



CONCLUSION

ON THE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES OF YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

Full name of the Institution:	Yerevan State University
Acronym:	YSU
Official address:	1 Alek Manukyan street, Yerevan, 0025, RA
Previous Accreditation decree and date:	Not available

LEGAL BASIS

Guided by the regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs” approved by RA Government decree as of 30 June, 2011 N978-Ն; by N959-Ն (30 June, 2011) decree on approving RA Standards for Professional Education Accreditation as well as by ANQA Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel, ANQA representatives together with the expert panel and ANQA coordinator of the accreditation procedure discussed YSU self-evaluation report, expert panel report, the action plan presented by YSU on the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel report, and the expert panel opinion about that action plan after which draft conclusion of ANQA about the institutional capacities of YSU was developed.

As a result of discussion **ANQA registered the following:**

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

Submission of application	29 February, 2012
Submission of self-evaluation report	2 April, 2013
Site-visit	16-19 June, 2013
Submission of expert panel report	22 October, 2013
Submission of action plan for elimination of shortcomings	17 February, 2014

RESULTS OF PEER-REVIEW

The expertise was carried out by an expert panel¹ formed according to the requirements of ANQA regulation on the Formation of Expert Panel. The evaluation was carried out based on the 10 criteria² of institutional accreditation approved by RA Government decree N 959-Ն as of June 30, 2011.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While carrying out the evaluation it was taken into account that “the University aims at becoming student-centered learning environment which prepares its graduates to active social life, to the role of a manager and to professional development and lifelong learning in line with the needs of modern labor market and globalized society”. YSU has always had leading positions among the higher education institutions in Armenia and South Caucasus. During more than 90 years of its existence YSU has had more than one hundred thousand graduates, has established new faculties and research centres.

During its operation the University has not undergone accreditation process. Education quality assurance was carried out through the application of some mechanisms of QA control. The current analysis of institutional capacities was the first attempt of the University with the aim of evaluating the satisfaction with education environment, the effectiveness of academic programs, social responsibility and the evaluation of the activities of newly developed internal quality assurance system.

The University is authorized to provide 60 BA, 130 MA and 70 PhD programs. There are 11 degree awarding Professional Councils in YSU. All the faculties of YSU provide programs which have clearly defined and well coordinated curricula. Intended learning outcomes are defined for all the programs. Effective mechanisms of feedback from students and alumni have been introduced to bring the academic programs in compliance with the needs and requirements of labour market and the society. Most of the academic programs have been reviewed for a few times during the recent years.

The University has adopted student-centered learning approach however the transition to it is not fully completed yet. It should be mentioned that students’ assessment is objective and the assessment criteria are transparent however the objectiveness of assessment can be improved.

YSU also provides professional trainings, continuous education courses and life-long learning possibilities to various groups of the society through its extension programs and courses. The University strives to fulfill the demand of having up-to-date programs through

¹ **Appendix 1** ` Expert panel composition and ANQA support staff

² **Appendix 2**` Summative evaluation

interconnecting research activities with education process. However there is not yet any structural base to carry out these activities. The involvement of alumni and researchers (PhD students) in research activities is possible based on their own motivation and scientific interest, however the University seems to have no comprehensive policy which will involve research and scientific thinking within the framework of academic programs. Moreover, the coordinated evaluation of the impact of those approaches is missing and it's not clear what impact they have in the study process.

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. Involvement in activities within TEMPUS projects helps the University to carry out benchmarking of its academic programs and to develop new programs.

The University mainly ensures sufficient resources according to the requirements of academic programs. In average the University campus (lecture rooms, laboratories) are in good conditions in terms of furnishing and technical equipment. 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. Yet 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, for the assessment of the resources however the provided information is not enough to understand whether the resources are fully enough for organizing the education process and gaining professional qualifications.

To manage and control the financial flows of YSU, an annual estimate of budget incomes and expenditures is formed and at the end of the financial year the annual budget performance is presented based on the analysis of authentic data. However, the analysis does not show how the mission and strategic goals are linked to budget. The planning of the necessary resources for the realization of the education process at YSU is carried out by the administrative staff of the separate subdivisions on the basis of defining their own needs.

Apart from the special medical training courses for students with special needs no other services are provided by the University and the quality of their provision is not analyzed. The same relates to teaching and learning of the students with special needs.

Experienced and professional teaching staff is working now at the University and this promotes the achievement of the main goals of the academic programs. However, 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 programs concerned.

YSU employs about 3000 staff out of which 1300 are the permanent teaching staff members (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 12.5/1. Continuous development of its teaching staff is among YSU priorities, which is a crucial factor for providing high-quality education. Recently YSU has introduced a new credit-based program for the enhancement of qualifications of teaching staff. It provides special training courses aimed at developing teachers' skills in applying new teaching, learning and assessment methods.

YSU's system of governance is an accepted system of governance within academic environment. 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 temporary 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- more because budget allocation does not seem to correspond to the Strategic Plan.

Education quality and quality assurance are given much importance to in all levels of the University though currently it is mostly conditioned by external requirements. In order to provide high quality education YSU currently is introducing internal quality assurance system in line with the requirements European standards and guidelines. Human, material and financial resources have been allocated for the organization of the processes. Though some processes are being carried out, it is not clear whether these approaches of internal quality assurance are sufficient and effective for the whole University. It is obvious that quality culture is not fully developed yet and that PDCA (plan, do, check, act) cycle is not closed yet.

Strengths

1. The strategic goals are widely shared within the University and teaching staff and students are aware of the goals and generally are supportive;
2. The students' involvement at all levels of governance is something to cherish. The students are informed, and have an influence on decision making;
3. The IT instruments for data collection are in place. In several areas of activities data are systematically gathered;
4. The assessment of students is fair and the criteria for assessment are transparent;

5. The teachers are very motivated and dedicated. The student satisfaction on the quality of the teaching staff is generally high. The staff works closely together, and that they discuss issues in a collegial manner;
6. Within the limited resources the University was able to ensure appropriate learning environment including a library and IT-facilities;
7. Students' satisfaction with learning resources and technical support services is sufficiently high;
8. The university takes measures against corruption given the present possibilities in order to reduce negative risks;
9. The teaching staff's social activities are taken into account in the evaluation process of the staff, this contributes to the fulfillment of the University goals concerning service to society;
10. The University has an active international office that takes many initiatives to facilitate and develop external relations and internationalization.
11. Having informative, well-structured and up-to-date website also in the English language, meeting the external needs and enhancing the visibility of the University is praiseworthy.

Weaknesses

1. The mission statement of the University is rather general. YSU should have a more specific profile;
2. The involvement of the external stakeholders need to be strengthened;
3. The University has to develop a more explicit policy on the alignment of learning outcomes and teaching and learning methods.
4. The lack of sufficient interdisciplinary programmes is bothersome. The existence of the latter is of crucial importance because many large questions in science can only be answered by interdisciplinary cooperation;
5. 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,
6. Support for students with special needs and for international students needs further formalization and improvement. Special attention should be paid to ensure their educational success. It is also necessary to encourage and formalize the active involvement of those students in University bodies;
7. Taking into account academic ambitions of the University the percentage of academic staff having an academic degree is rather limited;

8. Research activities are too limited both in terms of output and in the number of staff and students involved in research;
9. The University does not fully recognize that research is an essential learning method in education. Preparing students for research activities should be structurally included in all the academic programmes;
10. There is no necessary infrastructure for students with special needs;
11. There are a number of temporary initiatives at the University but an integrated strategy of internationalization is still lacking;
12. The lack of English language proficiency is a serious drawback in the development of internationalisation. The percentage of English language proficiency among teachers is rather low;
13. The quality culture is not yet fully developed. The PDCA cycle is not yet closed and the effect of the present evaluations is not clear yet.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXPERT PANEL

Mission and Goals

1. To reformulate the mission statement and make it more specific at the level of aimed outcome.
2. To include the indicators for evaluation of the achievements of the strategic goals in strategic plan; which will make the strategic plan more specific and follow up of the realisation of the goals is possible.
3. To make a clear distinction between the programs of majors and minors in terms of learning outcomes.
4. To improve the involvement of stakeholders (especially external).
5. To analyse the effectiveness of the stakeholders' involvement, with specific emphasis on the involvement of alumni and labour market representatives.

Governance and Administration

6. To simplify the University structure. The University might want to opt for a lean organisational structure still based on the collegial academic culture.
7. To adjust budget allocation to the Strategic Plan.
8. To adjust the governance structure in order to enlarge the input of the teaching staff in the development, application and revision of educational policies.
9. To use the indication of risks and chances as a regular planning instrument
10. To translate the Strategic Plan (where possible) into quantifiable targets and adjust data collection to underpin this strategy in an organized way.

11. To close the PDCA cycle on every level of governance, in order to efficiently achieve the goals of the Strategic Plan.
12. To mandatory include external peer review in the QA system.

Academic programs

13. 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.
14. To adjust the survey system in order to allow for critical assessment of the new educational approach.
15. To stimulate the development of interdisciplinary programmes.

Students

16. To encourage and formalize the active involvement of students with special needs and disabilities in University governing bodies.
17. To evaluate the effectiveness of the mechanisms revealing the students' needs.
18. To evaluate the extent to which the supplementary courses and internships contribute to the formation of intended qualifications.
19. To develop a clear formal procedure and a schedule for students at YSU to be able to turn to the administrative staff for their issues.
20. To link students and teaching staff research activities and evaluate the effectiveness of the research activities.
21. To study the effectiveness of the student right protection mechanisms and analyse their impact.

Teaching and support staffs

22. To determine particular requirements for the professional qualities of the teaching staff according to the demands of the academic programmes.
23. To establish a mentoring system for young lecturers.
24. To use the results of the students surveys for the purpose of guiding and individualizing the quality improvement programmes of the teaching staff.
25. To improve the teachers' proficiency in English.
26. To link the courses of professional development with the qualifications of the academic programs.
27. To develop professional standards and improvement mechanisms for the attestation of the administrative and supporting staff.

Research and development

28. To revise and specify the research strategy of the University.
29. To extend the research activities by focusing its efforts primarily on a limited number of carefully chosen centres of excellence including input of other universities or Education centres in Armenia or abroad. These centres can promote innovation and generate new knowledge. They can also be conducive for the further development of a strong teaching and learning method. This approach is possible to introduce through multidisciplinary programs, and it is encouraged to adopt this more modern concept of program design ensuring more horizontal integration;
30. To embark on a strategy which is aimed to increase the income for research from external sources.
31. To increase the number and quality of publications in international peer reviewed journals to assure the University's visibility.
32. To develop tools that check the research strategy's timely implementation and quality.
33. To develop a policy that ascertains that research becomes an essential learning method in academic education. Training of all students in terms of research and scientific thinking at the appropriate academic level needs to be structurally included in all academic programmes.

Infrastructure and resources

34. To invest in an integrated electronic documentation system, in line with a policy and procedures for information management;
35. To analyse the extent to which the resources available provide for the necessary environment to implement academic activities arising from goals in the Strategic Plan;
36. To create the necessary conditions for staff and students with special needs.

Social responsibility

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

External relations and internationalization

40. To develop an integrated strategy of internationalisation;

41. To further develop the prospective activities, action plans, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms of the International relations' office and invest in a professional working force in line with the mission of International relations' office.
42. To study the effectiveness of the activities contributing to the implementation of the mission of YSU and its strategic goals;
43. To analyse the impact of the international projects on the implementation of University's mission and goals;
44. To enhance the proficiency of English language among students, teachers and administrative staff;
45. To develop programme modules in English for bachelor and master programmes;
46. To increase the mobility of staff and students;
47. To carry out international benchmarking at an institutional level. A good use can be made of the expertise of the Educational-Methodological Department.

Internal quality assurance system

48. To involve 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.
49. To develop a comprehensive quality assurance handbook.
50. To close the PDCA cycle at all governmental levels of YSU.
51. To include opportunities and threats in the SWOT analysis and show how threats can become opportunities (and vice versa).

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

A peer review according to international standards has been carried out aimed at the enhancement of the University's competitiveness at the international level as well as integration into the European Higher Education Area.

Observations

The general impression is that the University is in a phase of transition. The panel has seen a discrepancy between the University's strategy and the actual situation.

The expert panel finds that the academic programs are rather traditional in the sense that they are discipline-based and teacher-centered. The emphasis is also more on the theoretical knowledge than on skills and professional behaviour. Aiming at modernizing the programmes the University should apply a more multi-disciplinary and student-centred approach.

One of the challenges of the University is that research activities are limited both in terms of (international) output and in the number of staff and students involved in research.

Another very important issue is not explicit relation between the intended learning outcomes and the assessment. Especially the assessment of skills and professional behaviour needs further improvement.

Only a limited number of students participate in international activities. Also not all staff is engaged in internationalisation.

The expert panel has seen no evidence of international benchmarking. Some chairs are involved in benchmarking but it is not done at institutional level.

There is a mechanism for data collection but is not yet fully developed, not yet fully integrated. The internal structure of providing information on the quality of programmes is rather complicated. 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

The recommendations mainly relate to the ambition of the University to carry out changes in line with Bologna process. As a result of peer-review according to international standards, it is recommended:

- 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 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 programs offered in relation to the European standards for academic education.
- 4 Wanting to implement **modern teaching and learning methods** it is recommended 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. 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.
6. The University is urged 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 RA National Academy of Science and the Medical University. These centres can stimulate innovation and 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** programs thus the University is encouraged to adopt this more modern concept of programme design.
7. The University invests largely in its **international relations**, and the University is encouraged to continue doing so. More attention should be paid to the proficiency in English among staff and students and the increase in mobility.
8. It is recommended 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.
9. The final recommendation concerns the relation with **external stakeholders**. The University is encouraged to further develop strategic partnerships with external stakeholders and society. The University should also improve the mechanisms for identifying stakeholders' needs. 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.

YSU'S ACTION PLAN ON THE ELIMINATION OF THE SHORTCOMINGS MENTIONED IN THE EXPERT PANEL REPORT

Yerevan State University admits that the recommendations presented by the Expert Panel are within the framework of the University's strategy and the University has presented action plan and time schedule for the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the Expert Panel report. These action plan and time schedule were approved by the Scientific Council on 30.01.2014.

Having examined the University's action plan based on the recommendations presented in the final Expert Panel report, the Expert Panel comes to a conclusion that according to the action plan the University plans to follow the recommendations presented by the expert panel for all 10 criteria. The Panel finds that all the recommendations demanding urgent change or improvement are involved in the action plan and the necessary resources will be allocated within the upcoming two years (until the end of 2015) for their implementation.

However it should be mentioned that a number of issues have not been given sufficient importance to.

- The University has mainly presented activities for improvement and actions for their implementation according to the requirements of the Expert Panel. However the University highlights more the documentary regulation of the activities: the development of different policy, procedures and mechanisms, rather than their implementation and study of their alignment with the set goals.
- For all the actions responsible people/working groups are clearly mentioned. It is clearly mentioned in the action plan how the actions should be carried out, what resources will be needed for their implementation. Allocated resources for the solution of most of the problems are relevant.
- The logical sequence of actions for all 10 criteria is mainly kept, the deadlines for the implementation of the activities are mainly clear and realistic however actions concerning some issues, their sequence and logic of the deadlines for the implementation need further clarification (especially in the field of "Research and Development").
- Most of the outcomes defined in the action plan are aimed at the fulfillment of the goals however in some cases they are not that much measurable and it is not clear what kind of qualitative change can be expected at the end of the particular action. Development of several policies, procedures and mechanism for the regulation of the main spheres of the University are planned. It is not declared but it is supposed that those documents will be applied once they are developed.
- For the monitoring and evaluation of the results of separate actions the University applies mainly one measuring indicator for determining the successful

implementation and no measuring indicator is used for the evaluation of impact of the actions.

Conclusion: The expert panel finds that implementation of the main part of the action plan does not contain any risks. As a results of its successful implementation during the upcoming two years the normative documents regulating the activities of the University in the main spheres will have been developed and the main processes will have been started after which the evaluation of their impact and effectiveness can be carried out.

Based on the aforementioned, ANQA suggests the Accreditation Committee in its decision to promote YSU to:

- 1) To give urgent solution to the problems existing in the spheres of **Academic Programs, Teaching and Support Staffs, Infrastructure and Resources, Internal Quality Assurance System.**
- 2) According to the requirements of clause 12 of the Regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs” or according to the deadlines set by the Accreditation Committee, regularly present a written report to ANQA on the results of the carried out activities.
- 3) Taking into account the ambitions of internationalization of University’s activities, to review the action plan paying attention to the recommendations and results of the peer-review according to international standards.
- 4) To review the action plan for the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the Expert Panel report taking into account the remarks about the action plan mentioned in the current conclusion.

ANQA finds that the presented improvements will foster the fulfillment of the University’s ambitions mentioned in the SER and will serve as a basis for the next evaluation.

Head of the Expert Panel

ANQA Coordinator

Composition of the expert panel

- **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 invites professor of Microbiology at Troms 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, former 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 Head of the Chair “Graphics and Basics of Machine Designing”.
- **Zaruhi Sargsyan**, 3rd year student in Yerevan “Gladzor” University, faculty of International Relations.

International viewers:

- **Michele Wera**- Policy advisors from NVAO.
- **Frank Wamelink**-Policy advisors from NVAO.

ANQA support staff

- **Susanna Karakhanyan**- Head of the “Department of Policy Development and Implementation” at ANQA, senior coordinator of YSU institutional accreditation
- **Ani Mkrtchyan**- Responsible for ANQA internal quality assurance, junior coordinator of YSU institutional accreditation
- **Meline Harutyunyan**- Specialist at the “Department of Policy Development and Implementation” at ANQA, secretary stenographer of YSU institutional accreditation process
- **Lilit Pipoyan**-Specialist at ANQA Department of Institutional and Program Accreditation, translator of YSU institutional accreditation process

SUMMATIVE EVALUATION ³

The expert panel presented its evaluation per accreditation criteria in the following table:

CRITERION	EVALUATION
<i>1. Mission and Goals</i>	SATISFACTORY
<i>2. Governance and Administration</i>	SATISFACTORY
<i>3. Academic programs</i>	SATISFACTORY
<i>4. Students</i>	SATISFACTORY
<i>5. Teaching and Support Staffs</i>	SATISFACTORY
<i>6. Research and Development</i>	UNSATISFACTORY
<i>7. Infrastructure and Resources</i>	SATISFACTORY
<i>8. Social Responsibility</i>	SATISFACTORY
<i>9. External Relations and Internationalization</i>	SATISFACTORY
<i>10. Internal Quality Assurance System</i>	SATISFACTORY

³While carrying out the evaluation the expert panel followed the Regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs” and the procedure described in the ANQA Accreditation Manual carrying out firstly evaluation per standards and then per criteria. “Satisfactory” and “Unsatisfactory” evaluation scale was applied

The expert panel followed the below mentioned principles while carrying out the evaluation:

-unsatisfactory: if the University does not meet the demands of the criterion and it is not allowed to continue the activities that way and urgent improvements are needed

-satisfactory: if the University meets the demands of the criterion yet there might be need for improvements as well