

NATIONAL CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE, FOUNDATION

REPORT

ON PILOT INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION CARRIED OUT AT YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY

YEREVAN - 2013

Foreword

The pilot institutional accreditation procedure conducted at Yerevan State University was made possible through the grant projects under the auspices of the World Bank and implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia, Project Implementation Unit. Two projects – *ARQATA* under the coordination of the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO) and *Pilot Accreditations* under the coordination of the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance, Foundation (ANQA) – have contributed to its implementation.

The current pilot is implemented as a joint procedure with expert panel members from the Netherlands, Flanders and Armenia. The pilot was not only instituted as external quality assurance but also as a review aiming at continuous improvement of the educational quality of the educational programmes. Therefore, experts from Europe and Armenia have been asked to perform two tasks:

- a pilot accreditation process of the university;
- a peer review of the university on the basis of international standards.

The universities and programmes having participated in the pilots are:

- 1 Yerevan State Medical University (YSMU): institutional audit;
- 2 Bachelor and Master in General Medicine, YSMU: programme assessment;
- 3 Yerevan State University (YSU): institutional audit;
- 4 Bachelor in Biology and Master in Genetics, YSU: programme assessment.

Four panels chaired by NVAO experts performed two tasks: (1) a pilot audit at institutional level and a pilot assessment at programme level according to ANQA criteria, and (2) a peer review according to international standards as a result of the ambition of the universities to be partners in the European Higher Education Area. The ARQATA pilots on institutional and programme accreditation are meant to help Armenian stakeholders to implement an effective quality assurance system. The pilot procedures are similar to the formal accreditation procedures, but there are also differences. First of all it was meant and executed as a pilot with formative elements. The duration of the site visit was shorter (two to three days). During the site visit panel members at the same time operated as ‘critical friends’ in a peer review. In the end, the pilots will therefore result in panel reports of a partial accreditation procedure. Hence, these reports cannot be used as a basis for a formal accreditation decision.

This particular report covers the pilot institutional audit of Yerevan state University on the basis of the ANQA framework and the peer review on the basis of international standards. The ANQA criteria and procedures used are approved by the Armenian Government on the 30th of June, 2011. The peer review of the institutional assessment was based on *The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* and on the expertise of the panel experts on the state of the art in academic education.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The panel is very positive about the participation of Yerevan State University (YSU) in this external and independent quality assurance procedure. The university has clearly invested in internal quality assurance by establishing an YSU Quality Assurance Centre (QAC) and supporting its activities, and by working closely together with ANQA¹ and NVAO² in the ARQATA³ project. As a result, this quality centre has done a good job making it possible for the university to undergo this audit.

Pilot Institutional Accreditation

Having scrutinized the evidence presented and after the interviews with the university's representatives, the panel comes to the conclusion that YSU meets most of the ten ANQA criteria except for one. The panel had a long discussion on the final decision of criterion 6 (Research and Development) knowing that YSU is ahead within Armenia and the region, and that YSU has quite a number of research groups with good achievements. At the same time, the university wants to be competitive at an international level. In that sense the panel comes to the conclusion that the university does not yet fully meet the criterion on research and development.

Strengths

- The strategic goals are widely shared within the university and faculty and students are aware of the goals and generally are supportive;
- The students' involvement at all levels is something to cherish. Students are heard, and have an influence on decision making;
- The IT instruments for data collection are in place. In several areas of activities data are systematically gathered;
- The assessment of students is fair and the criteria for assessment are transparent;
- The teachers are very motivated and dedicated. The student satisfaction on the quality of the teaching staff is generally high. The panel has experienced that staff works closely together, and that they discuss issues in a collegial manner;
- Within the limited budget the university was able to build a study landscape including a library and IT-facilities;
- Student satisfaction for learning resources and technical supporting services is sufficiently high;
- The university implemented measures against corruption given the present possibilities in order to reduce negative risks;
- The teaching staff is recognized for involvement in societal activities in the evaluation process of the staff, this contributes to the societal goals of the university;
- The university has an active international office that takes many initiatives to facilitate and develop external relations and internationalization.
- The panel appraises the informative, well-structured and up-to-date website also in the English language, meeting the external needs and enhancing the visibility of the university.

Weaknesses

- The mission statement of the University is rather general. The YSU should have a more specific profile;
- The involvement of the external stakeholders need to be strengthened;

¹ National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance, Foundation

² Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Agency Organization

³ Armenia Quality Assurance Technical Assistance

- The university has to develop a more explicit policy on the alignment of learning outcomes and teaching and learning methods.
- The panel has some concerns about the lack of establishment of sufficient interdisciplinary programmes. This is the future because many large questions in science can only be answered by interdisciplinary cooperation;
- The university has introduced the method of student centred learning. This is one of the important aims of the modernization of education. This transition is not yet accomplished. Still a serious effort is needed to make progress on this path,
- Student support for students with special needs and for international students needs further formalization. Special attention is required to ensure their educational success. It is also necessary to encourage and formalize the active involvement of those students in university bodies;
- The panel considers the percentage of academic staff having an academic degree as rather limited given the academic ambitions of the university;
- Research activities are too limited both in terms of output and in the number of staff and students involved in research;
- The university does not fully recognize that research is an essential learning method in education. The panel considers it important that the training of students in research is structurally included in all the academic programmes;
- The necessary infrastructure for people with special needs is lacking;
- The panel noticed many ad-hoc initiatives but an integrated strategy of internationalization is still lacking;
- The lacking knowledge of English is a serious drawback in the development of internationalisation. The percentage of English language proficiency in among teachers is still low;
- The quality culture is not yet fully developed. The PDCA cycle should be closed and the effect of the present measures is not clear yet.

Main recommendations

- The involvement of the labour market and alumni need strengthening. The panel obviously understands the difficulties related with the less developed labour market.
- The university is encouraged to develop a more explicit policy on the alignment of learning outcomes and teaching and learning methods.
- The panel recommends the introduction of new interdisciplinary programmes, as the bigger issues in science can only be answered by interdisciplinary cooperation. It will also boost research activities in an international context involving both YSU staff and students, and from abroad. As such, it will also strengthen the relation between research and education.
- YSU's quality assurance system would improve by the inclusion of periodical independent external peer review.
- The panel recommends including Ijevan branch more explicitly in the university's internal quality assurance system making full use of the outcomes of the existing internal quality assurance system of the branch itself.
- The panel recommends further investment in an integrated digital control system for data collection.

Peer Review on the Basis of International Standards

As critical friends, the panel also conducted a peer review according to international standards resulting in a number of observations and recommendations related to the ambition of YSU to be a partner in the European Higher Education Area.

Observations

- 1 The university is clearly in a phase of **transition**. The panel has seen a discrepancy between the university's strategy and the actual situation.
- 2 The **programmes** are rather traditional in the sense that they are discipline-based and teacher-based. The emphasis is also more on the theoretical knowledge than on skills and professional behaviour. Aiming at modernizing the programmes one would expect a more multi-disciplinary and student-centred approach.
- 3 **Research** activities are limited both in terms of (international) output and in the number of staff and students involved in research.
- 4 The relation between the intended learning outcomes and the **assessment** is not made explicit. Especially the assessment of skills and professional behaviour needs further attention.
- 5 Only a limited number of students participate in international activities. Also not all staff is engaged in **internationalisation**.
- 6 The panel has seen no evidence of international **benchmarking**. Some chairs are involved in benchmarking but it is not done at institutional level.
- 7 The mechanism for **data collection** is there but is not yet fully developed, not yet fully integrated.
- 8 As such, the internal **structure** of providing information on the quality of programmes is rather complicated.
- 9 The panel has seen sufficient evidence about the involvement of internal stakeholders but the representation of **external stakeholders** seems to be limited to the various committees. In addition, the communication with external relations is mostly informal.

Recommendations

YSU issues related to the Bologna process are amongst others: a lean organisational structure based on the existing collegial academic culture, more clearly ANQF defined levels for programmes, a more intense relation with the external stakeholders, the further modernizing of the educational concept, an increase of efforts in research with centres of excellence and a more interdisciplinary approach, the allocation of the budget, and further investment in internationalisation (benchmarking, teaching staff, mobility, English proficiency etc.).

The chair of the expert panel and the coordinator declare that this report reflects the opinion and judgements of the panel. The panel has analysed the report and agrees with the judgments included in the report. The panel members confirm that the evaluation was conducted in accordance with the requirements of the principle of independence.

15.09.2013p. _____

Prof. Ben Van Camp, chair

Ani Mkrtchyan, secretary to the panel

2. EXPERT PANEL COMPOSITION ⁴

The external evaluation of the YSU self-evaluation and the implementation of the educational and quality assurance processes were conducted by the following expert panel (see Annex 1 for the curricula vitae):

- **Professor Ben Van Camp**, Former Rector of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and former Dean of the Medical school, full professor in Hematology, President of the Board of Governors of the University Hospital (UZ Brussel)
- **Professor Jan Kijne**, retired professor of Bioscience at Leiden University J. Kijne was professor of Phytotechnology, Plant Physiology and Bioscience in Leiden, and guest professor of Microbiology at Tromsø University, Norway:
- **Professor Yuri Suvaryan**, Academician Secretary and member of presidency of the department of the Armenian Studies and social sciences in the National Academy of Science, Head of the chair of the management in the Armenian State University of Economy, retired rector of Armenian State University of Economy;
- **Professor Ara Amiryan**, the Head of the Department of Educational Reforms, Strategic Planning, Quality Control and Self-analysing and the Head of the Chair “Graphics and Basics of Machine Designing”.
- **Zaruhi Sargsyan**, 3th year student in Yerevan “Gladzor” University, International Relations faculty. Participates in the activities of the university student scientific organisation. She is a member of a Youth NGO. [mention the respective universities].

The composition of the panel was agreed upon with the university and appointed by the decree of the ANQA Director.

The panel activities were coordinated by ANQA junior coordinator Ani Mkrtychyan under the supervision of ANQA senior coordinator Susanna Karakhanyan from the Armenian part and Michele Wera and Frank Wamelink, senior policy advisors, from NVAO.

The minutes were taken by Meline Harutyunyan.

The translation was provided by Meri Dallakyan.

All panel members and the secretary signed a statement of independence and confidentiality.

⁴ APPENDIX 1. The autobiographies of the panel members

3. EXPERT PANEL WORK DESCRIPTION

The application for state accreditation

YSU applied for pilot institutional accreditation by submitting to ANQA the application form, the copies of the license and respective appendices on 29th of February 2012.

The ANQA Secretariat checked the application package against the ANQA requirements: the data presented in the application form, the appendices and the ANQA electronic questionnaire completed by the university.

According to the decision on accepting the application request made on the 26th of March 2012, a tripartite agreement was signed between ANQA, the Centre for Education Projects (Ministry of Education and Science PIU) and Yerevan State University.

The timetable of activities was prepared and approved, respectively.

The self-assessment implementation team, formed by the decree of the top management of the YSU undertook the self-assessment process from 26th of March 2012 to 2nd of April 2013.

The English and Armenian versions of the self-evaluation report (SER) were submitted to ANQA on the 2nd of April 2013.

The ANQA junior coordinator conducted a technical review against the ANQA requirements. On the 15th of April 2013, the SER was sent to the expert panel for desk-review. The desk review lasted from 15th of April 2013 to 15th of June 2013 and the output was the preliminary report, including the list of issues to be further explored during the site-visit, as well as the target groups to be met.

The intake procedure

On 10th of October 2012, the representatives from the YSU participating in institutional pilot accreditation attended two-day training on internal quality assurance. The training covered the understanding of the framework, starting the process of writing the self-evaluation report and actually writing it, organising the actual audit, and developing a handbook for EQA.

On 19th of December 2012, the representatives of YSU and the ANQA coordinators responsible for the pilot participated in a final one-day training on EQA. Feedback was given on the first draft of the self-evaluation report on institutional level. A panel of NVAO staff scrutinized the draft report and commented on the outline and the text covering the first criteria of the framework. Their written comments were discussed in more detail.

From November 2012 to March 2013 NVAO offered technical assistance and guidance to YSU in writing SER on the institutional level. This technical assistance was basically offered on line with the exception of one feedback session in December 2012.

In stage 1 (December 2012) of 'Taking writing SERs to the final step', it still seemed that little had been done with the feedback given when discussing the draft SER.

In stage 2 (February 2013), YSMU seemed to have taken the earlier comments on board. In general, the text was more relevant, better selected and above all, better matched with criteria and standard under review. Obviously, there was room for improvement but overall progress had been made.

Stage 3(March 2013) showed that although the quality of the text had improved, the gap between the current state of affairs and the high ambitions of the criteria remained visible.

The ANQA coordinator followed the feedback sessions on the SERs, both via mail and during the final training session in December 2012. The ANQA coordinator was also responsible for organizing the pilot following the ANQA manual, starting with the contract and the composition of the panel.

On 13th of February 2013, in The Hague, the international panel members met to discuss the draft SER and some organisational issues concerning the site visit.

On 10th of May 2013, the ANQA coordinator prepared the first panel meeting by analysing and commenting on the SER. The analysis was submitted to the panel.

On 16th of May 2013, the international peers met again in order to discuss the SER and the final programme for the site visit. ANQA organized several meetings with the Armenian panel members in order to discuss the SER and the issues for the site visit. The panel received the compiled list of issues and comments on 30th of May 2013.

The preparatory visit

On the 10th of June 2013 the ANQA junior coordinator together with the senior coordinator, one of the panel members and ANQA director paid a visit to the university to finalize the site-visit agenda⁵.

Arrangements were made about the facilities for the visit, including the provision of the simultaneous translation.

The site visit

The site-visit lasted from 16th to 19th of June 2013.

The day prior to the actual visit to the university all the panel members convened at ANQA. The expert panel exchanged their initial impressions and discussed the list of the issues as well as target groups for the sessions. Further, the discussion among the expert panel members elaborated on the evaluation framework, which evolves around a two-level evaluation scale: (1) does not meet the criteria, (2) meets the criteria.

Overall, the panel considered the critical reflection in the SER to be a useful document for discussions with YSU. However, some aspects of the document were not sufficiently precise and required further clarification during different interview sessions.

The expert panel visited YSU from 17 to 19th of June 2013⁶.

The site visit started and ended with meetings, held with the university top-level management. The other meetings were held with the governing board representatives, deans, chair holders, teaching staff and students. The panel members selected all the target groups to have meetings with on a random basis, except the staff of the QA department, all the members of which participated in the meeting.

According to the agenda, an open meeting was organized, however no person registered for individual discussions.

⁵APPENDIX 2. agenda of the site-visit of the expert panel for pilot institutional accreditation

The expert panel was consistent with the agenda. The expert panel discussed and confirmed the agenda. The meetings of the agenda were very well prepared and organized by the faculty staff. Therefore, the panel could keep the strict time schedule of the site visit. Apart from the meetings with different target groups, during the site visit the panel conducted document review and observed the facilities⁷.

The information obtained during the different interview sessions and the major findings from the document review and observations were summarized during the closed meeting at the end of the site visit. During the final closed session the panel discussed the integral findings and reached consensus about the criteria and standards for the pilot accreditation.

Overall, the expert panel managed to clarify the issues at hand during the site-visit to come up with an objective evaluation.

The self-evaluation report (SER) was very informative, honest and well-structured offering evidence for meeting the ANQA-criteria. However, the panel would have appreciated more information on short-term actions for implementation and priorities.

Another point of attention is the Ijevan branch. The panel missed more specific information about Ijevan in the SER but a lot has been clarified in the interviews during the site visit and in the SER of the branch itself. The panel very much appreciated having been able to talk with representatives from Ijevan.

The panel appreciated the open discussions with all representatives and, as usual, especially the sessions with the students were very instructive. In addition, the visits to the library, laboratories, centres and the opportunity given to the panel to speak with staff and students on site were very fruitful.

The accreditation report

After the site visit, the junior coordinator prepared the initial accreditation report and sent it to the experts for feedback. The accreditation report evolves around the major findings, judgements, conclusion and recommendations. All the experts gave feedback on the first draft of the SER and their comments were taken into consideration when finalising the report. The final report endorsed by all panel members has been submitted to the university on the 12th of September. **A feedback session via Skype was organised on 26 September 2013 with the chair. The session allowed YSU to ask for clarification about issues raised in the reports that needed further elaboration.**

The report includes both the outcomes of the pilot accreditation process of the university and of the peer review on the basis of international standards.

Comments of YSU were received on 04.10.2013 and the report was amended accordingly. The final version of the report was endorsed by the panel on **15.10.2013**.

⁷APPENDIX 3. reviewed documents

APPENDIX 4. resource observations and visits to units

4. GENERAL INFORMATION ON YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY

FACTS ABOUT YSU

Yerevan State University (hereinafter YSU) was founded in 1919 by the Government of the Republic of Armenia at the time when the first Republic of Armenia was being established. In more than 90 years of its existence the University has trained more than 100000 graduates, established new faculties and research centres. According to Article 28, point 8 of the RA Law “On Education” (adopted in 1999) Yerevan State University is an educational and scientific-cultural institution, the status peculiarities of which are defined by RA government.

EDUCATION

Major structural changes in YSU’s academic activities started in mid-1990s. In 1995 YSU changed the structure of its academic qualifications by establishing a two-level qualification system with Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees. In 2007 the ECTS credit system was introduced in all Master’s programmes, then a year later in Bachelor’s programmes.

Currently, YSU runs 60 Bachelor’s, 130 Master’s and 70 Doctoral programmes that involve nearly 18000 students. According to the data of January 1, 2013 there are 13500 BA students, 4000 MA students and 400 postgraduate students, 5000 of which are part-time students. The university has 19 faculties with more than 100 general and professional departments and one regional branch (campus) with 4 faculties in the town of Ijevan. YSU employs about 3000 staff out of which 1300 are the permanent academic staff (166 professors, 461 associate professors, 639 assistant professors and lecturers). 23 academicians and 26 correspondence members of the National Academy of Sciences are involved in teaching and research activities of the university. The student/teacher ratio is 12.5. The University has its publishing house and library.

The Bachelor’s programme is 4-year with 240 ECTS credits and the Master’s programme is 2-year with 120 ECTS credits. The University has also a 3-year Doctoral programme with 180 ECTS credits. There are 11 Doctoral degree awarding Professional Councils in YSU.

Now YSU is creating its internal quality assurance system in line with the requirements of European Standards and Guidelines to enhance the quality of its educational provisions. Effective feedback from students and graduates has been introduced to bring study programmes in compliance with the needs and requirements of labour market and the society.

Continuous development of its teaching staff is among YSU priorities, which is a crucial factor for providing high-quality education. Recently YSU introduced a new credit-based programme for teaching staff development. It provides special training courses aimed at developing teachers’ skills in applying new teaching, learning and assessment methods.

YSU also provides professional trainings, continuous education courses and life-long learning possibilities to various groups of the society through its extension programmes and courses.

RESEARCH

Currently 1 research institute, 24 research laboratories and 9 research centres are active in YSU. The majority of the research and scientific laboratories is involved in research in various areas of natural sciences including physics, chemistry and biology. The leading position among the humanities belongs to Armenian Studies.

About 2000 scientific articles were published in YSU in 2012, as well as more than 300 monographs, textbooks and manuals. Annually, 85 thematic scientific projects, financed via local and foreign grant programmes, are implemented at YSU.

YSU publishes 9 series of YSU Proceedings and Scientific Notes – six in various fields of humanities and social science and three – in the field of natural sciences (one in English).

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

YSU currently has more than 200 cooperation agreements with international partner – universities and research centres all over the world.

Besides bilateral interuniversity cooperation, more than 50 international research grants are implemented at YSU annually. They are funded by various international agencies and foundations and include grants from NATO SFP, ANSEF, NFSAT-CRDF, ISTC, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Volkswagen Foundation, DAAD, OSI, Russky Mir and others. Currently YSU is actively involved in the EU funded TEMPUS programme. In recent years YSU implemented various TEMPUS III and TEMPUS IV projects in fields such as university management, internationalization and quality assurance, developing and upgrading programmes and curricula.

YSU is a consortium-member university in the Erasmus-Mundus External Cooperation Window student exchange programmes that provide its students with the opportunity to study at European universities and transfer their credits back to YSU as part of their own study programme. It also participates in NIS Network University, allowing students to have their first year of MA studies abroad and second at YSU by the end being awarded diplomas from both universities.

YSU is a member of an International Association of Universities, the European University Association, the Eurasian Universities Association, the Black Sea University Network and the International Association of University Presidents.

Cooperation with partner universities is based on reciprocal criteria and has been developed by:

- Exchange visits between university scholars, teaching and research staff, technical and administrative personnel. Annually, more than 400 YSU professors and researchers are involved in various international programmes, educational or research grant activities.
- YSU encourages student participation within exchange programmes. In recent years more than 300 YSU students participated annually in various international programmes.

Foreign students form an integral part of the YSU student body. In the course of previous years about 7600 foreign students from more than 80 countries (3700 of them were Diaspora Armenians) studied at YSU. Currently more than 500 foreign citizens are getting their education at YSU, 50 of them are doctoral students. About 115 foreign citizens defended their dissertations at YSU, 35 of those being Diaspora Armenians.

5. PILOT INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION

CRITERION I. MISSION AND PURPOSE

The institution's mission and purpose are in accordance with the relevant reference levels and are consistent with the policies and practices that guide its operations.

FINDINGS:

1.1. - YSU is a classical broad university. The university has a well formulated mission that includes three main areas of activities: professional higher education on ANQF defined levels (BA, MA and PhD), scientific research, and public services. The statutory mission of the university is translated into concrete goals, priorities and specific objectives, which are reflected in YSU Strategic Development Plan of 2010-2014. The fulfilment of the University mission and vision is conditioned by the realization of the three strategic goals defined in the Strategic plan:

- 1 Quality Education that implies 5 objectives with 34 respective strategies;
- 2 Quality Research and Innovation that implies 4 objectives with 28 respective strategies
- 3 Community Involvement and service that implies 2 objectives with 16 respective strategies

All the strategic goals are widely shared within the university; staff and students are aware of these goals and are generally supportive. The goals have been translated into a schedule-plan of implementation, including time scales at the level of the faculties and a set of key-indicators for assessment. The key-performance indicators are set up to monitor and assess performance progress of each of these strategic goals.

1.2. According to the SER, the mission statement of the university reflects the needs of internal and external stakeholders. Several mechanisms are operative at YSU aimed at identification of the stakeholders' needs. These mechanisms are the following.

- both external and internal stakeholders are involved in the collegial management bodies of the university and its units,
- the participation of different groups of stakeholders in various university and faculty committees and panels,
- students involvement in the University management,
- the activity of the student organizations operating at the university,
- surveys among the students and alumni.

Internal and external stakeholders have been engaged in the elaboration of the Strategic Plan. Firstly, a representative strategic planning committee was installed, including members from YSU major units, i.e. administrative and teaching staff at the central and faculty levels. Secondly, both the first and the second drafts of the Strategic Plan have been circulated among the external and internal stakeholders with the aim to be widely discussed and to obtain proper feedback. Thirdly, the Strategic Plan has been discussed and approved first by the YSU Academic Council and then by the YSU Board, which includes both internal and external stakeholders. During the discussion of the draft, stakeholders made a number of suggestions and updates.

1.3. YSU has established a number of mechanisms and procedures to evaluate the implementation progress of the strategic plan. In order to evaluate this implementation, a Work Plan of YSU SP 2010-2014 has been developed, that presents a detailed plan of action/measures, implementation deadlines, responsible bodies and required resources. In order to monitor the SP implementation progress, "YSU key Performance Indicators" have been elaborated.

CONSIDERATIONS:

YSU is a clearly structured organization with an adequate mission. The panel appreciates that university has set up concrete goals, which are widely recognised within the university. As well as the fact that YSU Key-Performance Indicators, to check the progress, have twice been elaborated and published are something to cherish. However, the panel considers the mission to be rather general and to require specification at the level of output. For example, which sort of high-quality professionals the university wants to educate? How research can contribute more to innovation in the republic and which research strategy should be deployed? Answers to these questions may contribute to a better definition of YSU's profile. In addition, the panel has noticed some overlap between academic and vocational programming, which also affects YSU's profile as an academic institute. In case the current labour market asks YSU for specialized professionals rather than for academics with a research specialization, the university should put this requirement into the perspective of the Strategic Plan.

YSU tries to reveal, discuss and analyze different stakeholders' needs through different means. The involvement of the internal stakeholders in the formulation of the strategic goals is sufficiently evidenced. But the mechanisms for involvement of the external stakeholders, being the labourmarket and the alumni, needs to be enforced; an organized discussion forum seems to be lacking.

There are not sufficient findings and in-depth analysis to understand the extent to which these mechanisms of the effectiveness of the stakeholders' involvement are effective.

YSU is well aware of the need to study the needs of the labour market so as to improve the link with the programmes. The panel though is conscious of the problem of employability at present and this situation makes it all the more difficult for YSU – and all Armenian institutions of higher education – to meet the demands of that same labour market. Even so extra efforts are needed to involve employers and alumni.

The Key Performance Indicators are appreciated by the panel and publication of these indicators contributes to the transparency of YSU. The panel encourages YSU to include the indicators for evaluation of the achievements of the strategic goals into the SP. The plan will be more specific in this manner and a follow-up of the realisation of the goals will be possible and visible for YSU's community.

It is important to note that the annual budget is poorly linked to the strategic goals, which is a major concern for the implementation, of the SP. The financial planning should be more in line with the SP and indicators for its evaluation should be available

Considering all the evidence, the panel finds that criterion 1 meets the requirements but the panel has certain comments. Overall YSU is a clearly structured organization with an adequate mission. However, the panel considers the mission to be rather general and to require specification at the level of output. The panel has seen sufficient evidence about the involvement of internal stakeholders but the representation of external stakeholders seems to be limited to the various committees. The communication with external relations is mostly informal. It is important to note that the annual budget is poorly linked to the strategic goals, which is a major concern for the implementation, of the SP.

JUDGEMENT: The panel assesses the criterion 1 as positive

RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended:

- to reformulate the mission statement and make it more specific at the level of aimed output;
- to include the indicators for evaluation of the achievements of the strategic goals in strategic plan; which will make the SP more specific in this manner and follow up of the realisation of the goals is possible;
- to make a clear distinction between vocational and academic programmes at the level of learning outcomes;

- to improve the involvement of, especially, the external stakeholders;
- to analyse the effectiveness of the stakeholders' involvement, with specific emphasis on the external representatives of alumni and labour market.

CRITERION II: GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

The institution's system of governance ensures ethical decision-making and efficient provision of human, material and financial resources to effectively accomplish its mission, educational and other purposes.

FINDINGS:

2.1. – The YSU governance system has three levels:

1. state participation in YSU governance,
2. governance through the university bodies and structures,
3. governance in structural subdivisions.

YSU current governance is exercised through the university central bodies (Board, Academic Council, Rector), as well as through the central structures of governance (vice rector, administrative divisions, departments). Central university governance is based on a combination of the principles of self-governance and autonomy, and collegial and individual governance.

YSU explicitly follows the legal framework of the RA government in further improvement of its governance system. YSU has developed a reform programme for the improvement of its governance system, as it considers an increase of the university governance efficiency one of the operational priorities of YSU's SP. The new governance system appears to be accepted within the university. There are decentralized units with some autonomy. The executive capacity is well distributed and allocated in parallel collegial governance.

The financial policy of YSU is carried out according to legislation and corresponding YSU documents. Financial auditing is conducting in accordance to RA legislation. Staff recruitment is regulated by the document "Regulation on Competitive Election and Appointment of YSU Teaching Staff".

2.2.- As both teachers and students are involved in different governing boards, internal stakeholders contribute to the decision making process of YSU. However, in the SER the university highlights the lack of students' skills and experience in decision making and the low participation of academic staff in collegial governance bodies as shortcomings. YSU wants to broaden student participation and to strengthen student organizations. Initiatives to enlarge the input of academic staff other than deans have not been mentioned.

2.3. - Planning in YSU activities is manifested at two levels: a) long-term strategic planning, and b) short-term annual operational planning of the current educational and scientific activities. At operational level, YSU uses tools such as curricula, subject programmes, and academic schedule and timetables, which are measures to organize the education process. Other instruments are inner-institutional normative acts, research activity planning and monthly deadlines for document submission to the Educational-methodological department.

2.4. In the SER, YSU mentions mechanisms such as forecasting, planning, organization, general governance, monitoring and reporting, as a basis for data collection for decision-making. Forecasting enables

exploration of internal and external factors and the other mechanisms are used for the collection of internal data. Data collection involves IT instruments, and in several areas of activities, data are systematically gathered. For instance, (i) Super Vision registers student academic progress and mobility, (ii) key performance indicators define strategic progress, and (iii) the bottom-up reporting system provides information on the academic activities of the chairs and serves to collect essential data in the process of quality control.

However, the integration of all these data in an institutional ERP like system will greatly enhance the governance of the institution in all its aspects. The development of such an integrated system is hampered by lack of financial resources.

- 2.5. –University governance is based on its autonomy combined with the general principles of management such as individual and collegial leadership. YSU governance at the level of individual structural units is viewed as an entity of successive activities such as: a) revealing the main issues, b) working out implementation measures, c) decision-making for its realization, d) implementation of decisions, and e) control over its implementation. For the implementation of these processes, various policies, procedures and other legal acts have been adopted regulating the functions and work activity of the governing bodies.
- 2.6. –YSU provides information on her academic programmes including the learning outcomes, assessment criteria and teaching and learning methods. In addition, study guides and an informative website are available and information sessions are organized. Next to that, the KPI's are published and the SER has been widely discussed. This meets the requirements for impartial information on the quality of the programmes. As such, the internal structure to assure the quality of programmes is well developed in the educational-methodological committees, quality committees, and discussions in the chair and at the level of the faculty resulting in endorsement by the Academic Council. This system includes internal peer review.
- 2.7. – The YSU policy on awareness of educational programmes is based upon two principles. The first one is aimed at the orientation of applying students and does not include qualitative and quantitative data on the academic programme nor its effectiveness and relevance to the labour market. The second one discusses various mechanisms and procedures for assessing publications on the educational programmes, such as public opinion surveys and student participation. However, no reference is made to new academic programmes, to their qualifications or to their relevance of market needs (quantitative and qualitative).

CONSIDERATIONS:

YSU's system of governance is an accepted system of governance within academia. The executive power seems to be well distributed and allocated well balanced with a collegial "control" of governance. However, the governance structure is rather complicated, and at present monitoring of effectiveness and implementation of reforms are *ad hoc* processes. In the current phase of transition, the effectiveness of the organisational structure is an important concern of the panel, requiring critical monitoring as a part of the quality assurance system. The process of decision-making should be more transparent, the more because budget allocation does not seem to correspond with the Strategic Plan.

The internal stakeholders (both staff and students) are involved in different governing boards. Especially the students' involvement at all governance levels is something to cherish. The panel noted that students are heard and have an influence on decision-making. Because also the staff is involved at all levels of decision making, the governmental relation of YSU with internal stakeholders appears to be sufficient, although given the shortcomings mentioned above the extent of their influence within YSU seems to be limited in comparison with, for example, the influence of the state. Shortcomings in the relation with external stakeholders (labour market, alumni, and enterprises) have already been mentioned earlier (see

5.1.2). The panel stresses that implementation of strategic issues such as research-oriented education and student-centred learning requires a good contact with the shop floor and thus requires a structural input by academic staff.

The existence of strategic objectives is clear at the operational level. However, the university does not discuss the effectiveness of the planning, for example by presenting good practices. Furthermore, the panel has noted that YSU did not mention threats and opportunities at the end of each chapter of the SER. Indication of threats and opportunities is a vital element in policymaking.

The panel appreciates that progress has been made in strategic data collection. The panel joins the university in her observation that data collection is not yet integrated, and notes that data collection has not been visibly adjusted to the Strategic Plan. .

Description of a set of policies and principles does not imply that these mechanisms work in practice. A complete Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle requires an integrated system of plans, decisions, targets, actions, key indicators, monitoring and feedback reports, evaluations, critical analysis and improvements, at the levels of the university, the faculties and the chairs. Such an integrated cycle has not been presented to the panel, in accordance with YSU's admission that this cycle is not yet closed.

The panel appraises the collegial evaluation and review of the programmes. The panel also encountered many examples of improvement as a result of this evaluation. The panel however noticed the shortcoming that has already been mentioned in the SER, i.e. the absence of a systematic follow up of the implementation of improvements. But then again, the university is well aware of this. The system of quality control of programmes would profit from independent external peer review. This is a prerequisite for participation in the European Higher Education Area. In this respect, the panel heartily welcomes the initiative of YSU to apply for institutional accreditation and stresses the notion that a SER in the first place is a valuable strategic document of the whole university community rather than a bureaucratic prerequisite for accreditation.

The panel has been informed about the ill-developed labour market for academics in RA and has noticed the absence of an active discussion forum with external employers. Students complain about the lack of jobs and quite a few consider an academic career abroad. Since academic employment is an international rather than a local issue, and because the economic situation is not under YSU control, this is outside the scope of the panel. However, the panel has met young people with a large motivation for the Armenian academia and encourages YSU to translate the threats and opportunities for students with a future academic career into a hopeful perspective.

Considering all the evidence, the panel finds that criterion 2 meets the requirements but the panel also has certain comments. The panel considers that the governance system is accepted and collegial. The executive power seems to be well distributed and allocated well balanced with a collegial "control" of governance. The strategic goals are sufficiently operationalized and internal stakeholders (both students and staff) are involved in the governing boards, however as mentioned before there are shortcomings in the relation with external stakeholders (patients, professional field, alumni). The mechanism for data collection is in place but it is not yet fully developed and integrated. As such, the internal structure of providing information on the quality of programmes is rather complicated and would improve by the inclusion of periodical independent external reviews. In conclusion, it could be mentioned that the system of governance is sufficiently effective to accomplish the mission.

JUDGEMENT: The panel assesses criterion 2 as positive with certain comments.

RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended to:

- to simplify the university structure. In the end, the university might want to opt for a lean organisational structure still based on the collegial academic culture;

- to adjust budget allocation to the goals of the Strategic Plan;
- to adjust the governance structure in order to enlarge the structural input of the academic staff in educational policies;
- to use the indication of risks and chances as a regular planning instrument;
- to translate the Strategic Plan into quantifiable targets, where ever appropriate, and adjust data collection to underpin this strategy in an organized way;
- to close the PDCA cycle on every level of governance, in order to efficiently reach the goals of the Strategic Plan;
- to mandatory include external peer review in the Q.A. system.

CRITERION III: ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES

The programmes are in concord with the institution’s mission, form part of institutional planning and resources allocation, are intellectually credible and promote mobility and internationalization.

FINDINGS:

- 3.1** - YSU has 19 faculties, which offer about 260 academic programmes, which include 60 bachelor programmes, 130 master programmes and 70 post-graduate degree programmes. The academic programmes are in line with the mission of YSU. The transition to the bachelor-master (BA-MA) structure was made in 1995/1996. However, due to the lack of experience with the new approach the changes happened mainly at the structural level, leaving the content unattended. Thus, the university had to revise its approach in 2000-2001 based on the results of internal evaluations. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was adopted in 2006 along with a move onto a modular programme system first at MA and then at BA levels. A number of new academic programmes have been developed, either for meeting requirements of the labour market or in the context of international collaborations. In 2011-2012 a third, stage of curricular reforms was launched. Furthermore, YSU moved onto a learning outcome approach to curricula development.
- 3.2** – The university has introduced the approach of student-centred learning, and has taken steps to assign teaching methods to the learning outcomes. Almost all the programmes have now been described in terms of the intended learning outcomes, and full coverage of the learning outcomes is ensured by the curriculum matrix or plan. Some questionnaires have been run to check for the effectiveness of these approaches.
- 3.3** – Along with the revision of the academic programmes, YSU revised the approaches of student assessment to ensure fairness. An attempt has been made to link learning outcomes to the assessment methods. This revision has been accompanied by many discussions at several levels of governance. To evaluate the effectiveness of the current assessment system, a survey has been conducted among 8500 students and 1100 staff members. As a result, the system was considered to be acceptable, however additional revisions have been suggested. At the same time, YSU has undertaken a reform process to ensure correspondence of the assessment system to the requirements of the European Standards and Guidelines and has included this initiative as a strategic objective in the Strategic Plan. Emphasis is put on graduation requirements as well as on learning outcomes-based assessment.

- 3.4** – An important aim of the structural and educational revisions mentioned above is to enlarge mobility and to enable free traffic of students and staff inside YSU and in the academic world. One of the measures taken is the inclusion of optional modules in the curricula to the extent possible (10-15% of the overall curriculum at BA level and 25% at MA level). However, in the SER, YSU mentions that the rigid structure of the curricula still hinders student mobility. The university considers transition to individual curricula and takes steps to promote student mobility. On the other hand, double-degree programmes and joint degree programmes have been developed and are offered with international counterparts, taking advantage of internationally accepted standards.
- 3.5** – In 2011, the YSU Academic Council approved the “Regulations on current monitoring and periodic review of YSU study programmes”. All YSU academic programmes must undergo monitoring and periodic review. The periodicity of these reviews has been set at 5 -7 years for bachelor programmes and 3 – 5 years for master programmes. Training courses for the responsible committees are envisaged in the framework of the World Bank programme. Quality assurance structures such as the Quality Assurance Center (university) and Quality Assurance committees (faculties) have been established.

CONSIDERATIONS:

The panel highly appreciates the past and present efforts of YSU to enter the European Higher Education Area. In a relatively short time, many changes and revisions have been implemented, in structure as well as in content. However, the academic community in some areas has to find its way within this new structure. The university can make better use of good practices that now exist in YSU at various levels. Sharing these good practices amongst the deans can be a good start for the further dissemination within the university. These good practices can also be posted on a separate webpage of YSU’s internal website. In short, the university should consider developing a mechanism to identify, reflect and spread good practice examples. Modernization is a gradual process on the shop floor that can not be prescribed in top-down acts and documents.

Introduction of student-centred learning in connection with teaching based on learning outcomes (and this in the context of research-oriented education) is an important aspect of modernization of academic education. After the structural changes, this ambition should now have a high priority within the university. The panel realizes that this introduction is a complicated process. The transition in education is not yet accomplished and a serious effort is needed to make progress on this path. The panel, however, met sufficient indications of substantial first steps in this direction. Obviously, YSU is aware of the present shortcomings and is taking actions such as creation of a “teaching and learning unit”, dissemination of good didactic practices, development of assessment indicators and tools for checking effectiveness, teacher training, input of educational expertise and development of appropriate teaching materials. YSU aims at improvement of the situation within the next 2 -3 years. In view of the satisfaction of teachers and students with the present teaching system (see the SER), these internal stakeholders will only be persuaded to modernization by an increase in teaching satisfaction and study success. Proper involvement of staff and, particularly, students in the process can avoid misunderstandings and disappointments.

Given the recent revisions of the assessment system, the panel is not able to critically evaluate its long-term results. The panel considers the present system to be fair and the criteria for assessment to be transparent. Nevertheless, the objectivity of the assessments could be improved. The continuous attention of YSU for the assessment system is positive, the more because the university uses input from the inside (surveys, discussions) and the outside (Europe). However, it is important that this front soon comes to a rest. Continuous changes hinder proper evaluation of effectiveness and eventually demotivate staff and students.

The panel noted that YSU gives proper attention to the problem of plagiarism. However, the present situation can be improved, at the technical level (use of appropriate software, when possible) and at the academic (inclusion of the combat against plagiarism into the general framework of academic integrity).

As a stimulator of mobility, the panel likes to add the instrument of interdisciplinary programmes. There are few good examples within the university. The development of more interdisciplinary programs should be encouraged. The panel considers such programmes as part of the future because many large questions in science can only be answered by interdisciplinary cooperation. The faculties should be open and flexible for the development of new interdisciplinary programmes, the more because they enable students to cross the borders of their discipline.

Obviously, the site visit of the panel is too early for a proper evaluation of programme review and improvement at YSU, in view of the recent developments. As stated in the SER, the newly adopted processes of academic programme quality assurance are not fully functional yet. However, YSU is at the right track. Programme review requires experience, local and international. The application of the bachelor programme Biology and the master programme Genetics for accreditation and the resulting recent peer review offer a good start. The panel has full trust that coming experiences in this area will yield a proper framework of quality control of YSU curricula.

Considering all the evidence the panel finds that all faculties offer programmes that have a well-detailed and very structured curriculum based on disciplines. Intended learning outcomes have been defined for all programmes. The university has introduced the method of student-centred learning, though this transition is not yet accomplished. As well as it should be noticed that the student assessment is fair and the criteria for assessment are transparent, nevertheless the objectivity of the assessment could be improved.

JUDGEMENT: The panel assesses criterion 3 as positive.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- to develop a more explicit policy on the alignment of learning outcomes and teaching and learning methods, based on a stepwise approach with proper educational information, dissemination of good (international) practices and deep involvement of teachers and students
- to adjust the survey system in order to allow for critical assessment of the new educational approach
- to stimulate the development of interdisciplinary programmes.

CRITERION IV: STUDENTS

The institution has student advising and support services which provide for productive and learning environment.

FINDINGS:

- 4.1.** - The university has appropriate regulations and mechanisms for selection and admission of local and international students. The functionality of the system is reflected in the steady growth of the number of YSU applicants (about 20% more in the last 4 years). For local students, the admission criteria are defined

by law. The admission of international students is conducted in accordance to governmental regulations. An interesting aspect is the significant increase in the number of correspondence students. The coordination of the activities on admission and preparation of future students is carried out by the Pre-University Education department

- 4.2.** YSU takes several measures to identify students' educational needs. The institute of curators (consultants) has been reactivated. Curators are regular members of the academic staff, whose activities are paid in accordance with the amount of extra work. The role of the curators is to reveal the educational needs of the students under their guard, to monitor their academic progress and to help overcome eventual obstacles during the learning process. As the SER states, students' satisfaction with the work of curators was rather low. However, students in the interviews reported that these difficulties are mainly solved now and that it is needed to make students aware of the existence of curators. In addition to curators, students get help and information from the Student Councils and the Student Scientific Society. In 2006, the YSU Alumni and Career Centre was established, which is an important step to guide the students in preparation for the labour market. At present, a pilot project is carried out aiming at monitoring and analysis of student needs in a more systemized way.
- 4.3 -** The University provides opportunities for the extra-curricular activities to support student-learning. Various seminars, training courses, consultative meetings or individual consultations are periodically organized by YSU Alumni and Career Centre aiming at increasing the students' and graduates' competitiveness in labour market. It is planned to expand and develop the variety of supplementary courses for the students in parallel with revealing the students' educational needs. Since YSU aims at increasing the possibilities for individual study pathways, the border between curricular and extra-curricular activities may gradually disappear. The major point for additional support and guidance at the administrative level is provided by the deans. A set of documents regulates such procedures as students' transfers, reinstatements and the like.
- 4.4. -**The students turn to the deans or to their academic councillors on various issues of their concern either in written or oral form. In addition, the students have the opportunity to turn to their representatives in the student council or/and student scientific society, who present the issues at the sessions of the university governing bodies and/or the Rectorate. Numerous issues (tuition fee discounts, students' transfers, reinstatements, other educational issues) have to be decided upon at the university level. The present situation with regard to submission by students of issues of concern (or suggestions for improvement) is characterized by non-written practice, the presence of many counters and the requirement of own initiative.
- 4.5. -**The Career Centre is actively dealing with its mission. The Centre carries out various activities, among which seminars, training courses, consultations, volunteer work, contacts with companies, development of websites, and stimulation of faculty activities, internships and round-table discussions. Students are overall satisfied with the services of the Career Centre. The university takes steps to establish better ties with the labour market, in order to prepare specialists in line with the demands of external stakeholders. In this regard, the cooperation with Synopsis-Armenia is a good practice. A formal approach does not yet exist, though the university supports the idea of internships in industry and has included it within the required qualification of academic programmes.
- 4.6. -** Students are encouraged to participate in research activities through a variety of channels, such as:
- Student Scientific Society (SSS) to promote students' scientific, creative and spiritual development;
 - Programmes of Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree and Postgraduate education also envisage students' involvement in various scientific-research works,
 - SSS organized 46 republic-wide and 39 faculty conferences.

The university has special budget line for extra activities. Starting from the bachelor programme (with a major focus on knowledge and skills), research activities increase in the master phase to culminate in 100% activity in the PhD phase. Research subjects are directly or indirectly derived from the research programmes of the staff. Although the Student Scientific Society (established to which are to promote students' scientific, creative and spiritual development) allows some freedom in research subjects, the students may still profit from the specific expertise of supervising staff. Some faculties, such as the faculties in natural sciences, offer more research facilities to students than others. The students' involvement in research activities depends on the students' individual initiative and talent. Unfortunately, the research positions and possibilities are overall insufficient, limiting the academic development of students.

- 4.7. - Different bodies are concerned with the student's right protection, YSU student's rights are defined by RA legislation and internal acts of YSU. Projects aimed at students' rights protection can be divided into three main groups: 1) prevention and awareness activities, 2) non-individualized activities or development of institutional mechanisms; 3) individual activities. Students' problems are discussed in councils and committees. A better use of on-line possibilities is in preparation. The aim to enhance the role of students in university governance is highlighted in the SP.
- 4.8. – Assessment and quality assurance of students' educational, consultative and other supportive services are carried out through Students Surveys on the Quality and Efficiency of teaching and Graduate Satisfaction, surveys from the Education received at YSU. These surveys form the basis of quality control. The results of Student and Alumni Surveys are discussed at the sessions of the Faculty Council as well. A summary of the survey results has been introduced to the Academic Council. A future SER would profit from by the presentation of successful examples of good practice for this and other items.

CONSIDERATIONS:

The admission criteria of YSU are defined by law, not taking into account the applicants' differences in motivation or abilities. This might be correlated with the low study outcome in the first year of studies. In order to be able to increase the student success rate, the university might benefit from an increased autonomy in defining admission criteria including motivation and study skills of applying students.

Student-centred learning also implies appropriate support for students with special needs, disabilities, or problems caused by a specific socio-economic background. Up to now, support is given on an individual basis within the faculties, for example by vice-deans and curators. A general YSU policy seems to be lacking. In part, this is caused by financial constraints making it presently impossible, for example, to adapt all university buildings to disabled students. Obviously, this issue needs constant attention. Student support for students with special needs and for international students needs further formalization. Special attention is required to ensure their educational success. It is also necessary to encourage and formalize the active involvement of those students in university bodies.

Students seem to be satisfied with the effectiveness of the application and complaint procedures. However, an appropriate analysis of the effectiveness of the present procedure will be helpful.

The establishment of a career and alumni centre can be considered an important step to guide the students in preparations for the labour market. As there is no sufficient information on the formal regulations towards internships, it is not clear how the university can be certain of their quality and assesses their contribution to the required qualifications.

The panel likes to add self-assessment as an instrument to improve personal success, both for students and staff. Obviously, self-assessment is motivating for the individual student and teacher, and it also

stimulates the quality culture at an institutional level. The instrument of self-assessment can be introduced in the overall systems of the students' assessment and the staff's evaluation.

Considering all the evidence the panel finds that the participation of students in the organization and committees is very well structured. Furthermore, students are given the opportunity to be involved in advanced research activities, however, the extent to which the students get involved in advanced research activities depends on their individual initiatives and talent.

JUDGEMENT: The panel assesses criterion 4 as positive.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The panel recommends:

- to encourage and formalize the active involvement of students with special needs and disabilities in university bodies;
- to evaluate the effectiveness of the measures revealing the students' needs;
- to evaluate the extent to which the supplementary courses or internships contribute to the formation of intended qualifications;
- to develop a special formal procedure and a schedule for students at YSU to submit specific issues to the administrative staff;
- to link students and teaching staff research activities and evaluate the effectiveness of the research activities;
- to test the contribution of internships to obtainance of required qualifications;
- to study the effectiveness of the student right protection mechanisms and analyse their impact.

CRITERION V: FACULTY AND STAFF

The institution provides for a high quality faculty and staff to achieve the set goals for academic programmes and institution's mission.

FINDINGS:

5.1; 5.2. - A number of regulations and procedures operate at YSU, which are designed to contribute to the selection and maintenance of the teaching and supporting staff possessing the necessary professional qualities. Staff recruitment is regulated by the document "Regulation on Competitive Election and Appointment of YSU Teaching Staff", which was revised and approved by YSU Academic Council (28.06.2012). It defines the regulation and terms of the competitive election and appointment of the teaching staff, the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of various categories (professor, associate professor, assistant professor, lecturer), as well as previously missing flexible system of contracting of the teaching staff.

However, it should be noted that along with the successful experience in teaching staff selection, appointment by categories and progress evaluation, there are no particular requirements for the professional teaching qualifications in relations to the academic programmes concerned. As the SER

states, the mechanisms stimulating the involvement of young teachers in the educational process is not yet operating efficiently and the university lacks a mentoring system for young teachers.

5.3. - There are number of mechanisms operating at YSU for the evaluation of the teaching staff, among which particular importance is attached to students' surveys on the quality and efficiency of teaching. The evaluation of the academic staff includes a broad field of qualifications, covering education, research activities, administration and societal activities , which stimulates selection of the best staff. In order to increase the efficiency of the mechanisms of the teaching staff evaluation by students, the methodology, procedures and standards of surveys have been periodically revised and improved. As the panel could see during the site-visit, the students' satisfaction on the quality of the teaching staff is generally high. The teachers gave a motivated, dedicated and collegial impression. However, as the SER states, better use can be made of the results of the students' surveys in order to improve the quality of the professional teaching skills of the staff at individual level.

5.4. - The involvement of high quality staff and providing them with opportunities for their continual improvement are the most important principles of the formation of a high quality human resources potential at YSU. For this purpose various programmes for the improvement of the teaching skills have been developed and are operating at YSU. YSU implements a modern educational-scientific programme for the teaching staff professional development based on a credit system. The programme enables to improve the teaching staff in accordance with the international standards of quality assurance, as well as provides for the lecturers' academic mobility and development of internal mechanisms for quality assurance. Participation in professional development trainings is substantial. The credits system for training of teachers is an achievement and good practice. This is an important instrument to ensure the quality of the teaching staff. However, it should be noted, that the proficiency in English language is low.

The University is well aware of the problems to attract and keep high level teaching staff. Therefore financial incentives have been introduced which are based on workload and competitiveness.

The university has presented which mechanisms she uses to implement the process, however, the effectiveness of those mechanisms and the extent to which these mechanisms contribute to teaching and learning have not been studied yet. It is not clear, whether the professional development courses are linked to the specific qualifications of the academic programmes.

5.7. - The formation of the positions of the administrative and supporting staff, the description of employees' responsibilities in accordance with their election, promotion and evaluation are regulated by YSU charter and corresponding regulations at the level of the specific structural units. The quality of YSU administrative and supporting staff is ensured by a number of mechanisms including trainings, and qualification improvement courses. However, the university understands that there are no professional standards or improvement mechanisms for the validation of the quality of the administrative and supporting staff.

CONSIDERATIONS:

A number of regulations and procedures operate at YSU, which are designed to contribute to the selection and retention of the teaching and supporting staff possessing the necessary professional qualities.

It should be noted that along with the successful experience in the teaching staff selection, appointment by categories and progress evaluation, particular requirements for the teaching staff didactic qualities in relation to specific according to academic programmes are lacking.

Assessment mechanisms of the effectiveness of teaching staff are in place in YSU. The evaluation forms used in University are class-hearing methods and surveys conducted among students distinguish evaluation and the solving of problems. However, the existing tools are not sufficient to ascertain the desired goal.

The university has implemented measures to improve the teaching staff.

The fact that the improvement measures are not carried out in accordance with the needs of internal and external assessments, makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of improvement measures. The provided information gives sufficient basis to declare that the planning, data collecting and decision-making processes about improvements are not clear.

Considering all the evidence the panel assesses this criterion as positive **as** the panel met with a very motivated and dedicated staff. The panel has experienced that staff works closely together, and that they discuss issues in a collegial manner. This is crucial as the quality of the staff determines the quality of education. However, more staff members from outside the university need to be employed and further professionalization of the teaching staff is required. The panel appraises the system of the evaluation of the academic staff, including a board field of qualifications, covering education, research activities, administration and social involvement.

JUDGEMENT: The panel assesses criterion 5 as positive.

RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended:

- to determine particular requirements for the professional qualities of the teaching staff according to the demands of the academic programmes;
- to establish a mentoring system for early carrier lecturers;
- to use the results of the students surveys for the purpose of guiding and individualizing the quality improvement programmes of the teaching staff;
- to improve the teachers' proficiency in English;
- to link the professional development courses to the qualifications of the academic programmes;
- to develop professional standards and improvement mechanisms for the attestation of the administrative and supporting staff.

CRITERION VI: RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

The institution promotes its research objectives, projects and expected outcomes. There is a research ethos and culture, and mechanisms for the validating research outcomes.

FINDINGS:

- 6.1** – The university has a clearly stated ambition to become a research university, aiming at growth of and wider involvement in research activities, promotion of collaborative research, internationalization of research, and revision of the post-graduate programme in line with EU approaches. Present interests and ambitions of YSU, reflecting the long-term strategy in the research area, aim at maintenance and further development of its research through fundamental research linked to the professorial chairs and scientific-

research substructures (institutions, centres, laboratories). The strategy of choice to mobilize and finance these structures to reach the ambitious goal of a research university is as yet unclear.

- 6.2** – In the present situation, each department of the university (faculty, chair, laboratory), develops its own research programme and establishes the terms of implementation and formation of research groups. Depending on the planned research by the substructures, the university formulates its mid-term programmes and comprises these in a 3-5 year research plan of direction. This bottom-up approach gives little space to the development of a long-term strategic plan and vision of the university.

Measurement of the quality and output of research activities with tools such as the number of peer reviewed publications (local and international), impact factors, number and financial level of (inter)national grants, number of PhD' s per sub entity, etc., is underdeveloped. Traditionally, YSU is primarily active in research in the field of natural sciences, with financial contributions from the university and from international grants. However, the financial resources are limited. Low salaries stimulate the brain drain of young researchers.

- 6.3** –As the SER states the policy and procedures of YSU research activities and innovations proceed from the YSU Charter, the government orders on how to distribute and dispose the financing means for science, and are validated in the YSU regulations and programme documents. They are aimed at maintenance and development of the YSU scientific projects and research schools, in order to link up to international developments in science, for example by creating new scientific laboratories and centres.

The YSU research budget is made up from three sources: a fixed state funding programme based state grants, and non state funding (cooperation agreements, international grants, etc.).

- 6.4** – YSU tries to widen the scope of cooperation with scientific centres, international partners, to take part in international conferences, to increase the number of scientific publications in international peer-reviewed professional journals, and to establish joint programs promoting PhD 's and Masters' mobility. This is stimulated by the organization of meetings and seminars with foreign experts on internationalization of research activities.

Internationalization of the YSU research activities is the priority of every scientific-educational subdivision which is conditioned by the international nature of science and by the availability of international sources of financing of researchers.

There is a strong commitment to internationalization of research in the field of sciences (natural and mathematical directions), however the same can not be stated about social sciences and humanities. The reasons for this major discrepancy have not been analysed, nor is any evidence provided for improvement of this situation. Further, in the shortcomings in the SER improvement of this situation has not been mentioned as a major challenge.

- 6.5** – Linking research to the learning process is considered one of the directions of teaching improvement. The university advocates the involvement of students at the level of postgraduate students (research projects) as well as at the level of BA-Ma student (research themes) in research carried out in laboratories or during practical work. However the involvement of students' in extra-curricular research activities is based on his/her own motivation and ambition. Overall, it forms no integral part of the study curriculum with the exception of the faculties of Sciences. . In fact, the university has no policy which promotes research, and by that token, research-based scientific thinking as an essential part of the educational programme. Therefore, it is not possible to analyze the impact of a science based programme on the individual student learning outcomes. The university seems not to fully recognize that research is an essential learning method in education.

CONSIDERATIONS:

The research strategy of the institution is clear in that it aims at growth of and wider involvement in research activities, promotion of collaborative research, internationalization of research and revision of the post-graduate program in line with EU approaches. However, the university might consider to develop the research strategy further by defining specific goals, making their rationale explicit and by allocating a supportive budget.

There is a short statement of existence of medium and short-term plans for research activities. However, the described activities do not provide sufficient information to understand how such kind of planning is implemented and which tools are available to check a timely implementation and resulting quality.

The university has its peculiar role in research development and innovations. The panel welcomes initiatives to collaborate with enterprises such as Synopsis, the Central Bank, a. o. However, the differences between *ad hoc* collaborations and strategic collaborations in line with the SP are not clear.

There is good evidence of internationalization of research in the field of the sciences (natural and physics-mathematical directions) and a proven international scientific output. However, the same can not be stated about social sciences and humanities. Moreover, the reasons for this major discrepancy have not been analysed, nor is any evidence provided for the improvement of this situation. Further, in the shortcomings in the SER improvement of this situation has not been mentioned as a major challenge.

Some processes in the university are aimed at connecting research and educational activities. However, as yet these processes are lacking a structural basis.

Involvement of graduate and postgraduate students in research is possible if the individual motivation and scientific interest are present. However, the university does not seem to have a comprehensive policy on including research and scientific thinking within the educational academic programmes. Further, a systematic evaluation of the impact of these approaches and their contribution to student learning is lacking.

Considering all the evidence the panel concludes that research activities are too limited both in terms of output, in the number of staff and students involved and in the academic design of the study programmes. It is clear that the university has its peculiar role in research development and innovations. However, YSU needs an integrated research strategy in line with its SP (see consideration criterion 1). Locally, the scientific output is at a high level. However, the quality of research has to improve to be competitive at an international level. The panel underscores the research ambitions of the university, but at present assesses this criterion as negative.

JUDGEMENT: The panel assesses criterion 6 as negative.

RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended:

- to revise and specify the research strategy of the university;
- to extend the research activities by focussing its efforts primarily on a limited number of carefully chosen centres of excellence including input of other universities or Academy centers in Armenia or abroad. These centres can stimulate innovation and generate new knowledge. They can also be conducive for the further development of a strong academic teaching and learning method. This new way of working is expected to result in more multidisciplinary programmes, and the panel

certainly want to encourage the university to adopt this more modern concept of programme design with more horizontal integration;

- to embark on a strategy which is aimed to increase the income for research from external sources;
- to increase the number and quality of publications in international peer review journals to assure the university's visibility;
- to develop tools that check the research strategy's timely implementation and quality;
- to develop a policy that ascertains that research becomes an essential learning method in academic education. Training of all students in research and scientific thinking at the appropriate academic level needs to be structurally included in all academic programmes.

CRITERION VII: INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES

The TLI has its own property and resources, which effectively support the implementation of its stated mission and objectives and create a learning environment.

FINDINGS:

7.1. - YSU seems to be taking due care of the resources appropriate to the academic programmes offered. On average, the buildings of the university (classrooms and laboratories) are in relative good state in terms of furnishing and technical equipment, with several good practices. Within its limited budget the university was able to build adequate library and IT facilities. In addition, a considerable sum of money is yearly allocated from the university budget to reconstruct and completely repair the buildings, practical-training complexes and other constructions. Still, the laboratory equipment and electronic teaching environment need to be upgraded. The number of classrooms intended for interactive teaching is low..

There are mechanisms in place, which allow assessment of the resources. Judging from these results, the university revises its facilities. Students' and teachers' satisfaction with learning resources and technical supporting service is sufficiently high.

7.2 – To analyze the management and monitoring of the financial flows, YSU draws up an annual estimate of budget incomes and expenditures. At the end of the financial year the annual budget performance is presented based on the analysis of authentic data. The main income articles of the YSU budget have the following distribution: the tuition fees make up about 62% of the income, the state financing 31%, and other incomes (grants, bank interests, additional courses, etc.) 7%. The analysis of the financial flows of the recent years shows that both the YSU incomes and the expenses have increased year after year. The normal measures for transparency and accountability on the budget are in place. However, there is no strategy to link the allocation of financial resources to strategic plans and aims. Moreover, there are aims in the strategic plan that are not envisioned in the budget, or at least are not explicit under this standard. The university strives and plans to diversify its revenue channels in the future, however, no analysis is available about the background of this analysis.

7.3 – Taking into consideration the great number of academic programmes carried out at YSU, the financial resources to be effectively managed are distributed not by academic programmes but by the scientific-

educational subdivisions implementing these programmes (faculties, centres). Nevertheless, the allocation of the financial resources is based on the appropriate resources needed to offer and sustain the academic programmes. YSU budget incomes are distributed to separate faculties according to the number of academic staff, no matter in what faculty the workload of the lecturer is fulfilled. An independent financial audit is performed yearly. There is no analysis on the extent to which such an approach to budgeting is effective

7.4 – The planning of the necessary resources for the realization of the educational process at YSU is carried out by the administrative staff of the separate subdivisions on the basis of defining their own needs.

One of the mechanisms to assess the financial load of the existing educational programmes is the current monitoring of the educational programmes, which includes the yearly needs of the programme. In the case of necessity, requests for additional resources are either addressed to the YSU central administration or these wishes are realized at the expense of the educational subdivisions.

7.5 – Improvement of the management of information and documentation is one of the strategic objectives of YSU. As the SER states, a central integrated information system (ERP-like) has yet to be built. The management of YSU information and documentation is fulfilled by the Super Vision electronic information system, the YSU website, the system of automation of administrative processes. A Super Vision system is in place to ensure effectiveness of data collection and its management. Another important mechanism of gathering and analysing information on YSU activities is the already mentioned complete set of “Key performance indicators of YSU activity assessment”.

7.6 – The activity of YSU health and safety services is in the immediate focus of attention of the YSU Rector and is coordinated by the Vice-rector on General Issues. The SER elaborates on the description of the health care services in place and emphasizes its good state. Recreational activities for students and teachers are in place due to the necessary facilities in resort areas of Armenia owned by the university. Apart from the special medical training courses for students with special needs no other services and the quality of their provisions is analysed. The same relates to teaching and learning of the students with special needs. The university has the necessary staff and takes the measures to ensure adequate sanitary level.

7.7 – There are two major mechanisms– Graduate Satisfaction Survey and Student Survey – to evaluate effectiveness, applicability and availability of resources drawing on which the university takes decisions on improvement. However, it is not enough to fully understand the environment since the opinions of such important stakeholders as teachers and administrative staff are not considered in the analysis.

CONSIDERATIONS:

YSU seems to be taking due care of the resources appropriate to the academic programmes offered. The buildings of the university (classrooms and laboratories) are in a relative good state in terms of furnishing and technical equipment.

There are mechanisms in place, which allow assessment of the resources and drawing on the results the university revises its facilities. However, the provided information does not show whether this assessment includes the suitability for learning and achievement of the academic qualifications.

To analyze the management and monitoring of the financial flows YSU draws up an annual estimate of budget incomes and expenditures, and at the end of the financial year the annual budget performance is presented based on the analysis of authentic data. However, this analysis does not provide evidence to understand how the statements in the mission and SP are linked with the budget lines. Moreover, there are goals in the SP that are not envisioned in the budget, or at least are not explicit under this standard.

The YSU budget is allocated to faculties, centres and other units, rather than to academic programmes. The faculties exercise autonomy to some extent when it comes to use of the allocated budget.

The planning of the necessary resources for the realization of the educational process at YSU is carried out by the administrative staff of the separate subdivisions on the basis of defining their own needs. There are certain mechanisms revealing these necessary. However, it is unclear to the panel how the bottom-up planning based on programme financing is linked to top-down planning based on the SP.

The management of YSU information and documentation is mainly visualized in the Super Vision electronic information system, the YSU website, and the system of automation of administrative processes. However, there is not sufficient feedback control to assess the validity and reliability of these data collection, and to which extent the risk of data distortion by the human factor in data collection is reduced.

As the SER states, the integrated documentation flow system is only partially operating because of the lack of appropriate financial allocation and lack of capacity of the staff to handle the system. Moreover, there is no mention about any policy and procedure for information management and its soundness.

The activity of YSU health and safety services is in the immediate focus of attention of the YSU Rector and is coordinated by the Vice-rector on General Issues. The university has the necessary staff and takes the measures to ensure an adequate level of sanitary. Apart from the special medical training courses for students with special needs, no other services and the quality of their provisions are analysed. The same relates to the teaching and learning of the students with special needs. There are two major mechanisms – Graduate Satisfaction Survey and Student Survey – to evaluate effectiveness, applicability and availability of resources drawing on which the university takes decisions on improvement.

Considering all the evidence, the panel notes that within the limited budget the university was able to build an adequate study landscape including a library and IT-facilities. The panel is satisfied with the learning environment, which is appropriate to the academic programmes presently offered. However, the university should systematically evaluate the effectiveness of the faculties, especially with regards to future developments related to YSU's strategy. Such an evaluation should include necessary facilities for staff and students with special needs.

JUDGEMENT: The panel assesses criterion 7 as positive.

RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended:

- to invest in an integrated electronic system of administrative documentation, in line with a policy and procedures for information management;
- to analyse the extent to which the resources available provide for the necessary environment to implement academic activities arising from goals in the SP;
- to create the necessary facilities for staff and students with special needs.

CRITERION VIII: SOCIETAL RESPONSIBILITY

The institution is accountable to the government, employers and society for the education it offers and the resources it uses to meet these objectives.

FINDINGS:

- 8.1** – The reporting system at YSU evolves around (a) an annual report of the Rector; (b) annual reports of all the structural units, (c) an integrated financial report; (d) reports at faculty level; and (e) annual reports submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science. The university considers the main problems of the current reporting system to be that the work is not clearly planned beforehand and that definite target indicators are lacking. This questions applicability of the SP and the operational plans the university refers to in Criterion 1. Further, there is no reference to whether the reporting system is effective with regard to feedback control.
- 8.2** –The mechanisms warranting the transparency and availability of YSU procedures and processes are established by a number of legal acts. The department of Public Relations and Information is in charge to establish sustainable mechanisms for providing the information flow from institution to society and the corresponding feedback (work with journalists, proper responses to surveys providing information, development of the internet resources, work with NGOs, other institutions of higher education, state and private organizations, etc.). YSU also implements a consistent anti-corruption policy, given the present possibilities. The plan of Complex measures against corruption phenomena includes a number of provisions aimed at contributing to the process of ensuring transparency and publicity. The description elaborates on the PR activities of the university rather than on provisions of transparency.
- 8.3** – Online mechanisms (through the web-site and e-mails) collect feedback from the broader levels of the society. YSU has its official pages in social networks. Via social networks students, teachers and employers, applicants and graduates, as well as representatives of the society at large ask a great number of questions, get answers, give ratings and share opinions on the various fields of YSU activity. A variety of surveys aimed at the study of public opinion are also considered to be a tool for providing feedback that promotes the formation of strong links with the society. The approaches do not bear a systemic character and are carried out on an occasional basis.
- 8.4** –There are certain mechanisms to transfer knowledge to the society: public lectures at regional institutions of higher education and military units, meetings with representatives of various social strata, involvement in civil movements and programmes (ecological, charitable, etc.). In this respect, the university takes its responsibility for the regional development, particularly through its Ijevan branch. YSU organizes higher, post-graduate professional and additional education, implements staff trainings and quality improvement, carries out scientific researches, provides counselling and expert services, performs publishing activities, and organizes cultural events and so on. YSU also works with public school pupils and applicants providing counselling services in the sphere of their professional orientation. The panel acknowledges the long standing tradition of the transfer of knowledge and academic-ethical values but suggests to include these activities in a systematic evaluation.

CONSIDERATIONS:

The university has two levels of accountability. The university is accountable to the government and obeys the law, and in addition there is an internal system of bottom-up reporting resulting in a comprehensive annual report on the academic activities of the university.

The university warrants the transparency and availability of its procedures and activities directed to the society through websites, newspapers and information provided by the various units. The mechanisms of the transparency and availability of YSU procedures and processes are established by a number of legal acts.

The information provided by the university does not allow to understand the mechanisms that ensure transparency of procedures at YSU, nor which documents and procedures are made available/open to the public to maximize the public trust toward the services offered by YSU.

The university is developing partnerships with government, enterprises and other societal institutions. Varieties of mechanisms are available to collect feedback from the broader levels of the society. However, there is no analysis of the effectiveness of those approaches and to what extent they contribute to the formation of solid and fruitful links with the society at large.

Considering all the evidence, the panel appreciates that the university is in general transparent in its activities directed to the society and, for example, publishes results on the website and in other media. The effectiveness of these activities needs further study. The panel recognizes the teaching staff or involvement in various societal activities, an item in the evaluation process of the staff. These activities contribute to the societal goals of the university.

JUDGEMENT: The panel assesses criterion 8 as positive.

RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended:

- to assess the effectiveness of the reporting system on accountability;
- to develop a policy on provision of transparency;
- to analyse the effectiveness of the mechanisms available to collect feedback from the broader levels of the society.

CRITERION IX: EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND INTERNATIONALIZATION

The institution promotes experience exchange and enhancement through its sound external relations practices, thus promoting internationalization of the institution.

FINDINGS:

- 9.1** – The university has an active international office that takes many initiatives to facilitate and develop external relations and internationalization. Internationalization mainly involves implementation of joint research projects, professional and student mobility, participation in international professional networks and intercultural communication. However, internationalization in its broader sense is not yet perceived in the university policy since internationalization of academic programmes and internationalization of services has not yet been envisioned. The panel noticed many *ad hoc* initiatives but an integrated strategy of internationalization is still lacking. The university plans to develop a new internationalization policy and implementation strategy to ensure a structural approach to internationalization. In this context, good use can be made of the expertise of the Educational-Methodological Department and of the good practices already existing.
- 9.2** – YSU has a well-established international-relations office (IRO), which deals with admissions of international students, student exchange and mobility, international projects, issuing official documents and the like. In addition, the smooth flow of activities is hindered because of unsettled relations between the IRO and the faculties, with a poor information flow as a result. The effectiveness of the current internationalisation approach and its contribution to the implementation of the mission of YSU and its strategic objectives has not been studied.
- 9.3** – YSU has international cooperation agreements and contracts with 200 universities, institutes and international organizations in almost 50 countries all over the world. In addition the university

participates in several international educational and research programmes.. However, the productivity of these agreements needs to be assessed for their added-value and contribution towards the strategic goals of the YSU.

- 9.4 – Knowledge of the English language among the staff can be considered as weak. This knowledge among the YSU staff, which is necessary to enter the European Higher Education Area, is 30% average, 20% almost fluent and 10% zero knowledge. The students' knowledge of English is average, though some students who are involved in international programmes or deal with international organizations are fluent in foreign languages.

CONSIDERATIONS:

The university has an active international office that takes many initiatives to facilitate and develop external relations and internationalization. The panel noticed many ad hoc initiatives but an integrated strategy of internationalization is still lacking.

The international-relations office is well-established and deals with admissions of international students, student exchange and mobility, international projects, issuing official documents and the like. However, the findings provide appropriate evidence to note that the university is still in need of developing regulatory documents such as prospective activities of the unit, action plans, monitoring and evaluation mechanism. Furthermore, the proficiency in the use of the English language among the staff is still low which seriously hinders the development of internationalization.

YSU has a large number of cooperation agreements and contracts and is apparently involved in a variety of international projects. However, the lack of an analytic and critical review does not allow the panel to understand how effective these projects are, what impact they have, what the continuity after the projects' lifetime is and how they contribute to the university mission and objectives.

The university takes steps to improve the level of the knowledge, through the organization of language courses for all students and professors. However, it is not clear whether these training courses are effective and satisfy the participants with regard to their international impact.

The panel appraises the informative, well-structured and up-to-date website also in the English language, meeting the external needs and enhancing the visibility of the university.

Considering all the evidence, the panel appreciates the obvious drive of the university towards internationalization. The university has an active international office that takes many initiatives to facilitate and develop external relations. However, the poor knowledge of English among teachers is a serious drawback in these developments. Measures have been taken to overcome this well known shortcoming. Since YSU is on the right track, the panel arrives at the following judgement.

JUDGEMENT: The panel assesses criterion 9 as positive.

RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended:

- to develop an integrated strategy of internationalisation;
- to further develop the prospective activities, action plans, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms of the international relations' office and invest in a professional working force devoted to the IRO mission

- to study the effectiveness of the activities contributing to the implementation of the mission of YSU and its strategic objectives;
- to analyse the impact of the international project on the university mission and objectives;
- to enhance the proficiency of English language knowledge among students, teachers and administrative staff;
- to develop programme modules presented in English for bachelor and master programmes;
- to increase the mobility of staff and students;
- to introduce the concept of international benchmarking at an institutional level. A good use can be made of the expertise of the Educational-Methodological Department.

CRITERION X: INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

The institution has a set infrastructure for internal quality assurance, which promotes establishment of a quality culture and continual development of the institutions.

FINDINGS:

10.1, 10.3 – The IQA policy was developed and adopted in 2007 and was revised in 2012 to fully comply with ESGs requirements. The establishment of the YSU QA system started in 2008. A number of essential mechanisms and procedures of QA have been developed only recently. Currently, a set of mechanisms are in place to check for efficiency and quality of teaching, quality of the teaching staff, and quality assurance of academic programmes. All mechanisms and procedures of QA have been published and distributed to all academic and administrative units of the university, and are posted on YSU official documents' website to make these available for the external stakeholders and the public. Students and external stakeholders have their specific participation in all QA processes. The stakeholders are involved in the committees and working groups that carry out institutional and programme self-assessment processes for accreditation and prepare appropriate reports. The panel is positive about the quality of the SER. It contained the necessary information based on relevant evaluation results. The SER was sufficiently self-critical and presents the results of an internal evaluation process in which all stakeholders have been involved. Participation in the pilot demonstrated that the internal quality assurance is adequately geared to participate in external quality assurance. However, a systematic approach and a continued dynamics in the development of quality assurance is not yet evident. There is no analysis on the effectiveness of the approaches and to what extent these contribute to the quality enhancement of YSU and thus to the mission of YSU.

There are sufficient indicators that the Ijevan branch has implemented the Quality Assurance policy of YSU. In some cases the branch is in front.

10.2 – Creation of an internal QA system complying with ESGs requirements necessitates establishment of an independent central specialized YSU structure aiming at conducting broad and professional QA functions. Thus, the YSU quality assurance centre was established to promote implementation of internal QA mechanisms and procedures in line with ESGs as well as continuous development of quality culture. The university has allocated human and material resources to operationalize quality assurance processes, however, it is not clear whether the organisational structure is sufficient for the university scale and whether the IQA organization sufficiently reflects its applicability to the system.

The panel notes that the YSU has not yet a QA handbook available. The panel stresses the importance of this handbook since it will be the QA “bible” of the university.

10.4 – The IQA is in the phase of establishment and a review is envisioned after the first cycle of external evaluation. It is obvious that the quality culture is not yet fully developed. But the panel is impressed by what has been achieved in recent years, which however should not be an incentive to relax. There are still serious and important steps to be made. The PDCA cycle should be closed and the steps should be continued.

10.5, 10.6 – It is not clear to what extent the IQA provides a valid and sufficient background for EQA. Transparency is ensured through making some of the documents as well as reports publicly available; however, since this is the first experience with self-assessment the quality reports on academic programmes and the institutions are not yet publicly available.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Since 2012 the YSU has an IQA policy complying with the ESGs requirements and put in place a set of mechanisms to check for efficiency and quality of teaching, quality of teaching staff, quality assurance of academic programmes. The internal and external stakeholders are involved in QA processes, as well as in the committees and working groups that carry out institutional and programme self-assessment processes for accreditation and prepare appropriate reports. However it is too early to have proof of the effectiveness of the QA methodology in the quality enhancement of YSU. The university still needs to develop a comprehensive QA handbook.

There are sufficient indicators that the Ijevan branch has implemented the Quality Assurance policy of YSU. In some cases the branch is in front.

The University has allocated human and material resources to operationalize quality assurance processes. However, it is not clear whether the arrangements are sufficient for the university scales and whether the approaches to IQA are effective.

Overall the panel is positive about the quality of the self-assessment report. It contained the necessary information based on relevant evaluation results. The self-assessment report was sufficiently self-critical and included the results of internal evaluations. Participation in the pilot accreditation process showed that the internal quality assurance is adequately geared to participate in external quality assurance. It is obvious that the quality culture is not yet fully developed and that the PDCA cycle is not yet closed. But the panel is impressed by what has been achieved in recent years.

Following the overall description of criterion 10 the panel assesses it as positive, accepting the fact that the IQA policy was only recently introduced and geared by dedicated staff members.

JUDGEMENT: The panel assesses criterion 10 as positive with remarks

RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended :

- to include the Ijevan branch more explicitly in the university’s internal quality assurance system making full use of the outcomes of the internal quality assurance system of the branch;
- to develop a comprehensive quality assurance handbook;
- to close the PDCA cycle at all governmental levels of YSU;
- to include opportunities and threats in the SWOT analysis and show how threats can become opportunities (and vice versa).

6. OVERVIEW OF THE ASSESSMENTS

CRITERION	DECISION
I. Mission and purpose	YES
II. Governance and administration	YES
III. Academic programmes	YES
IV. Students	YES
V. Faculty and staff	YES
VI. Research and development	NO
VII. Infrastructure and resources	YES
VIII. Social responsibility	YES
IX. External relations and internationalization	YES
X. Internal quality assurance	YES

7. PEER REVIEW ON THE BASIS OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

As critical friends the panel also conducted a peer review resulting in a number of recommendations related to the ambition of the university to enter the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The panel has seen a lot of promising evidence but the road to Bologna is long and demanding.

The panel would like to put forward some recommendations, which can help the university to move forward into the EHEA. Most of these recommendations are meant to encourage the university to continue the work already done. In general, the panel's recommendations relate to issues as a result of the university's aim to implement changes in accordance with the Bologna process. These issues concern amongst others: a more productive relation with the external stakeholders, the further modernizing of the educational concept, substantial efforts to increase research volume and quality, and further investment in internationalisation.

Observations

1. The university is clearly in a phase of **transition**. The panel has seen a discrepancy between the university's strategy and the actual situation.
2. In general, the **programmes** are rather traditional in the sense that they are discipline-based and teacher-based. The emphasis is more on theoretical knowledge than on research skills and professional behaviour. Modernizing of the programmes requires a more multi-disciplinary and student-centred approach.
3. **Research** activities are limited both in terms of (international) output and in the number of staff and students involved in research.
4. The relation between the intended learning outcomes and the **assessment** is not made explicit (yet). Especially the assessment of research skills and professional behaviour needs further attention.
5. Only a limited number of students participate in international activities. Also not all staff is engaged in **internationalisation**.
6. The panel did not see evidence of international **benchmarking**. Some chairs are involved in benchmarking but it is not done at institutional level.
7. The mechanism for **data collection** is there but is not yet fully developed and, not yet fully integrated.
8. As such the internal **structure** of providing information on the quality of programmes is rather complicated.
9. The panel has seen sufficient evidence about the involvement of internal stakeholders but the representation of **external stakeholders** seems to be limited to the various committees. Also the communication with external relations is mostly informal.

Recommendations

- 1 The university should try to make its internal structure less complicated and consequently more effective. A good start might be to consider the combination of a number of committees, and thus to reduce their number. In the end, the university might want to opt for **a lean organisational structure still based on the collegial academic culture**.
- 2 In order to deepen the already existing **quality culture** the panel emphasises that staff and students should profit from the quality assurance rather than considering it a burden.
- 3 The university needs to contemplate on the **ANQF defined levels** and the programmes offered in relation to the European standards for academic education.
- 4 Wanting to implement **modern teaching and learning methods** the panel advises to further invest in the development of an educational concept at the institutional level including research oriented education and in the training of the teachers. Starting with the method, it is helpful to have a clear educational concept based on the latest international insights. Once having adopted this concept,

faculties can make this concept fit for purpose. The Educational-Methodological Department can take the lead in developing this concept involving all internal stakeholders. Also good use can be made of good practice present in the university. The same department should also see to it that all teachers fully understand the newly developed concept and profit from adequate training.

- 5 To invest in the development of an educational concept at institutional level including research-oriented education and in the training of the teachers aimed at implementing modern teaching and learning methods. Starting with the method it is helpful to have a clear educational concept based on the latest international insights. Once having adopted this concept, faculties can make this concept fit for purpose. The educational- methodological department can take the lead in developing this concept involving all internal stakeholders. Also good use can be made of good practice present in the university. The same department should also see to it that all teachers fully understand the newly developed concept. In addition, the university should consider compulsory training of teachers.
- 6 Keywords of a **modern educational concept** are:
 - An international benchmarked blueprint for the curriculum including predefined intended learning outcomes;
 - student-centred learning with interactive student participation and small group learning;
 - problem-based learning;
 - a multidisciplinary approach with more horizontal integration;
 - a strong relation between research and education starting in the first year of the bachelor’s programme.
- 7 The panel wants to urge the university to extend its **research** activities. This can be done by focusing its efforts primarily on a limited number of carefully chosen **centres of excellence** including the input of other institutes, such as universities for instance: institutes of the National Academies of Science and the Medical University. These centres can stimulate innovation and generate new knowledge. They can also be conducive for the further development of a strong academic teaching and learning method. This new way of working is expected to result in more **interdisciplinary** programmes, and the panel certainly wants to encourage the university to adopt this more modern concept of programme design with more horizontal integration.
- 8 The university invests largely in its **international relations**, and the panel encourages the university continuing to do so. Two points of attention are (1) the proficiency in English among staff and students, and (2) the increase in mobility of staff and students.
- 9 The panel recommends to introduce the concept of **international benchmarking** at institutional level. Again good use can be made of the expertise of the Educational-Methodological Department and of good practice examples already existing in the university.
- 10 The final recommendation concerns the relation with **external stakeholders**. The panel wants to encourage the university to further develop strategic partnerships with external stakeholders and society. It should also improve the mechanisms for identifying stakeholders needs. It might be useful to train and staff and students in entrepreneurship. In order to do so it might be useful for the university to work closely together with other universities in Armenia, and share the expertise present and instruments already developed.

APPENDIX 1. THE CURRICULA VITAE OF THE PANEL MEMBERS

Professor dr. Ben Van Camp - In 1971 received MD, in 1976 became a Specialist Internal Medicine, Hematology, In 1980 received his PHD degree.

Actual position

President of the Board of Governors of the University Hospital (UZ Brussel) and steering committee of the University Medical Centre-Brussels project.

Member of the "OECD Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE)", as delegate for the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) since 2011.

Full Professor in Hematology (since 1988)

Past positions

Rector of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (2000-2008) and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine (1994-2000). In both capacities he adapted the Academic and administrative Organisation of the University and led the implementation of the "Bologna" changes with emphasis on curriculum changes and quality assurance in all aspects of the academic mission (research, education and services to society).

As an active member (2007-2011) of the Steering Comité of UNICA (Network of the Universities of the Capitals of Europe), he took part in the evaluation processes of member universities and initiated efforts for joint International Master and PhD programmes.

Head Division of Clinical Hematology (UZBrussel) (1985-2012).

Panel member NVAO institutional audit Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam (2012).

Honorary titles

Belgian Franqui Chair University of Antwerp (2001); Member of the Royal Flemish Academy of Medicine (2002); King Albert II of Belgium has honoured him with the peerage of Baron (2007).

Professor dr J.W. (Jan) Kijne - (1947), retired professor of Bioscience at Leiden University J. Kijne was professor of Phytotechnology (1994–1997), Plant Physiology (1997 – 2006) and Bioscience (2006–2010) in Leiden, and guest professor of Microbiology at Tromsø University, Norway (1995–2000). He also was educational director of the biology programmes (1996–2002) in Leiden, vice-dean of the Faculty of Science (2002–2008), and scientific director of the Pre-University College, Leiden (2004–2008). J. Kijne has been chair of the evaluation committee for the degree programmes in Biology in the Netherlands and a member of various other evaluation committees.

Professor Yuri Suvaryan - In 1965 graduated Yerevan State University and received a diploma degree in economics.

1970 defended his thesis on "The ratio of the productivity of the work and the salary in the field of Mechanical Engineering" and received his PhD degree in economics. In 1974 was awarded associate professor's, in 1984 defended his doctoral thesis on "The management of the productivity of the complete work" and received his doctor's degree in economics. In 1986 professor's academic title and in 2010 academic's title.

The research activities include macroeconomics, theory or management, methodology of strategic management, theory and history of public administration, issues regarding the management of the scientific educational system.

He has more than 240 published scientific articles, monographs, manuals, including 33 textbooks and handbooks regarding the above-mentioned topics.

Currently he is the Academician Secretary and member of presidency of the department of the Armenian Studies and social sciences in the National Academy of Science (since 2011), Head of the chair of the management in the Armenian State University of Economy (since 1994). He worked at Yerevan State University (YSU), in the positions of assistant, associate professor (1968-1975), then in the position of associate professor and professor at Armenian State University of Economy (1975-1987). In 1992-1993, he was the advisor to the prime minister. In 1987-1994, he occupied the position of the vice-rector of the scientific activities and in 2006-2011 he was the rector of the Armenian State University of Economy.

Currently, in the Armenian State University of Economy he is the president of the professional board of awarding scientific degrees. President of the “Armenian Association of the Management”.

He has participated in a number of local and international conferences.

He was awarded by a medal of Anania Shirakatsi (in 2000), 1st level medal for serving to the motherland (in 2011), Nagorno-Karabakh “Vachagan Barepasht” medal (in 2013), RA National Assembly Medal of Honor (in 2013).

Professor Ara Amiryan – In 1979 graduated from the Armenian Agricultural Institute and received a diploma degree in engineering. In 1982-1984 has been a PHD student in the chair of Agriculture and Melioration machines. In 1987 defended its thesis on "Development and Substantiation Hydromechanical Drives Parameters of Machines for Mountain Cultivation" and received his Candidate of Technical Science Degree in the University of Donny Rostov. In 1998 defended his doctoral thesis on "Scientific Basics of Development of Universal Drives for Agricultural Machinery" and received his Doctor of Science degree. In 2000 he got a title of a professor.

The research activities include studies in mechanical transmissions (basically to Harmonic Drives) and to Alternative Sources of Energy. He has created a new type of Harmonic Drives called Chain-Wave Transmission.

About 100 publications including: 1 monograph, 75 scientific papers and articles; 9 patents; 15 works on methods and presentations at 12 professional conferences.

Currently he is The Head of the Department of Educational Reforms, Strategic Planning, Quality Control and Self-analysing (since 2011) and the Head of the Chair “Graphics and Basics of Machine Designing”. Currently lecturing is on “The Theory of Machines and Mechanisms”, “Machine Elements”, “CAD systems” (since 2006). He worked as a Professor at the Chair “Graphics and Basics of Machine Designing” (2003-2006). In 2000-2003 he was a Professor at the Chair “Agricultural machines, vehicles and transport conveyance”. In 1992-2000, Associate Professor at the chair “Tractors and Vehicles”, in 1994-1996, appointed Head of the Department of Agreements and Adoptions; in 1992-1993, Appointed Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Agricultural Engineering; in 1985-1992: Appointed Lecturer at the Chair of Tractors and Vehicles; in 1979-1982: Elected Secretary of the Young Communist League.

He has a membership in 2 international professional associations: A member of World Scientific and Engineering Society (in 2000) and a Member of International Society of Automotive Engineers (1999).

He has participated in a number of local and international scientific conferences. As a trainer he came up with scientific reports in Germany, France, Switzerland, Denmark, Japan, USA, China, Greece, Canada, Italy, etc..

Was involved in Grant projects of international organisations. In 1985 received Honour of Lenin’s Komsomol for academic research.

Zaruhi Sargsyan: 3th year student in Yerevan “Gladzor” University, International Relations faculty. Participates in the activities of the university student scientific organisation. She is a member of a Youth NGO.

APPENDIX 2. AGENDA

PART III – Pilot Institutional Audit YSU – June 2013

- Sunday 16 June – panel meeting institutional audit (morning/lunch)
- Monday 17 June – interviews institutional audit
- Tuesday 18 June – interviews institutional audit
- Wednesday 19 June – panel meeting & feedback YSU institutional audit (morning)

Chair: prof. dr. Ben Van Camp (Brussels, Belgium)

Sunday 16 June		Panel meeting institutional audit (<i>morning/lunch: 09:00-13:15</i>)	Where
Start	End		
09:15	13:15	Closed panel meeting including consulting documents on display (acquaintance, discussion of self-assessment report, preparation of interviews, reading of documents, assessment achieved learning outcomes)	ANQA
		Lunch	
Monday 17 June		Interviews institutional audit (<i>full day: 08:30-18:00</i>)	YSU
08:30	09:30	Meeting with board	
09:45	10:45	Meeting with rector and vice-rectors	
11:00	12:00	Meeting with educational management (deans, heads of chairs, the head of the educational affairs office)	
12:15	13:15	Visit of facilities (1): library and IT facilities	
13:15	14:15	Lunch and closed panel meeting	
14:15	15:00	Meeting with student council	
15:15	16:00	Meeting with academic council	
16:00	17:30	Closed panel meeting including consulting documents on display	
17:45	18:00	Meeting with rector	
Tuesday 18 June		Interviews institutional audit (<i>full day: 08:30-19:00</i>)	YSU
08:30	09:30	Meeting with teaching staff	
09:45	10:45	Meeting with quality assurance staff	
11:00	12:00	Open meeting/ consultation session	
12:00	13:00	Visit of facilities (2): central student services	
13:00	14:00	Lunch and closed panel meeting	
14:15	15:00	Meeting 1 with subdivision A: Students' involvement in quality assurance ⁸	
15:15	16:00	Meeting 2 with subdivision B: PDCA at faculty level (Faculty of Economics) ⁹	
16:15	17:00	Meeting 3 with subdivision C: Ijevan branch including Faculty of Applied Art ¹⁰	
17:15	19:00	Closed panel meeting	
		Dinner with panel & ANQA coordinator	
Wednesday 19 June		Panel meeting & feedback YSU institutional audit (<i>morning: 08:30-12:00</i>)	YSU
08:30	10:45	Closed panel meeting (<i>continued</i>)	
11:00	12:00	Presentation of initial findings by panel ¹¹	

⁸ Representatives of various student bodies and YSU boards, councils etc. (6 in total; time 45')

⁹ Dean, 3 representatives Faculty Council, 2 students (6 in total; time 45')

¹⁰ Representatives of Ijevan branch including dean Faculty of Applied Art and 2 students (6 in total; time 45')

¹¹ It is important to invite the chairperson and up to three internal and three external stakeholders

APPENDIX 3. LIST OF DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

N	Name of the document	Criterion /Standard
1	YSU Charter of the (2011)	1.1
2	YSU Strategic Development Plan (2010-2014)	1.1
3	The Schedule-Plan of Implementation of YSU Strategic Plan 2010-2014	1.3
4	The Set of Key Indicators for Assessing YSU's Activity (2003-2009 and 2005-2010)	1.3
5	YSU Key Performance Indicators (Yerevan 2009, 2010)	1.3
6	Surveys on Alumni's Satisfaction	1.3
7	YSU Board regulations (adopted by YSU Board in 2006)	2.1
8	YSU Academic Council Regulations (2011)	2.1
9	Procedure of YSU Rector election (2006)	2.1
10	YSU Rectorate Regulation (2011)	2.1
11	YSU Faculty Exemplary charter (2011)	2.1
12	Procedure of YSU Faculty Dean Election (2012)	2.1
13	YSU Procedure of Department Chair Election (2012)	2.1
14	YSU Accounting Policy (2007)	2.1
15	Annual Account of YSU State Non-Commercial Organization's Income and Expenses (2011,2012,2013)	2.1
16	Annual Performance of YSU State Non-Commercial Organization's Income and Expenses (budget) (2012)	2.1
17	Charter of YSU Student Council (2010)	2.2, 4.7
18	Regulation on Current Monitoring and Periodic Review of Academic Programmes (approved by YSU AC in June 2011)	2.6
19	The Schedule of the Introduction of Credit System in YSU (2006)	3.1
20	Methodological Guidelines for Development of YSU Study Programmes (2010)	3.1
21	Manual on Academic Programmes	3.1
22	Current System of YSU Students' Knowledge Assessment and Evaluation (2011)	3.3
23	Guidelines for Assessment of YSU Students (2012)	3.3
24	Student Mobility Document Format	3.4
25	Regulation on Approval of Academic Programmes (approved by YSU AC in February, 2011)	3.5
26	Regulation on Current Monitoring and Periodic Review of Academic Programmes (approved by YSU AC in June 2011)	3.5
27	PhD Study Programme / Organization of the Academic Process on Credit-based System (2010, 4 documents)	4.2
28	YSU Rector's order on "Organization of Academic Counselors' (Curators) Activities" (27.07.2010)	4.2
29	Regulations on Student Allowances, State and Inner-institutional Scholarship Provision (approved on 18.11.2010 by YSU Academic Council)	4.4
30	A Guide for Freshman	4.4
31	Regulation on Graduate Satisfaction Surveys from the Education Received in YSU (approved by YSU Academic Council on June 17, 2010)	4.8
32	Regulation on Implementation of YSU Faculty Development Programme (July 07, 2011)	5.1
33	Regulation on Competitive Election and Appointment of YSU Teaching Staff (2012, 2000)	

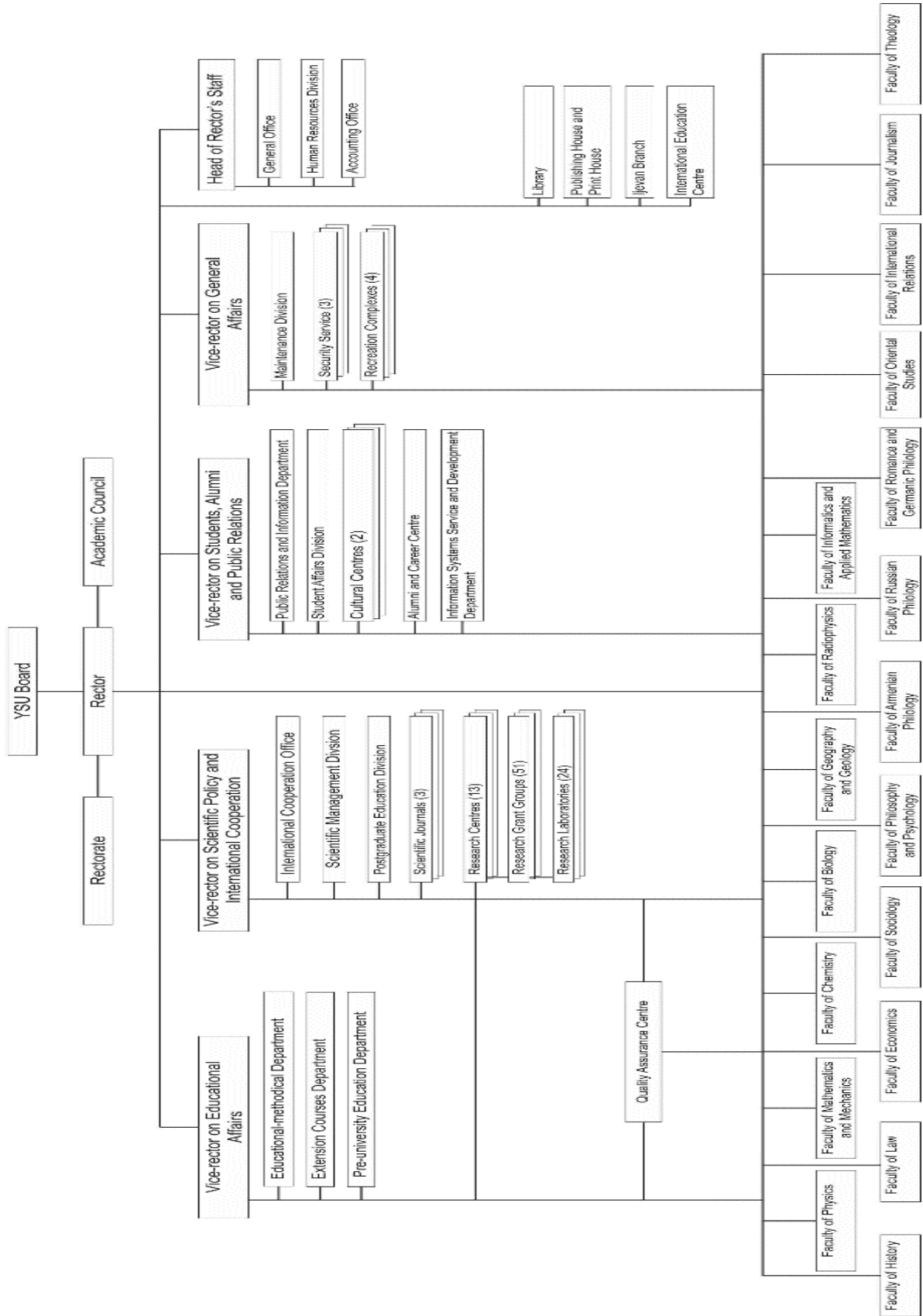
34	Regulation on Student Surveys on the Quality and Effectiveness of Teaching at YSU (approved by YSU Academic Council in 2002, changes were made in 2003, 2004 and 2010)	5.3
35	Regulation on differentiated payment bonus for YSU teaching staff (2011, last approved on 17.12.2012)	5.4. 6.3
36	Amended Regulation on Students' Survey on Teaching Quality and Efficiency (Decision of YSU SC, 17.06.2010)	5
37	First Phase of Faculty Development Programme (06.12.2002) Second Phase of Faculty Development Programme (29.11.2007)	5.4
38	Credit-Based Faculty Development Programme (November 18, 2010)	5.4
39	The Key Performance Indicators of YSU's activity, 2000-2010	6.1
40	Guidelines for Organization and Notification of Public Events at YSU (YSU rector's order N176/1 of 29.09.2010)	8.3
41	Charter of Foreign Collaboration Department	9.2
42	Regulation on Organizing the Programme of Qualification Enhancement of YSU Teaching Staff	10

APPENDIX 4. RESOURCES REVIEWED BY THE PANEL

1. History museum of the YSU
2. IT centre
3. Library and reading halls
4. Laboratories
5. Language centre
6. International relation's office
7. Auditoriums

APPENDIX 5. THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY



APPENDIX 6. LIST OF THE ABBREVIATIONS

1. **ANQA**-National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance, Foundation
2. **ANQF**- Armenian National Qualification Framework
3. **ARQATA**- Armenia Quality Assurance Technical Assistance
4. **ECTS**-European Credit Transfer System
5. **ESG**_ Standards and guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area
6. **KPI**- Key Performance Indicators
7. **IRO**- International Relation's office
8. **NVAO**-Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Agency Organization
9. **PDCA**- Plan Do Check Act
10. **QA**- Quality Assurance
11. **QAC**-Quality Assurance Centre
12. **RA**- Republic of Armenia
13. **SER**-Self-evaluation report
14. **SP**- Strategic Plan
15. **(SSS)**_ Students scientific society
16. **YSU**- Yerevan State University