SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

JUNE 2016

National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance, Foundation
YEREVAN

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

The current self-assessment has been carried out to prepare the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA) for an external review against the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG 2015). ANQA expresses its desire to become a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and join the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) to pursue new approaches to quality enhancement, to develop quality culture in the higher education system as well as continue providing comprehensive services and networking opportunities. The full membership would also facilitate international recognition of qualifications, would enhance mobility, would foster trust among the Tertiary level institutions (TLIs) in Armenia, and would finally promote their integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The current external review is undertaken in accordance with the decision made by the ANQA Board of Trustees. The decision stems from the importance to ensure ANQA's credibility, professionalism as well as recognition of its evaluation processes at both national and international levels.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

This is the first attempt for ANQA to undergo external review against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area (ESG) with the aim of applying for the full membership at ENQA and being admitted to EQAR. In order to manage the self- assessment process, an implementation plan was developed and a team of seven people (including an expert and a student representative, who were involved in ANQA accreditation procedures) was established to write the self-assessment report. The SWOT analysis for each standard was carried out as a first step, and as a second step a data analysis process was launched. Each of the ESG standards was discussed by the team members and two of them drafted the self-assessment, and afterwards the content was again discussed, reviewed and finalized. It is worth mentioning that besides the self-assessment implementation team, all the staff members of the Agency and the key stakeholders took an active part in the process. The report was sent to the ANQA's national and international experts for feedback. The analysis and evaluation of each standard was circulated among the ANQA staff members, who carried the ultimate responsibility for all the amendments and additions made for the improvement of the text. The other stakeholders' involvement was ensured through the provision of written feedback on the draft report disseminated among them and through meetings aimed at exhaustively discussing the report. The self-assessment report was reviewed based on the provided feedback. The current report summarizes a process of comprehensive analysis and reflection on the compliance of ANQA with the ESG. The self-assessment report was discussed and approved by the Board of Trustees.

3. ARMENIAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND QA OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ARMENIA

3.1. INFORMATION ABOUT THE NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN ARMENIA

The history of higher education system of the Republic of Armenia goes back to the 14th century. The basis of the contemporary higher education was laid during the two-year existence of the first Republic of Armenia/1918-1920/ which was further developed during the 70 years of the Soviet Union and the 25 years of independence of the Republic of Armenia.

The Armenian tertiary education has undergone significant changes in recent years. Higher education in Armenia is regulated by the Law on Education and Law on Higher and Post Graduate Education of the Republic of Armenia. The Law on Education was adopted on 14 April, 1999 and defines the principles of state policy in the field of education and the legal–organisational, financial and economic grounds of the education system. The Law on Higher and Post Graduate Education in Armenia was adopted on 14 December, 2004. It regulates legal, organisational and financial relations in the sphere of higher and postgraduate professional education in the Republic of Armenia. The adoption of a large number of legal documents, regulations and other normative acts has changed the governance of the education system. The regulatory framework is in line with the main objectives of the Bologna Process.

Law on Education of the Republic of Armenia	**Web**
Law on Higher and Post Graduate Education of the Republic of Armenia	**Web**

The number of educational institutions functioning in Armenia and the number of students and staff is shown below.

	State HEIs	Private HEIs	Transnational TLIs		
			HEIs founded by interstate agreements and state participation	Branches of foreign private universities	Branches of foreign state universities
Number of HEIs	20	31	5	3	5
Number of students of HEIs	Bachelor		Masters		PhD
	79.623		14 476		1223 (989 in HEIs)
Number of teaching staff	11197				

Table 1. The number of education institutions, students and staff (2015)

The types of Higher Education institutions (HEIs) functioning in the Republic of Armenia (RA) are the following: Universities, Institutes, Academies, Conservatory.

- **University:** HEI providing higher, postgraduate and supplementary education in different branches of natural and sociological fields, science, technology, and culture, as well as providing opportunities for scientific research and studies.
- **Institute:** HEI conducting specialized and postgraduate academic programs and scientific research in a number of scientific, economic and cultural branches.
- **Academy (educational):** HEI, the activity of which is aimed at the development of education, science, technology and culture in an individual sphere; it conducts programs preparing and re-training highly qualified specialists in an individual field, as well as postgraduate academic programs.
- **Conservatory**: HEI preparing specialists in the field of music, providing qualification development and postgraduate academic programs.

The state HEIs in Armenia are autonomous, non -profit legal state entities which possess, utilize and manage the property allocated to them according to their mission and policies developed by the founder (the government).

The HEI independently defines its budget and the usage of the funds received from other non-state sources, including the size and amount of salaries and remunerations to be paid to the faculty and staff. The funds received from the state budget constitute only part of the HEI's overall budget and can be used for a specified purpose according to the regulations assigned by the legislation. The HEIs are also free in forming their internal organizational structure.

Tuition fee levels for both domestic and international students can be set freely by the institutions and money is retained without affecting the budget allocation from the government.

According to the Law on Education and the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Education, admission and selection procedures are carried out through unified secondary school state final examinations, which are held at "knowledge assessment centres" set up to replace the centralized admission examinations.

The formal weekly workload (contact hours) that students are expected to carry out depends on the type of programmes and differs considerably from institution to institution within the country, but common practices are as follows: for Bachelor programmes-28-32 hours per week (sometimes up to 36), for Master programmes 16- 18 hours and for postgraduate (Doctorate) programmes-4-8.

Starting from 2008, all academic programmes in Armenia are based on the ECTS, with one year of studies equivalent to 1800 hours of student work, and is defined as 60 credits.

The mode of study is either full-time or part-time. The academic year, as a rule, starts on September 1 and is comprised of two semesters with 20 and 22 week durations, for the fall and spring semesters respectively. In order to be awarded the bachelor's degree students must meet the requirements of 240 credits for the whole programme (4 years of full-time studies) for most of the specialities, for police speciality minimum 180 credits (minimum 3 years), and for medical education360 credits (6 years of integrated master studies). To be awarded the master's degree students must meet the requirements of 60-120 credits, and 240 credits for medical education. As far as part-time education is concerned, one academic year is added to the overall duration of courses.

The state budgeting of HEIs in Armenia is around 15-25 percent. In recent years, about 10 percent of state budget expenditure has been allocated to education in Armenia.
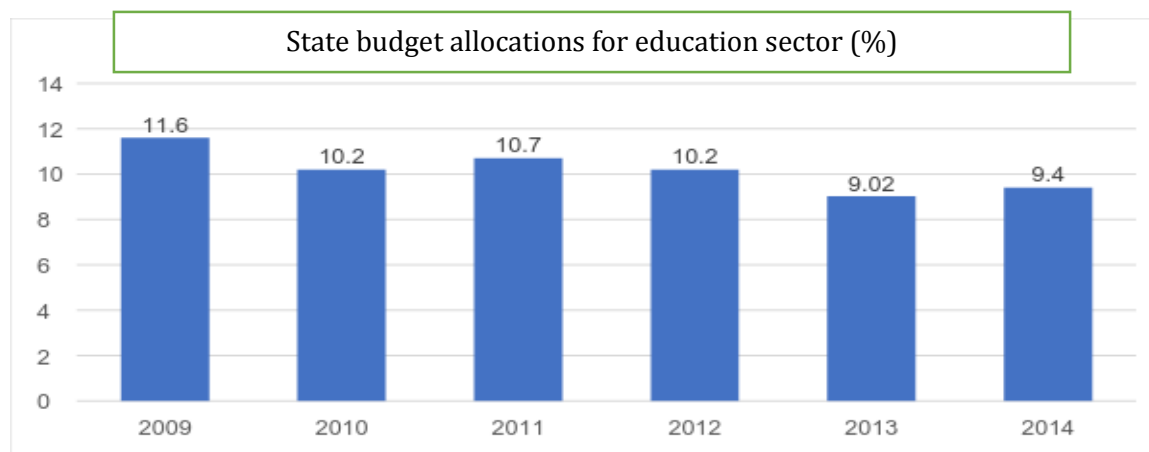
Figure 1. State budget allocations for education sector

The Government expenditure on education as percentage of GDP is 2.4%.

3.2. NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

In 2011, the Armenian Government adopted the National Education Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Armenia (ANQF) consisting of 8 levels, and the responsibilities for the operation and maintenance of the ANQF are within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES). The preparation of specialists for Bachelor's, Master's degrees, as well as postgraduate degrees, including doctoral programmes (research) is implemented within the framework of Higher Education. According to the ANQF, higher education system in Armenia has a unified character, which implies integration of professionally-oriented and research -oriented programmes in terms of degrees and horizontal or vertical mobility. The private HEIs, with the exception of some leading ones, mainly offer bachelor programmes whereas the state ones offer bachelor and master programmes. Though more than 60% of HEIs are private, about 90% of both students and teaching staff are involved in state HEIs.. The postgraduate education is conducted through two scientific degree systems: aspirantura (candidate of science) and doctorantura (doctor of science), three to five years for fulltime and distance studies respectively.

Education Qualifications and Their General Descriptors of the Republic of Armenia	[Web]

3.3. REFORMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The reforms in the education sector were carried out after the declaration of Armenia's independence (1990) within new economic and social relations. There was a need to meet the challenges of the period.

Currently, the higher education of Armenia undertakes intensive reforms within the framework of the Bologna process. Armenia joined the Bologna Process in May 2005 (Bergen Communiqué). Since then the "Development Strategy of Education for 2008-2015" has been developed and put into practice, with the main objectives of:

- enhancing quality;
- widening access to higher education;
- developing international cooperation;
- increasing the attractiveness of the education system;
- ensuring effective governance and financial management of higher education institutions.

The "Development Strategy of Education 2008-2015" was revised and reinforced in June 23, 2011. Thus, drawing on the Development Strategy, the shift to the two-cycle degree system has been completed. All the universities now issue Diploma Supplements and all higher education academic programmes have implemented the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) as of 2008. Furthermore, a National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA) was established in 2008 and after a series of pilots of the criteria, standards and procedures for institutional and academic programme accreditation, the external quality assurance framework was officially adopted and put into practice by the Armenian Government in 2011. At HEI level, initial steps to establish internal quality assurance systems have been taken.

Armenia has submitted four Stocktaking Reports to the Bologna Follow-Up Group (2007, 2009, 2011) with the latest one dating to 2015.

3.4.   THE FORMER SYSTEM OF ACCREDITATION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The evolution of the accreditation system in the Republic of Armenia can be divided into two major phases: prior to and after Armenia's joining the Bologna Declaration in 2005. The first phase was launched in 1999 by establishing a unit within the Ministry of Education and Science that started the process of accreditation. While the accreditation process was mandatory for state universities, the private ones could apply for accreditation on a voluntary basis. Because of the nature of the accreditation process and its expected outcomes, including the right to issue a state diploma, none of the state universities actually applied for accreditation since they had already been granted that authority. On the other hand, almost all the private universities applied for accreditation and 47 universities were accredited by 2007 with the aim of attracting students and establishing their own niche in the labour market and education realm. The criteria for accreditation were similar to those of licensing with a special emphasis on the final exam results: the university was considered accredited if 75% of academic programmes were successful. No emphasis was made on the enhancement. The granted accreditation had a lifetime nature and did not consider a cyclical approach apart from frequent monitoring visits organized by the Ministry (monitoring never had negative consequences). The consequences of the first experiences with accreditation could be considered successful partially since the way it was designed failed to attract the state HEIs that were supposed to undergo accreditation according to the Law on Education (1999). Moreover, due to its non-cyclical nature, the private universities that had undergone accreditation ceased to follow-up on the development and enhancement of a university quality management system that would provide impartial and objective data for further decision-making and effective management of institutions. Thus, the first attempt yielded lessons for developing and implementing a more viable and effective system.

4. HISTORY, PROFILE AND ACTIVITES OF THE AGENCY AND ITS POSITION IN THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

4.1. HISTORY OF THE AGENCY

ANQA was established in November 2008 under the Government Decree (No. 1486) and started its functioning in March 2009 after the election of the Director by the ANQA Board of Trustees. The last seven years of ANQA functioning have been marked by the development of external quality assurance (EQA) processes drawing on the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

During this period, RA was in such a state that it needed to establish external quality assurance system that would be similar to that of Europe (an enhancement-led system with similar outcomes, ensuring the stakeholders' involvement) and would be guided by European frameworks It also needed a radical overhaul of HE system (to have an in-depth change of HE system,) in order to attain the required level of institutional autonomy and ,to some extent, reach European benchmarks of HE.

The important promoter of the establishment of EQA was the integration into European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Thus, universities accepted it as a challenge and immersed themselves in the development process. State universities had some experience in implementing ESG guidelines; however, it was fragmental and not systematic.

In the first phase of EQA development the needs assessment policy was implemented by conducting meetings, conferences, workshops with stakeholders taking into account the existing large diversity in HE system. The main challenge was the lack of experience in HE institutional evaluation based on ESG guidelines. Another no less challenging factor was the lack of expert pool. As regards the peer review mechanism for evaluation in HE, it was in its start-up phase.

In the meantime, the first version of programme and institutional accreditation criteria and standards was developed, and several pilots were implemented involving the VET sector and HE sector with private and state institutions. Reports on the findings were published and presented at EQAF and INQAAHE conferences.

The ANQA strategic plan was developed in 2010 with the support of the World Bank and with the help of colleagues from NVAO. The aims and the activities of the project will be described in more details later in the text.

In November 2011, the Statute on State Accreditation and the accreditation procedure were published; ANQA manual and supporting materials for practical implementation of institutional and programme accreditation were developed and published.

In addition, first trainings for experts were conducted, many workshops with institutions were held, an expert pool was established, and coordinators were trained for conducting ANQA procedures, their knowledge and skills were further practiced during pilots, a reporting framework was developed. ANQA started accreditations with the support of WB and the assistance of NVAO with an active involvement of specialists with different levels (ARQATA project).

ANQA basic documents have been reviewed in compliance with the ESG due to the direct involvement of partners in TEMPUS DIUS and PICQA Projects.

In 2011, the first institutional accreditation cycle was launched. State institutions, with a large number of students and programmes; private universities with a small number of students and programmes; professional institutions with different profiles, different levels of research and internationalisation were involved in the processes. The same criteria and standards were applied inasmuch as the process was the same for all the institutions. To ensure a larger inclusion of students in accredited environment and to provide more coverage of the new EQA system, state institutions with larger number of students were the first to go through these processes. It is important to mention that those institutions shared ANQA's vision and approaches and expressed their willingness to embrace the QA reforms.

The Accreditation Committee (AC) was formed at the end of 2013 and afterwards the trainings for the members were organized The decision-making process started in 2015 with a special focus on consistency.

Two appeal applications were accepted and the appeal procedure was put into practice. However, one of the universities terminated the process after the submission of the final report (before the decision-making phase).

As far as the internal quality assurance is concerned, it is an integral part of all ANQA activities. A large amount of data is gathered and analysed on a regular basis. Different stakeholders as well as local and international experts are involved who give feedback from different perspectives. Activities concerning the achievement of ANQA mission and the relevant response to different challenges are analysed and solutions are agreed upon.

In 2015, the ANQA manual and supporting documents were reviewed based on the in-depth analysis and relevant feedback both verbal and written.

Since its establishment, ANQA has paid a special attention to students' educational needs. Students' active involvement in all processes, including but not limited to accreditation processes, has always been of great importance to ANQA staff.

ANQA analysed the achievements of the 2010-2015 strategic plan, the state of arts in the system and on the basis of the results and findings has recently defined its strategic priorities and finalized its development strategy for the years 2016-2020.. Key strategic lines evolve around:

- ongoing support for further development and fulfilment of IQA systems in HEIs;
- effective and efficient fruition of the programme accreditation process and its public recognition keeping the focus on teaching and learning methods, assessment, student-centred education;
- protection of students' interests and competition in the market of educational services;
- promotion of local institutions internationally;
- transparency of reliable information on the quality of tertiary education and its availability for both local and international stakeholders.

4.2. ANQA MISSION AND STRUCTURE

ANQA fosters the assurance of tertiary education quality standards and ongoing quality enhancement, supporting the autonomy and accountability of TLIs.

ANQA strives to promote public trust, social cohesion, equity, responsibility and competitiveness through periodic enhancement of the quality of educational services.

ANQA carries out its mission by:

- being receptive to the needs of national stakeholders through its mandatory institutional and voluntary programme accreditation;
- aligning its QA criteria and standards with international standards and guidelines;
- ensuring international recognition, thereby assisting to strengthen the position of Armenian professional education in EHEA;
- attaching importance to close cooperation with stakeholders in the process of developing the quality assurance system.

The following were ANQA strategic objectives for the years 2010-2015:

- to ensure that the TLI's activities and qualifications awarded are in line with state academic standards and accreditation criteria;
- to promote and foster continuous enhancement in the quality of tertiary education services by working in close cooperation with tertiary education stakeholders;
- to enhance the TLI's responsibility towards quality assurance;
- to ensure the public availability of clear, transparent, and accurate information on the quality of the TLI's academic performance;
- to promote the dissemination of national and international best practices while evaluating the quality of available educational services.

The strategic plan for the years 2016-2020 is designed with the aim of ensuring, that ANQA is an organization supporting the enhancement of tertiary education quality, internationally recognized and reliable for all its stakeholders.

ANQA Mission, Vision, Values	**Web**

ANQA is a non-membership and non-commercial organization established on the basis of voluntary property payments of the founder and aims to make studies, analyses, recommendations and evaluations in the sphere of professional education. ANQA has been set up as a small and flexible organization, with qualified staff to perform a wide range of responsibilities. The organization has the following key elements:
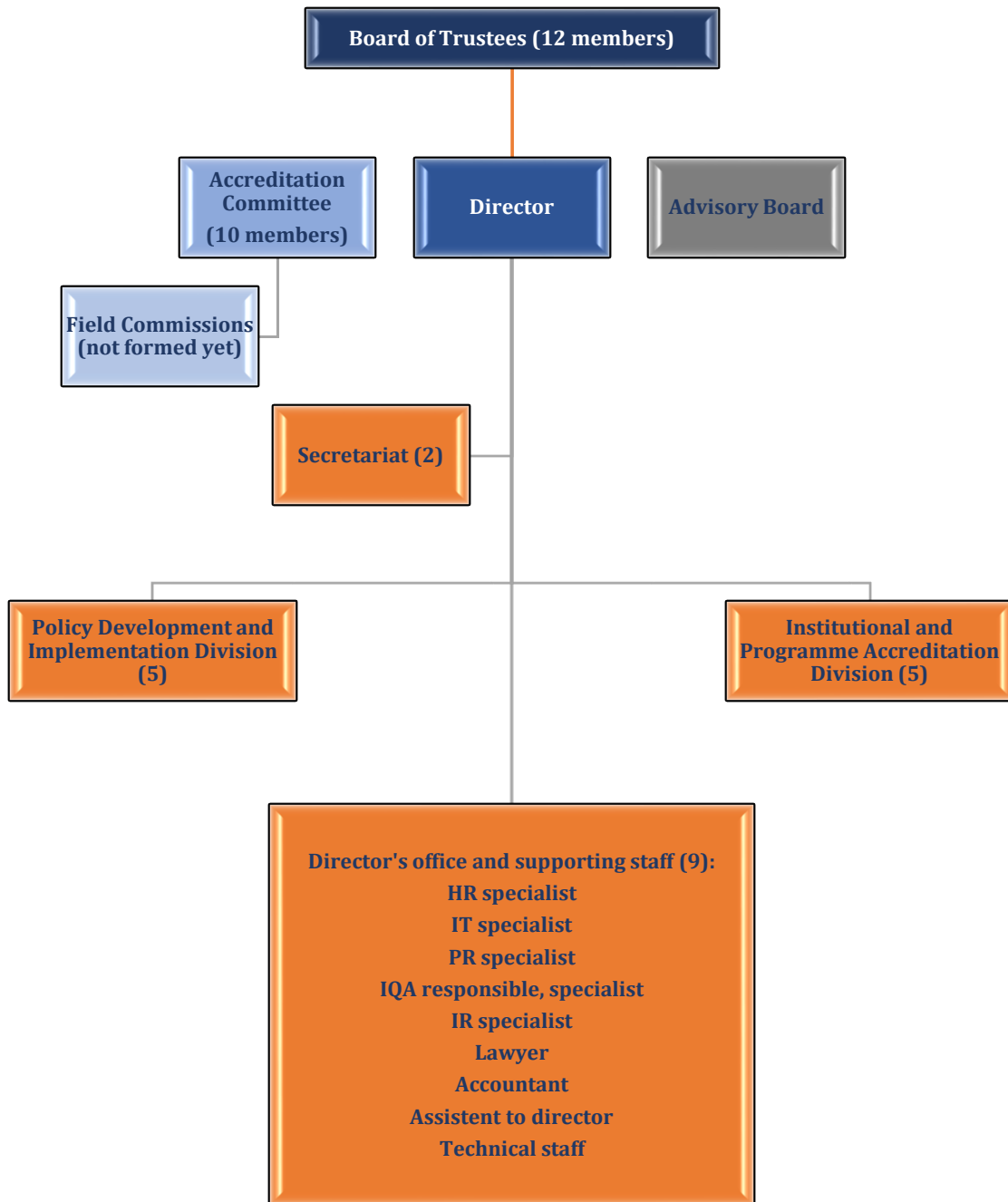
Figure 2: ANQA Organizational Chart

The organizational chart presents the main logic of institutional and operational management in ANQA.

- The highest governing body is the **Board of Trustees**, which consists of 12 representatives from different groups of stakeholders. It is formed for a period of 4 years. The Board of Trustees is the organ ultimately responsible for the ANQA organization. It appoints the director and evaluates his performance. It has to approve the strategic plan, yearly plans,

and yearly budget. It also approves the realisation of the budget and changes made in it. The Board draws up the list of Accreditation Committee members The Board also approves the expert panel for the appeal procedure. The Board is not involved in ANQA's daily activities and does not take part in decision-making processes for individual cases of external evaluation

- **The Accreditation Committee** is an independent, collegial, permanent body, which carries out its responsibilities defined by the Statute on State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programmes and by the Regulation on Accreditation Committee Formation and Operation adopted by the Board of Trustees. The Accreditation Committee is the highest quality assurance body within ANQA designed to be solely responsible for
  - making decision on institutional and programme accreditation and
  - making suggestions to ANQA for the improvement of the accreditation mechanism.

  Its composition and acceptance by the main stakeholders in the tertiary education system as well as by Armenian society in general are crucial elements for the success of the Armenian accreditation system. The Committee consists of 10 members. The Accreditation Committee is made up through a rigid recruitment procedure to ensure legitimacy of its functions. Candidates for the members of the Committee are nominated by higher education institutions, employers and professional associations and the National Students' Association.

  The Accreditation Committee strives to make decisions based on consensus between members for each case and in special situation can make decisions through a voting system.

- **Field Commissions** are not yet established, however a statute and a policy regulating their functioning have been developed. According to their mission, Field Commissions will design the strategy for development of Sectoral Qualifications Framework assuring the compliance of academic programmes with the requirements of the sector, accreditation standards and the professional education programmes with the sector development tendencies and societal requirements.

  Field Commissions will be formed of leading specialists (experts) in the sector, representatives of state bodies and private sector employers. Field Commissions will define the research spheres and priorities, discuss and approve the research results, provide recommendations to the Ministry of Education and Science of the RA on making amendments in the accreditation standards and the NQF, develop draft SQF proposals, present them to the MoES for discussions and approval, create and regularly update the data base of the sector experts to conduct programme accreditation and carry out any other research in the relevant sectors. Each Field Commission will consist of 8-10 members. Commissions will be created in the following 10 fields in compliance with the list of specialities adopted by the Government: Education, Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Journalism and Information Sciences, Business, Administration and Law, Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics, Information and Communication Technologies, Engineering, Industry and Construction, Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary, Healthcare and Social Work, and Services.

- **The Advisory Board** is to provide consultations to the Board of Trustees and the Director of ANQA on strategic development when necessary. The Advisory Board provides its consultation when asked by the Director or the Board, or it can give unsolicited advice.

- **The Director** has to take the leadership of ANQA. He/she is responsible for setting policy direction and for communicating with stakeholders. The Director of the Foundation is elected through a public competition.

ANQA has three functional departments:

1. **Policy Development and Implementation division**: responsible for the development and implementation of ANQA policies and procedures, the production of supporting regulatory documents, and ensuring stakeholder communication.
2. **Institutional and Programme Accreditation division**: responsible for operating the external evaluation processes in TLIs and providing the Accreditation Committee with data and documents to make consistent accreditation decisions.
3. **Secretariat**: responsible for providing technical assistance to ANQA in external communication as well as in communication with ANQA Accreditation Committee.

ANQA Director's office includes:

- Human Resource specialist;
- International Relation manager;
- Internal Quality Assurance specialist;
- Lawyer;
- Information Technology specialist;
- Public Relations specialist;
- Accountant.

The work within the functional departments is organized along the lines of major policy programmes.

5. ANQA SWOT ANALYSIS

Strenghts

- Involvement of stakeholders in agency's policy-making process and strategic management, regular feedback from all the parties involved (TLIs, national and international experts, student experts, coordinators, etc.)
- Integration and adaptation of international practices taking into account local needs, combining bottom-up and top-down approaches to overcome challenges
- Alignment of ANQA criteria and standards with ESG Part 1 standards
- Trust of institutions in the field of QA and towards its methodology
- Motivated staff and its professionalization in both IQA and EQA spheres and its awareness on country developments and international trends
- Agency's proactive position to consult the legislative and executive bodies on policy-making
- Expert panels covering several perspectives, including education management and QA professionals, academic staff, students and international experts
- Regular thematic analyses and work with stakeholders
- Transparent and well-structured IQA system covering all the processes in the agency

Weaknesses

- Not fully clarified QA guidelines for VET system
- Difficulties in finding field experts as a result of small academic community
- Difficulties in equally prioritizing HEIs and VETs due to limited human resources
- Gender imbalance among staff
- Lack of experience in programme accreditation
- Lack of representation in state governance bodies
- Limited resources for further staff development
- Staff retention and regeneration issues

Opportunities

- Official establishment of programme accreditation requirements for institutions, establishments of SQFs
- An increase in ANQA international recognition, thereby strengthening the position of Armenian professional education in EHEA
- Regional and joint accreditation and mutual involvement of regional experts
- Flexible approaches to programme accreditation implemented to reduce the expenses for institutions
- Further diversification of income sources leading to the increase in financial independence
- Increasing number of education management specialists in the country
- Growing demand for QA in higher education system
- Increase in public interest in QA activities

Threats

- Probability of conflict of interests due to small academic community, though the corresponding risks are managed by the Code of Ethics
- Insufficient resources of VETs to apply for external QA processes
- Non-accomplished legal reforms and an inflexible legal basis
- Decreasing number of students in Armenia and migration
- Lack of professional unions in the country
- Lack of international mobility among HEIs and difficulties in finding local experts with the capacity of providing international perspective
- Public expectations for quicker changes of quality of education and society's expectations for reforms rather than enhancement.

6. HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITIES OF ANQA

After signing the Bologna Declaration in 2005, Armenian tertiary education in general and higher education in particular has entered a new phase of reforms and endeavours. One of the first endeavours was the establishment of the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance, which would meet the ESGs, thus promoting recognition of the qualifications awarded in the Armenian tertiary education system.

Currently, the external quality assurance primarily focuses on the achievement of the objectives set by educational institutions, determines the level of their compliance with the quality assurance criteria and standards established by the RA Government. It also determines the priorities in education development, and public needs. When estimating the relevance of objectives, the quality assurance pays special attention to their conformity with NQF, state academic standards, priorities, as well as public needs.

QA in tertiary education in Armenia is a process of quality assurance and continuous enhancement directed to bring tertiary education into conformity with the needs of students, stakeholders, and society as a whole. Quality assurance is guided by two basic principles: accountability and enhancement.

There are two levels of operations in Armenian quality assurance system:

- "Political" level: stakeholders in education engage in the processes regarding the development and periodic review of criteria and procedures; they also join in further discussions in order to interpret and comment on those criteria. These discussion processes are coordinated and facilitated by ANQA, which serves as a central "arena" for effective interaction and collaboration between stakeholder groups.
- "Procedural" level: if the Government or other interested parties feel the need for alterations and adjustments to be made either in the accreditation system or in the criteria, they can be made only at the "political" level of Quality assurance framework. Criteria or procedures can be modified when accreditation processes are in progress. However, as a rule, these changes may not have a retrospective effect on the educational institution, which is already in the accreditation process, if nothing else is foreseen by the legal act.

In the Republic of Armenia, the external quality assurance is carried out through accreditation. The accreditation process is being performed by ANQA. The Armenian external quality assurance entails two types of accreditation: institutional and programme.

Institutional accreditation is a mandatory process both for private and state institutions operating in the territory of the RA. The main purpose of the Institutional Accreditation is to evaluate the effectiveness of TLI operations, as well as to find out whether the TLI is in compliance with its mission, whether it follows the policy of continuous improvement and enhances its academic programmes. The accreditation process of HEIs has launched since 2011. 10 state and 6 private HEIs have already undergone institutional accreditation by ANQA, 1 out of which was granted accreditation for 6 years, 9 state and 1 private HEIs received accreditation for 4 years, 3 private HEIs received conditional accreditation for 2 years and 2 private universities were rejected in institutional accreditation. 7 HEIs have applied for institutional accreditation and the procedures of which are currently in process. Pilot institutional accreditations have been carried out in three VET institutions.

Programme accreditation is the recognition of academic programmes and the correspondence of their quality with state academic standards and programme accreditation criteria. Programme accreditation is targeted at separate academic programme. This procedure allows to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of each academic programme as well as to monitor whether it thoroughly ensures the achievement of intended learning outcomes. Programme accreditation is carried out on the initiative of the TLI, based on voluntary basis, with the exception of medical academic programmes, the accreditation of which is compulsory. So far, ANQA has implemented 7 pilot programme accreditations, the two of which were carried out within the framework of World Bank ARQATA project, and the other five were carried out within the framework of Tempus projects MAHATMA and PICQA. In this respect it should be noted that according to the Statute on State Accreditation in RA, institutional accreditation is a prerequisite for programme accreditation. That's why ANQA started with the institutional accreditation. Currently, when the TLIs have already been granted institutional accreditation, they are more willing and interested in applying for programme accreditation. The process is still voluntary in Armenia; however, ANQA has prepared a proposal to make amendments/changes in the regulation to make it obligatory, thus stimulating the process of application in order to ensure the accountability at academic programme level. Currently the policy on cluster accreditation is under development. The policy principles were discussed and agreed with the stakeholders; currently they are being circulated among the TLIs with the aim of making the procedure more effective and cost-efficient.

In its further plans, as well as in the new strategic plan for the years 2016-2020, ANQA envisions promotion of jointly conducted accreditation procedures with other well-known agencies, as well as implementation of accreditation in regional countries.

According to the Law of the Republic of Armenia on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education, the education institutions and their branches established in the RA, with the participation of the RA and other foreign states, higher education institutions, and organizations, enjoy legal equality with the state higher education institution and shall be licensed, accredited according to the laws of RA, if nothing else is envisaged by the international treaties of the Republic of Armenia. Currently ANQA is involved in TEMPUS TNE QA (Promoting Quality and Recognition of transnational education in Armenia and Georgia) project, which is aimed at enhancing quality, and promoting regulation and recognition of cross-border (transnational) higher education provisions in Armenia and Georgia through establishing internal (for Higher Education Institutions-HEI) and external (for External Quality Assurance Agencies-EQA) quality assurance mechanisms in line with OECD/UNESCO guidelines to effectively manage the quality assurance procedures at universities providing transnational higher education. A draft policy on quality assurance of transnational education, as well as the criteria and indicators have been developed and are currently being piloted.

7. ANQA'S QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES AND METHODOLOGY

Accreditation is a process by which educational institutions and academic programmes are recognized for their performance, integrity, and quality that entitles them to the confidence of the educational community and the public. Accreditation is granted for a certain period and guarantees that the institution or academic programme has the necessary capacity to provide education for a definite time span.

An educational institution seeking accreditation status can apply to ANQA or other quality assurance agencies that are either registered on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR henceforth) or are full members of ENQA. Applications are submitted according to the format of application form set up by ANQA and the Board of Trustees.

To conduct an external evaluation of an educational institution or an academic programme, ANQA sets up an expert panel of 5 to 7 experts. The selection of expert panels is made in compliance with the requirements set forth in the Statute on Expert Panel Formation approved by the ANQA's Board of Trustees. One of the important steps in the expert panel formation procedure is submitting the list of panel experts to the approval of the TLI under review. ANQA, by order of ANQA's director, appoints a coordinator from the ANQA staff to facilitate the process in general and take care of the overall process planning and implementation.

For both types of accreditation (Institutional and Programme), there are three general phases or steps:

- **Self-assessment** is an evaluation procedure of the institution or its academic programme, which is followed by a written report based on the standards adopted by the RA Government. The accreditation process requires that institutions, as part of their compliance review, measure the levels of compliance of their missions, goals, strategies, processes and achievements. It is essential that the institution clearly follow the self-evaluation format, the structure of the format, the sequence of separate parts and the content without any errors or omissions. The self-evaluation report should be submitted in both English and Armenian.

- **External review** is a process whereby an expert panel carries out desk-review, which involves examining the self-assessment report and all other important documents submitted by the institution. This is followed by a site-visit during which the expert panel members meet with institutional representatives in person: administrative and academic staff, students, graduates, employers and, as an outcome, the panel prepares a written report which includes recommendations on the areas to be improved.

  A desk review utilizes a process, which rates the adequacy of the self-evaluation report and respective documentation submitted by the TLI/AP to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of a TLI/AP according to ANQA criteria and standards. Desk review is a screening tool, which intends to facilitate the review of TLI self-evaluation within a relatively short period. During the meetings designed for the desk-review, experts introduce and discuss their written findings on each standard, and the Panel Chair generalizes the results by the ANQA's template. After all the standards have been discussed the initial version of the expert evaluation report is drawn up and agreed with all the members of the expert panel.

  Prior to the **site visit,** the ANQA coordinator in consultancy with the Panel Chair, develops an agenda for the site visit and negotiates it with the TLI under review. Site visit lasts 3-7 days

depending on the type of accreditation, the size and specifications of the institute under review, the availability of affiliates and subsidiary buildings, etc.

The panel report includes findings on each standard that describes the TLI's current situation. The findings are brought out by the local and international experts from the self-evaluation report, the appendices as well as during the site visit. These findings are bases for making considerations on the criteria. The panel report includes an educational institution's or programme's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the expert panel recommendations for improvement. The considerations prepared for each criterion are the expert panels' approach on the findings that are described per criteria. These considerations should bring out the key elements that approve the assessment of criteria and the recommendations. After an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of each criterion, the expert panel's conclusion about each criterion is being introduced. This preliminary version of the panel report is being sent to the TLI after all the members of the panel have come to an agreement on it. The only objections and comments that the TLI can make should be related to the findings and information about the TLI. If necessary, respective changes are possible to be made. The changes are made only in the special part of the panel report template after mentioning the TLI's comments. After this process, the panel report is being finalized and presented to the ANQA Secretariat. The ANQA Secretariat, according to the procedure on "Formation and Operations of Accreditation Commission" and within the stipulated time, sends the report to the Accreditation Commission for the preparation of the decision-making session.

An educational institution launches the **follow-up** process immediately after receiving the expert panel's final report. The follow-up activities should be directed to overcoming the issues mentioned in the expert panel conclusion and the implementation of recommendations. Expert panel studies the follow-up in terms of being satisfactory and realistic.

Based on the educational institution's self-evaluation report and the endorsed final report, ANQA's conclusion is prepared within the timeframes fixed in the Accreditation Statute. ANQA's conclusion includes the brief summary of desk-review and site visit results.

- **Decision-making** is a process based on fact–reviewing. Therefore, it is directed to the areas that are t in need of urgent solutions. The accreditation decision may be one of the following:
  — to grant institutional accreditation for a period of 4 or 6 years (programme accreditation for a period of 5 years);
  — to grant conditional accreditation for a period of 2 years;
  — to reject accreditation.

The final report becomes public after the Accreditation Commission takes a decision. Thus, the conclusions on institutional or programme accreditation approved by the Accreditation Commission along with the accreditation decision are published on ANQA's website within the timeframes set by the respective procedure in the Accreditation Statute.

According to the Accreditation Statute, it is an obligation that the accredited TLI carries out internal institutional evaluation once every two years. By saying internal evaluation, the mid-term assessment of the areas in need for amelioration as mentioned in the expert report is meant. The assessment can be carried out both internally as well as through an external expert. The results must be submitted to ANQA. In the accreditation decision, the Commission emphasizes the areas

that need primary and urgent improvements and which must serve as basis for the forthcoming self-evaluation. Upon gaining conditional institutional accreditation, an educational institution submits a written report to ANQA once every six months on follow-up implementation. Educational institutions should highlight the compliance with follow-up while preparing the reports and analyze the effectiveness of the implemented actions.

According to the accreditation procedure, an educational institution that has been denied accreditation is entitled to an appeal. Within a month after receiving an adverse accreditation decision, an institution may appeal to the ANQA Board of Trustees against the Commission's decision on institutional or programme accreditation.

ANQA is the only responsible for the organisation and implementation of institutional and programme accreditation in the Republic of Armenia.

ANQA Accreditation Manual 2015	Web

ANQA's quality assurance processes are analysed in more detail under standards 2.2, 2.3 2.5 and 2.6.

8. ANQA'S INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

Since its establishment, ANQA has been working hard on adopting a model of its internal quality assurance that would efficiently perform and directly oversee its management. Different principles have been adopted, put into practice so as to promote its effective and efficient functioning. Thus, starting from 2012 a bottom-up approach to ANQA internal quality assurance has been opted for enabling establishment of a system that works and yields positive outcomes. During the phase of establishing IQA system ANQA staff members have been regularly trained. The trainings were aimed at revealing and adapting international best practices, developing IQA policy and procedures. "ANQA Internal Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures" was developed and established in 2012 and are published on ANQA website. The internal QA system of ANQA is designed to assure the goal of becoming an effectively and efficiently managed organization to enable delivery of external QA services to TLIs that are at the highest level of professionalism and soundness, are objective and credible and to allow for gradual improvement and enhancement of the system. Guided by its principle of transparency, ANQA endeavours to make its internal quality assurance processes visible to the Armenian society and to ensure accountability those at international level. ANQA ensures the accountability of its activities through: (1) the annual reports that are presented to the Board of Trustees and are made publicly available through web-site and different media, (2) the quarterly report, that are presented to the Government on financial and other types of activities of the agency and (3) its internal quality assurance reports. ANQA considers its internal quality assurance as one of the major accountability elements.

ANQA has developed a well-structured internal quality assurance system, which is aimed at:

- Providing appropriate policy and procedures of the internal quality assurance, and making these processes transparent and accountable to the Armenian society and those on the international level;
- Enabling continuous evaluation of the results and structuring a plan for improvement (by following the PDCA cycle);
- Making the results of the evaluation of ANQA's internal and external activities visible and transparent, and letting the evaluation process determine whether these results meet the organization's goals and contribute to the overall quality of the organization;
- Developing improvement measures and proposals based on the results of the evaluation;
- Ensuring involvement of all stakeholders by means of an open dialogue with them;
- Preparing ANQA processes and results for the external evaluation.

ANQA has adopted process- and outcome- based approach to its quality management. The scope of work of AQNA IQA is to determine whether ANQA's management and control processes are adequate and are functioning in a manner to ensure that

- Risks are appropriately identified and managed;
- Significant financial, managerial, and operating information is accurate, reliable, and timely;
- Employees' actions are in compliance with policies, standards, procedures, job descriptions and applicable laws and regulations;
- Resources are acquired economically, used efficiently, and adequately protected and accounted for;

- Programmes, plans, goals and objectives are achieved.

The model for ANQA IQA is described below (for full description see "ANQA Internal Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures"). The model considers that QA and quality assessment for all the activities are addressed to the mission and goals, which secures their complete integrity as well as reflects the requirements of the stakeholders.
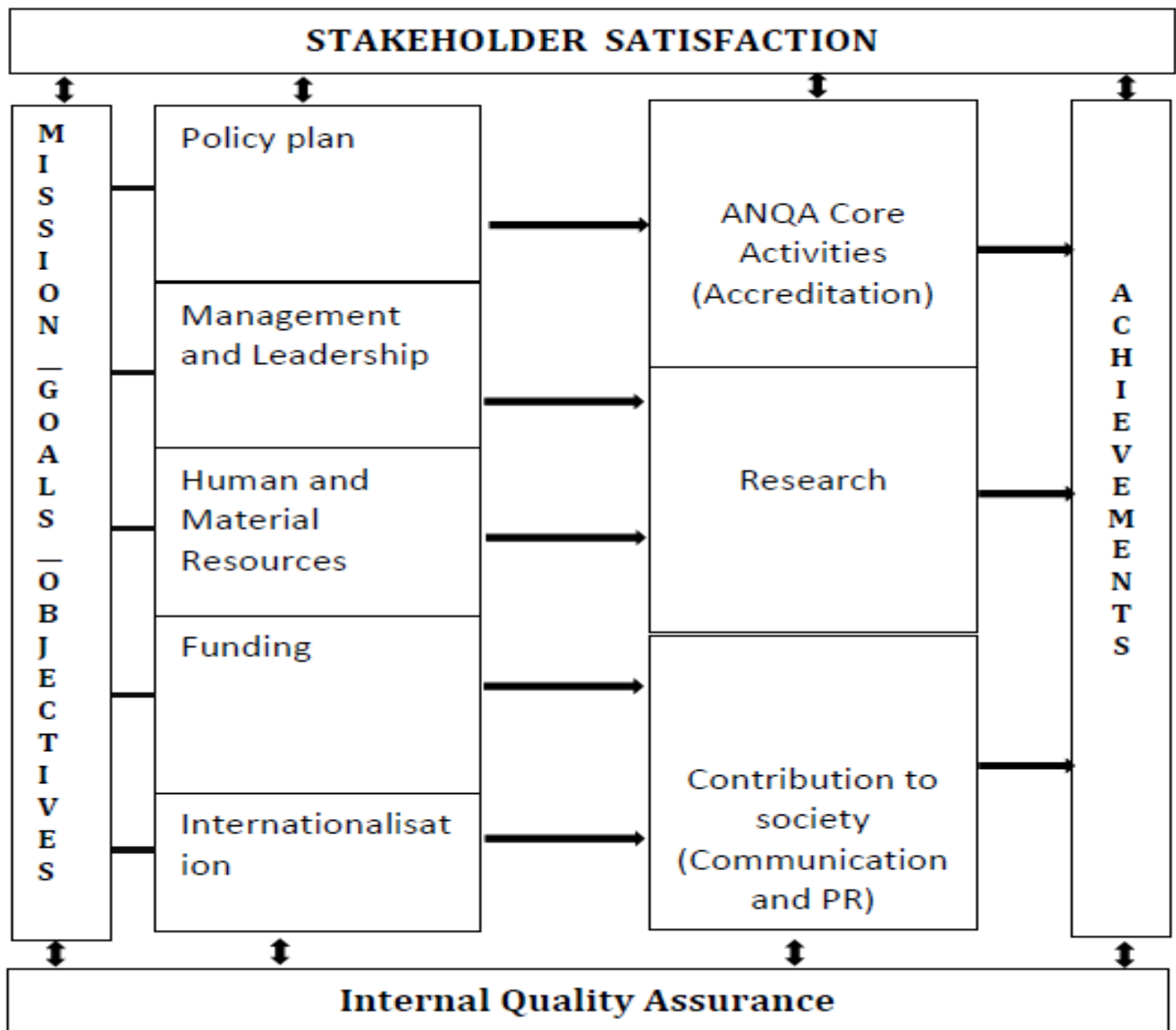

Figure 3: ANQA IQA model

All the activities run by ANQA are broken down into 11 quality areas:

1. Leadership and Management;
2. Accreditation Committee;

3. Institutional and Programme Accreditations;
4. Internal Quality Assurance;
5. Human Resources Management;
6. International Affairs;
7. Communication and PR;
8. Legal Affairs;
9. Secretariat;
10. Information Technologies;
11. Resources.

To manage the quality assurance processes in these areas, a tool in the form of a protocol elaborating the goals, targets, indicators, activity plans and quality assurance tools has been developed. The achievements of ANQA quality areas are analysed from the perspective of those processes.

ANQA IQA Policy and procedures; **Protocols**	**Web**

The IQA system of ANQA is analysed in more detail under standard 3.6.

9. ANQA'S INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Since its inception, ANQA has taken active steps to internationalize its activities and to succeed in its desire to be comparable with the international organizations, to achieve their recognition, to familiarize itself with the latest international trends and make them applicable at national level. The scope of ANQA international affairs extends to the following areas:

- Cooperation with relevant organizations at international level in order to understand best practices more thoroughly, provide platform for the exchange of ideas and promote them at the local level;
- Promotion of the recognition of Armenian quality assurance and giving its full support to Armenian tertiary education at international level.

The activities aimed at ANQA internationalization evolve around the following:

- ANQA capacity building at international level:
    - Professional development activities of ANQA staff within international projects;
- Ensuring the visibility of ANQA and following up on the international developments in quality assurance and higher education, as well as contributing to quality dialogue by actively collaborating with the international QA organizations and networks:
    - Participation in ENQA annual events and working groups,
    - Participation in INQAAHE annual events, working groups and Board activities;
    - Participation in activities with the involvement of EQAR, ECA, EUA and other networks;
    - Cooperation with other agencies from the EU, former Soviet Union countries and the region;
- Development, management and proactive participation in international projects:
    - WB projects;
    - Tempus projects;
    - Twinning projects.

With regard to ANQA's participation in the quality dialogue, an active involvement in the QA events at European level was expressed through contributions in the form of articles submitted to the EQAF and INQAAHE conferences as well as participation in the ENQA and INQAAHE working groups. ANQA is currently a full member of INQAAHE and is represented on the INQAAHE Board of Directors.

ANQA has been active in the implementation of various projects. At this level, the impact is tangible with regard to ANQA staff professionalization, refinement of the developed mechanisms based on the feedback of international experts, development of tools for external quality assurance, investigation of different educational issues, as well as professionalization of TLIs quality assurance staff. Further, regarding World Bank projects, such activities as support to the development of internal quality assurance systems at tertiary level institutions, pilot accreditations, training of internal quality assurance staff of TLIs and development of external quality assurance system have been undertaken. As for the Tempus projects, ANQA has studied the RA educational system and, on the basis of identified problems, 13 Tempus projects on different issues have been designed. ANQA has so far implemented 13 Tempus projects, 3 World Bank projects and 2 Twinning projects. Currently there are 11 Tempus and 1 Twinning project in which ANQA has a role of a leading partner and a coordinator at national level. All the projects entail

capacity building of internal and external quality assurance. The results of the surveys have shown that the trainings have had a positive impact on the ANQA staff since, on the whole, those trainings have been rather useful. Accordingly, the trained staff gained competencies in managing external review procedures, report preparation and production, as well as HEI internal quality assurance processes. Generally corresponding to ANQA Accreditation Criteria and Standards, The Tempus projects evolve around the challenges the Armenian tertiary system is currently faced with:
— internal and external quality assurance;
— the establishment of university and market cooperation ties;
— quality assurance of transnational education;
— outcome-based approaches to education and the alignment of academic programme learning outcomes to National Qualifications Framework;
— structural changes in the university governance system;
— the internationalisation of educational activities;
— the structural development of 3rd cycle education;
— the development of sectorial qualifications frameworks, etc.

Within the framework of the projects, regular meetings, round-table discussions with different stakeholders are organized (teachers, administrative staff, QA specialists, students, employers, alumni, etc…). As a result of the meetings the following changes have been made:

Governance and administration:
— reviewing both regulatory and legal documents of HEIs;
— revealing and analysing the current issues and obstacles of the management system of HEIs;
Academic programmes:
— studying the student assessment in HEIs: revealing the strong and weak points;
— revising the academic programmes by using an outcome–based approach;
— developing the concept of student-centered learning;
— clarifying the criteria and methodology of academic programme evaluation;
— implementing   international benchmarking on the structure and content of academic programmes;
— developing and establishing academic programmes on Education Management;
— pilot accreditation of "Education Management" academic programme;
— developing a guideline for bringing the academic programmes and their learning outcomes into alignment with the Armenian National Qualifications Framework;
— developing the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for IT sector, education and economics;
Teaching staff:
— clarifying the teacher recruitment mechanisms;
— improving the teacher evaluation and promotion systems;
— training the teaching staff;
Research:
— revising 3rd cycle programmes based on Salzburg principles in some leading HEIs;
— fact-finding and SWOT analysis of 3rd cycle programmes, aimed at revealing the current state of arts of the programmes;
— developing a roadmap for 3rd cycle programmes;

— developing the criteria and standards for external quality assurance of 3ʳᵈ cycle programmes;

Social responsibility:

— revising/developing the alumni and other stakeholder feedback mechanisms;
— creating alumni database at HEIs, data collection and analysis;
— developing a software with the aim of assessing and analysing the needs of the stakeholders to strengthen the link between the university and the labour market;
— developing and applying stakeholders' needs assessment mechanisms and tools;

Internationalisation:

— clarifying the responsibilities of the international relations and external relations centres of HEIs;
— studying the legislative/regulatory framework of Armenia regarding transnational education;
— developing the methodology of transnational education quality assurance;
— defining the criteria, indicators and thresholds of transnational education provider institutions quality assurance;
— developing the national policy of transnational education quality assurance.

Overall, the projects are successful and have a capacity building impact, which is the aim they were developed for.

International Projects	Web

Within the frames of World Bank projects, capacity building of both ANQA staff and the quality assurance staff of the HEIs has been undertaken. These projects are:

- Armenian Quality Assurance Technical Assistance Project (ARQATA) under the coordination of the Dutch Flemish Accreditation Agency (NVAO). The project aims at building on the capacity of HEIs and ANQA as well as prepare ANQA for the recognition by ENQA. Within the frames of the project a series of workshops, trainings, study tours and conferences have been organized. One of the major achievements was the feedback provided by the NVAO, represented by Karl Dietrich, to the ANQA Board of Trustees on the formation and operationalization of the Accreditation Committee to ensure independency of ANQA decision-making.

ARQATA project web-site	Web

- Capacity Building for the HEI IQA Staff Members, coordinated by ANQA. Within the frames of the project, 400 staff members from the HEIs were trained. ANQA designed a three-round training: two rounds for three days and a five-day coaching on-site. The topic for the first round was "Establishment and Operationalization of Internal Quality Assurance". The topic for the second round was "Self-Assessment: Methods and Methodology". During the five coaching days the trainees worked with the HEIs' staff on-site, providing them with guidance.
- Pilot accreditations of HEIs.

Activities aimed at internationalisation of ANQA have an impact on the establishment, maintenance and expansion of the pool of international experts. As for the establishment of the pool for international experts, a special procedure for expert pool formation has been worked out. For this purpose, a letter of request for international experts was sent to different international organizations and agencies. Drawing on the list of experts obtained from the feedback, the primary expert pool was formed and all the accreditation procedures were conducted with participation of international experts from the pool. Currently, there are about 30 international experts in the ANQA pool.

Last, but by no means least, ANQA has been actively involved in quality assurance at international level. ANQA has established broad collaboration ties with the international QA organizations and networks (INQAAHE, ENQA, EUA) and QA agencies at international level for experience exchange and learning from peers. ANQA has cooperation agreements with ASIIN - German accreditation agency for Study Programmes in Engineering, Informatics, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, PKA - Polish Accreditation Committee, NCPA-Russian National Centre for Public Accreditation, IQAA.KZ - Independent Kazakhstan Quality Assurance Agency in Education, etc.

10. COMPLIANCE WITH EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES (PART 3)

3.1. ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:
Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

Guidelines:
To ensure the meaningfulness of external quality assurance ; it is important that institutions and the public trust agencies.
Therefore, the goals and objectives of the quality assurance activities are described and published along with the nature of interaction between the agencies and relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the scope of the agencies' work. The expertise in the agency may be increased by including international members in agency committees.
A variety of external quality assurance activities are carried out by agencies to achieve different objectives. Among them are evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities at programme or institutional level that may be carried out differently. When the agencies also carry out other activities, a clear distinction between external quality assurance and their other fields of work is needed.

List of main evidences:	
ANQA Mission, Vision, Goals	**Web**
ANQA Strategic Plan_2010-2015	**Web**
ANQA Strategic Plan_2016-2020	**Web**
ANQA Charter	**Web**

In the 2010-2015 strategic plan, ANQA has clearly defined its mission, goals and objectives, which are composed as a hierarchy and are based on the analyses of internal and external environments of ANQA. Yearly action plans with certain deadlines and responsible people are set considering each objective, which correspondingly ensures the implementation of strategy and its transformation into everyday activity. In its strategic plan for the coming period, ANQA has set priorities in accordance with needs of Armenian education system, thus defining the next phase of transitional period oriented towards the continuous development of quality culture.

Strategic documents and even drafts are submitted to target respondents not only to inform external stakeholders but also to engage them in the discussions of these documents. Since the involvement of all groups of stakeholders is of great importance to ANQA, a special action plan was designed for the activities intended for successful progress towards the establishment of quality culture in particular and towards reform promotion in general. In the current strategic plan,

involvement of all stakeholders is also set as one of the priorities being specifically focused on perception of ANQA as a reliable partner for all the stakeholders.

The strategic plan of 2010-2015 was monitored on a yearly basis. The Annual report on implementation was prepared. In 2015, an analysis on the achievements of the strategic goals and objectives was carried out, the results of which were presented and discussed with the Board of Trustees.

The Strategic plan for the years 2016-2020 has recently been developed with the involvement of the stakeholders and has been approved by the Board of Trustees. It mainly refers to:

- ongoing support for further development and fulfilment of IQA systems in HEIs;
- effective and efficient fruition of programme accreditation process and its public recognition keeping focus on teaching and learning methods, assessment, student-centred education;
- protection of students' interests and competition in the market of educational services;
- international promotion of local institutions; transparency of reliable information on quality of tertiary education and its availability for both local and international stakeholders.

Based on ANQA Strategic Plan for 2016-2020 an action plan with certain activities, tasks, deadlines, indicators and responsible bodies was developed.

The involvement of stakeholders in the institutional governance of ANQA is ensured by the structure of the Board of Trustees established by ANQA charter, which includes such stakeholders as employers, RA government, HEI representatives and students. These stakeholders are also included in the Accreditation Committee to ensure more participative decision-making.

To promote the QA culture, ANQA initiated the Students' Voice programme in 2011.

Students' Voice programme	Web

As an external quality assurance provider in HE, ANQA's core activities are based on external QA principles and correspond to the standards of ESG (Part 2).

ESG standard	ANQA activity
2.1. Consideration of internal quality assurance	Accreditation criteria and standards of ANQA are the basis of the whole external QA process in Armenia (see Standard 2.1 and the mapping of standards).
2.2. Designing methodologies fit for purpose	ANQA regularly evaluates the efficiency of external QA methods with the involvement of stakeholders and makes necessary revisions.
2.3. Implementing processes	The procedure for external QA established by ANQA includes the core elements of self-assessment analysis, site visit, report and follow-up plan
2.4. Peer-review experts	Experts' recruitment, selection, training, expert panel formation, working and monitoring procedures are established on the principles of

	inclusiveness, participation, transparency, independence and avoidance of conflicts of interest.
2.5. Criteria for outcomes	The final outcomes of an external QA process are decisions of the Accreditation Committee (see Standard 2.5).
2.6. Reporting	ANQA requires the expert panels to provide reports in accordance to the pre-defined template, which includes findings, considerations, conclusions and recommendations. The expert panel reports together with the Accreditation Committee conclusions and decisions are published on the ANQA web-site.
2.7. Complaints and appeals	Though new regulations are in the development phase, appeal opportunity is being considered and the corresponding procedure is established.

Table 2: ESG standards' reflection in ANQA activities

The above mentioned activities or processes are cyclical and continuous in the country. The concrete schedule of accreditation processes is caused by the terms of granted accreditation, the policy of accreditation requirements and the understanding of QA as an on-going process.

All the activities run by ANQA are broken down into QA processes to ease the "strategy to daily operations" transformation and monitoring. For each QA area a protocol has been designed, and these protocols have a specific reference to ESG standards.

ANQA protocol	ESG standards referenced
Leadership, mission, strategy	2.1, 2.2 , 2.3, 2.4, 2.7, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7
Institutional and programme accreditation	2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 3.1
Internal quality assurance	2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7
International relations	2.1, 2.4, 3.4, 3.7
Information technology	3.5, 3.6
Legal affairs	2.7, 3.2, 3.3
Communication / PR	2.2, 2.4, 2.6, 3.4, 3.6
Resources	3.3, 3.5, 3.6
Human resources management	3.3, 3.5, 3.6
Accreditation committee	2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7
Secretariat	2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 3.6

Table 3: ESG standards' reflection in ANQA protocols

Though external quality assurance is the core process for ANQA, its organizational structure and approaches ensure the independence of each external QA process, and the institution of coordinators mostly appointed from ANQA staff considers additional remuneration for additional responsibilities.

3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

Standard:
Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.
Guidelines:
In particular, when external quality assurance is carried out for regulatory purposes, institutions need to have the security that the outcomes of this process are accepted within their higher education system, by the state, the stakeholders and the public.

List of main evidences:	
Laws and regulations	**Web**
ANQA Charter	**Web**
Government Decree on ANQA establishment (available in Armenian)	**Web**

Currently, ANQA is formally recognized as the only agency to provide external quality assurance services for the Armenian tertiary education. ANQA was formed as a foundation by the RA government decision on November 27, 2008. As stated in the mentioned decision, ANQA is the body responsible for external review on accreditation in the field of tertiary education, particularly middle level professional education and higher education (bachelor's and master's degrees). ANQA is established based on the founder's voluntary property payments as a non-membership, non-commercial organization aimed at implementing investigations, analyses, recommendations and evaluation in the field of tertiary level education.. The cooperation with the MoES mainly evolves around the proposals towards changes in legal acts. MoES also issues the certificates on the decisions of the Accreditation Committee but is not entitled to change the decision. The MoES may send the accreditation decision back to ANQA if only there are procedural drawbacks. However, all the certificates on the decisions of ANQA Accreditation Committee have been issued by the Ministry of Education and Sciences without any exception, which means that ANQA activities and results are fully recognised by the state authorities. However, the Accreditation decision, the conclusion on the decision and the expert panel review report are published on the very same day the decision is made.

The recognition of formal results of ANQA activities by the national higher education system is guaranteed by the involvement of HEI representatives as stakeholders both in the Accreditation

Committee and the Board of Trustees. Besides, stakeholders are key participants in all the policy development and implementation processes. Apart from involvement in policy-making on specific subjects, it is also important to establish procedures to communicate with different stakeholders on a permanent basis. The website, newsletters, regular meetings, fora, conferences and focus groups are in place to ensure effective communication with the stakeholders and their proactive involvement in ANQA activities. The analysis of the feedbacks from different stakeholders of the agency showed, that they are mostly satisfied with the activities carried out by the agency. Similarly, they are satisfied with the information provided by the agency. For their part, the HEIs emphasized that ANQA equally treats all the institutions functioning in RA: the same information and consultancy is provided to all the institutions; the involvement of all stakeholders in ANQA fora/conferences/trainings is ensured; the same criteria and standards are applied, the process for external evaluation is the same, etc.

3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Standard:

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

Guidelines:

Autonomous institutions need independent agencies as counterparts.

In considering the independence of an agency the following are important:

- Organisational independence, demonstrated by official documentation (e.g. instruments of government, legislative acts or statutes of the organisation) that stipulates the independence of the agency's work from third parties, such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholder organisations;
- Operational independence: the definition and operation of the agency's procedures and methods as well as the nomination and appointment of external experts are undertaken independently from third parties such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholders;
- Independence of formal outcomes: while experts from relevant stakeholder backgrounds, particularly students, take part in quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

Anyone contributing to external quality assurance activities of an agency (e.g. as an expert) is informed that while they may be nominated by a third party, they are acting in a personal capacity and not representing their constituent organisations when working for the agency. Independence is important to ensure that any procedures and decisions are solely based on expertise.

List of main evidences:

ANQA Charter	**Web**
ANQA Budgets	**Web**
RA Law on foundations	**Web**
ANQA Code of Ethics and the Rules of Conduct	**Web**
Procedure on "Formation and Operations of ANQA Accreditation Committee"	**Web**
ANQA Accreditation Manual_ 2015	**Web**

Organizational independence of ANQA is determined by its legal status of foundation institutionally governed by the Board of Trustees. As for the independence of the agency, ANQA is a foundation independent from tertiary level institutions, the Ministry of Education and Science and third parties. The independence of the whole structure is based on the system of counterbalances used to form the Board of Trustees: the 12-member-board is composed of different stakeholders (see the Chapter of the "National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance" Foundation and Standard 3.1). As for the executive management, the Director of the Foundation is elected by a public competition. The president of the Board (elected by the Board to organize its work and to chair board sessions) signs a contract with the Director for four years.

According to the Charter, ANQA is the only responsible body in Armenia to implement the required expertise for accreditation in the secondary and higher professional education, as well as to work out criteria and procedures for the external evaluation and accreditation of the tertiary level institutions and academic programmes (see standard 3.2). The legal status (regulated by the RA Law on Foundations) and the Charter of ANQA consider the right to acquire and own property for use in compliance with defined goals and objectives. Combined with the financial policy of ANQA, this enhances the financial independence and excludes any leverage of influence (see Standard 3.5).

Operational independence is mostly based on the Code of Ethics, values of ANQA and independence-assuring mechanisms set for different procedures, particularly regarding the independence of experts and their individual responsibility (see Standard 2.4).Expert panels consist of specialists and students who are selected according to clearly defined procedures developed by ANQA and ratified by the Board of Trustees. For each accreditation ANQA submits a selected shortlist of experts to the Accreditation Commission. Then the expert panel is selected from the agreed list. ANQA has adopted a strict conflict-of-interest policy for experts nominated for participation in the accreditation process. ANQA has also designed the Code of Ethics, which regulates the principles of experts', Board's, Accreditation Committee's and ANQA staff members' behaviour and independence. To exclude the cases of conflict of interest and influence of stakeholders, at the beginning of the process all the panel members sign a Commitment on confidentiality and Declaration on exclusion of conflict of interest. ANQA attaches a lot of importance to the independent and impartial implementation of external evaluation; hence it takes all the necessary measures to ensure that the experts do not subject to any influence or pressure.

For this reason, after each procedure an anonymous survey is conducted to find out to what extent the experts were independent during:

- the expertise (96.5%),
- the evaluation of the criteria and standards (100%),
- the decision-making process (93%).

ANQA has methodological independence and the agency considers to be the main policy-maker in the field of QA: most of the QA documents are designed by ANQA and approved to become national regulations. ANQA also prepares proposals for changes and/or amendments regarding the QA issues in the legislative framework.

As for the independence of formal outcomes, each ANQA accreditation procedure ends with the decisions of ANQA Accreditation Committee, which is an independent body. Activities of the Accreditation Committee as the generator of the final outcome of external QA processes are regulated by the Procedure on "Formation and Operations of ANQA Accreditation Committee" (see also the Accreditation Manual, pp. 57-58). The candidates to the Committee are suggested by the TLIs, professional unions (including unions of employers), and the national association of students. The formation of the Committee is the responsibility of the Board of Trustees, which confirms or rejects the candidates. ANQA signs a contract with each committee member defining their rights and responsibilities, concurrently clarifying and legally maintaining the avoidance of any conflict of interests and other ethical context. All the decisions taken by the Accreditation Committee are based on the conclusions of peer-review panels.

The organizational structure and internal organizational culture of ANQA lead to independent consulting, trainings, seminars and so on.

3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Standard:

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

Guidelines:

In the course of their work, agencies gain information on programmes and institutions that can be useful beyond the scope of a single process, providing material for structured analyses across the higher education system. These findings can contribute to the reflection on and the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts.

A thorough and careful analysis of this information will show developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulty.

Besides the accreditation processes, ANQA regularly conducts surveys, analyses and organizes events to reveal best practices, the needs of stakeholders and problems of the field, which is set as one of the priorities for the upcoming period in the strategic plan of ANQA. The selection of topics

for thematic analysis/research studies is based on the results of the surveys, focus group discussions and regular meetings with the stakeholders, as well as on the issues identified during the accreditation processes. Periodical thematic analyses, summarizing analyses of accreditation processes for internal and external use, and creation of a platform for exchange of experience in QA are among the objectives of research and analysis. ANQA periodically gathers information using surveys of different stakeholders and organizes discussions, fora (Qweek) and intends to create a "club" of QA professionals with at least monthly meetings. ANQA also conducts system-wide analyses on a three-year cycle. The thematic analysis/ research studies are carried out by ANQA staff members on a regular basis. Appropriate changes/amendments/ improvement measures (such as changes in regulatory framework, improvements in the different activities/procedures, revision/review of the mechanisms and tools, revision/improvement of the experts' and or coordinators' training materials, design of the projects, etc…) are implemented based on the results of the relevant analysis. The outcomes of the analysis are disseminated in various formats depending to whom these results concern (presentation during the conferences/fora, publication on the ANQA web-site and discussion with relevant stakeholders).

Year	Event / Analysis	Goal	Availability of results
Publications			
2009	Guiding Principles for Tertiary Level Educational Establishments on External Quality assurance	The paper reflects the external quality assurance framework: the state of arts in the country and the methodology to implement EQA in Armenia.	**Web**
2010	Building Bridges For Transferring What? Isomorphism vs. Legitimacy	The paper seeks to understand how higher education policy from the Europe and Community is transferred to developing countries and beyond. Particularly, this study aims to delve deeper into the actual implementation of quality assurance from the perception of seven Armenian tertiary level institutions involved in a try-out of the national quality assurance standards and criteria. The main findings explicate that setting too broad a standard and/or guideline creates room for a variety of interpretations leading to deviation from its original purposes, thus questioning alignment and therefore recognition. Alternatively, the model isomorphs, in the form of best practices transferred may generate legitimacy issues a prerequisite for success. However, applying the quality assurance standards and guidelines accompanied by explication of the underlying philosophies and mechanisms	**Web**

		does lead to capacity building, establishment of own models, thereby(thus) legitimating the latter on one hand and aligning with EU approaches on the other.	
2012	The reasons of increase and decrease in students' motivation to learn: Survey among students and lecturers	A survey was conducted in 2012 among students to investigate their attitudes and satisfaction in relation to various aspects of student life. In particular, the study aimed to reveal their awareness level on the ECTS, attitudes towards the assessment system, the factors affecting their motivation as well as various aspects of teaching and learning from their perspective (teaching methods, resources, etc.). The sample included 564 students from 17 state and private HEIs in 3 large cities in Armenia.	**Web**
2011-2012	1st system-wide analysis	Analysis was focused on the extent to which internal quality assurance system was installed at tertiary level institutions - the governance and the management of institutions as well as ANQA's impact on the formation of the quality assurance in Armenian HE.	**Web**
2013	Analysis of the observation conducted in the HEIs, that were undergoing pilot accreditation	The analysis was aimed to revealing at what stage of PDCA cycle the TLIs were regarding each accreditation criteria.	**Web**
2013-2014 2015	Comprehensive analysis of Accreditation process	The analysis was aimed at: assessing the effectiveness of the accreditation process discovering the best practices in the process, revealing the shortcomings and obstacles, hence contributing to the improvement and review of the regulatory documents, methodology and the process itself, analyze the impact of accreditation on the development and enhancement of TLIs.	**Web**
2014	The peculiarities of Armenian higher education system. Survey conducted among students	A study aimed at revealing the factors affecting the student's motivation to study was accomplished by the Student's Voice research group in 2014. The reasons of the increase and decline in student's motivation were investigated from both students' and lecturer's perspectives. Focus group	**Web**

		discussion was used as a method for data collection with the participation of students and lecturers from 8 universities. The analysis resulted in a number of implications for the university.	
2014-2015	Salzburg principles: State of arts in the Republic of Armenia	The paper presents the results of the fact-finding process and recommendations on the alignment of the Armenian doctoral education to the Salzburg Principles. The proposed recommendations can serve as a basis for the development of the Armenian doctoral education in line with the Salzburg principles.	**Web**
2015	Impact of Accreditation Process on Higher Education Internationalization Developments. Case of Armenia	In this article we draw your attention to overall accreditation process in the Republic of Armenia by emphasizing how it contributes to the review of the internationalization quality. The article intends to provide an introduction of components and key activities which are integral to the internationalization process and have to work in unison to achieve the internationalization of TLIs. Paper draws upon mostly primary sources, including institutions' self-assessments, panel member national/ international expert reports of evaluation for accreditation, follow up plan on panel recommendations, ANQA manual, ANQA strategic plan, experience gained in different projects regarding the internationalization process ANQA has taken part in, etc.	**Web**
2015-2016	2nd system-wide analysis	The study aimed to assess the extent to which internal quality assurance system is established at tertiary level institutions, processes and procedures conducted, the practices of quality assurance of teaching and learning. A comparison will be drawn to reveal the changes and introductions occurred among HEIs within the last 3 years and impact of ANQA activities on the development of system.	**Web**
Events			
2010	"Quality assurance of professional education in	The event had the aim to present and discuss the suggested approaches of	**Web**

	Armenia: current issues and development prospects", ANQA biannual stakeholders' conference	external quality assurance in professional education of Armenia.	
2011	"The Internal QA in the Field of Tertiary Education: Challenges and Prospects", ANQA biannual quality forum	The event had the aim to present, discuss and clarify the QA methodology used by Armenian TLIs and ANQA.	**Web**
2012	The first Quality Week that includes a two-day stakeholders' conference on "The states of arts in quality assurance in Armenian tertiary education".	The event had the aim to promote quality dialogue among ANQA stakeholders and to disseminate the state of arts in internal and external quality assurance. To discuss further challenges and explore new opportunities for quality assurance enhancement in Republic of Armenia.	**Web**
2013	Challenges of transitional period in the quality assurance system of Armenian tertiary education: Building trust	The event had the aim to: present the outcomes of the implemented pilots and ANQA external review, disseminate the state of arts in external and internal Quality Assurance, discuss further challenges	**Web**
2014	Quality Week that includes a two-day stakeholders' conference on "Fostering Quality Culture in Armenian Tertiary Education System: Ensuring Recognition of Qualifications".	The conference focused on the experience of institutional accreditation procedures, the main issues identified, as well as transition to programme accreditation and the current challenges.	**Web**
2015 (January 2016)	Tertiary education Quality Assurance: is teaching and learning effective, ANQA third quality assurance forum.	The conference provided a platform for discussion, professional development and exchange of experiences among the main stakeholders in QA of HE of Armenia and beyond.	**Web**

Table 4: List of the ANQA Research studies and events

Annual reports on ANQA activities also include summarized image of situation in TLIs and results of ANQA activities and impact.

Along with the events organized by the ANQA, staff members participate in lots of international conferences, workshops, trainings with the aim of studying the international trends and developments and using the results in ANQA's research studies, (the list of the trainings and workshops per year is available upon request). ANQA has also studied different educational aspects, and based on the identified problems and challenges TEMPUS projects were designed and are currently being implemented. The projects address the following issues:

— Alignment of learning outcomes to NQF;
— Development/revision of learning outcomes-based academic programmes;
— Transnational Education quality assurance;
— Internationalisation of the university activities;
— Improvement of the governance system of the HEIs;
— Development of the sectorial qualification framework;
— Enhancement of the university - labour market cooperation,;
— Structural development of the third cycle based on Salzburg Principles, etc.

3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:
Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

Guidelines:
It is in the public interest that agencies are adequately and appropriately funded, given higher education's important impact on the development of societies and individuals. The resources of the agencies enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance activities in an effective and efficient manner. Furthermore, the resources enable the agencies to improve, to reflect on their practice and to inform the public about their activities.

List of main evidences:	
ANQA annual Budgets	**Web**
ANQA annual reports	**Web**
ANQA Code of Ethics and the Rules of Conduct	**Web**
Policy on Human resources management	**Web**

Since its establishment, ANQA has occupied a 400 m² area donated by the Government. Along with the initiation of accreditation processes ANQA was granted an additional 400 m² area (one more floor in the same building) fitting the need for workspace for the Accreditation Committee and field committees. This shows that the Government cares about the efficient activities of ANQA and more specifically its independence. It has necessary space for organizing all its activities. All the rooms are well-equipped and have all the necessary facilities to effectively organize the day-to-day activities. With the efforts of ANQA, European support programmes were brought to provide upgrade for the equipment and to implement modern information technologies into the management process. ANQA has its library and a digital system DocFlow to maintain the library and all the other documentation of ANQA as well as to manage the accreditation procedure electronically.

To assess the physical resources from the perspective of effective management of ANQA strategic plan and external quality assurance resources, once or twice a year surveys among the staff and once after each accreditation procedure among the experts are conducted.

According to the results of the surveys, in general, the staff are highly satisfied with the equipment and working conditions (91% in 2015). They consider that ANQA has necessary technical and physical capacity to organize and efficiently run its external quality assurance procedures and other activities. As far as the quality and quantity of computer hardware and software is concerned, 100% of the employees are satisfied with the speed of the computer hardware and software necessary to perform their jobs efficiently and effectively. Regarding the ANQA internal process automation system – Docflow, survey showed that 88% of staff members in 2013 and 100% in 2015 were satisfied with the information in the Docflow. The policies and procedures for appropriate information retrieval and usage and security for all hardware and software are defined in the protocols of IT and Resources.

Considering that the quality assurance is a newly developing sphere in Armenia, the recruitment of competent staff has been a challenge for ANQA. However, the main staff of ANQA has always been a team of enthusiastic, motivated individuals with ambitions to have high quality TLIs through permanent enhancement and to integrate into international trends of development and adaptation of innovations in education field into Armenian context. Since the first day of its establishment, ANQA has promoted the ethos of European approach to dealing and communicating with stakeholders. ANQA's approach is building from the bottom up with taking into account its vertical governance legacy and promoting the autonomy and the responsibility of main stakeholders. ANQA's internationalization approach provides the commitment to international experience and communication, and each staff member has the sense of being involved in that communication. It is essential that all the staff members understand and carry the core competences of ANQA. At regulatory level, ANQA has defined a staff recruitment policy and procedure according to which ANQA hires and dismisses its staff. The main duties are described in the job descriptions. Apart from the probation period and a set of rights and responsibilities outlined in the contract, there is a set policy and procedure on the systematic induction and promotion of the new staff. First of all, the new staff is provided with the induction package (such as necessary regulatory framework, reading materials, etc...) and participates in the core procedures in ANQA responsibilities – accreditation: desk review process as an observer and in site-visits and peer-reviewers' meetings as an observer and a minute taker. Next the most actively motivated ones are hired for a probation period of three months after which they are hired for a position. Once hired, they first act as a junior coordinator (learning through doing) for an accreditation procedure under supervision of a senior coordinator during which mentoring takes place. There is also an opportunity for the graduates to volunteer for a period of two months to better understand their career aspirations match the ANQA mission. Fluency in the English language and writing skills in Armenian and English are among the prerequisites for the newly hired staff since ANQA reports are produced both in English and in Armenian (for more details see ANQA HRM policy and procedure).

ANQA maintains a flat organizational structure and network development logic with flexible groups; for instance, in some projects, higher managers become developers and mid-level specialists become head of development group.

Year	Staff number (position / factual average)	Staff outflow	Staff inflow
2012	22 / 31	14	6
2013	22 / 23	6	8
2014	22 / 24	9	7
2015	22 / 21	9	4

Table 5: ANQA staff retention

ANQA develops its core staff and combines them in virtual groups with non-permanent staff. The relatively high rate of fluidity is because of ANQA's strategy first to hire permanent staff and next hire professional support of half-time employees for special needs. That is why in 2012 there were 31 employees fitting 22 jobs. QA is a new area in Armenia and because of that there are many cases when experienced staff members employed at ANQA were invited to higher career positions outside the agency, as the specialists of ANQA are very attractive because of the strong selection and experience on European QA culture. Even experts who have worked with ANQA for a short period of time have further showed professional career progress at their home universities.

Five staff members are procedure coordinators and each manages 4-5 procedures per year. Thus, there is enough capacity to manage 20-25 procedures per year. This figure is to be raised up to 50 procedures per year by shaping technological side (of communications with experts and universities and report writing) and shifting from new developments to regular processes, which is considered to be enough to handle both institutional and programme accreditations for each respective cycle. Currently, there are approximately 500 programmes in the country, with a max 10 years delay for the first cycle start (for most influential/critical/popular programmes it will be a 5 year start delay). In 10 years ANQA will be able to have all the programmes accredited.

Since its inception, ANQA has taken the professionalization of its staff seriously. Studying the SAR of institutions, recommendations of national and international experts', international trends and developments, feedbacks received from the HEIs', ANQA has defined the directions of staff professionalization. The areas for professionalization are defined according to QA criteria and standards. Each staff member is responsible for one direction, such as Academic Programmes (student-cantered learning, student assessment, teaching and learning practices, horizontal and vertical alignment, etc.), Governance and Administration, Teaching staff, Research, Internationalisation, Internal Quality Assurance, etc. The responsible staff member is to research the area with the aim of:

- Revealing the challenges and current trends of the area,
- Identifying the best practices and disseminating these among the internal and external stakeholders,

- Developing relevant guidelines to improve the accreditation process based on the results of the studies,
- Developing/updating the experts' training materials,

To ensure the sustainability of the staff, ANQA has set the rate of average salary higher than that of the country's average salary

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
RA average salary (AMD, nominal)	102652	108092	113163	146524	158580	184647
ANQA average salary (AMD, nominal)	155166	165454	165454	189626	189626	190578

Table 6: Average salary rate of the ANQA staff members compared to country's average salary rate
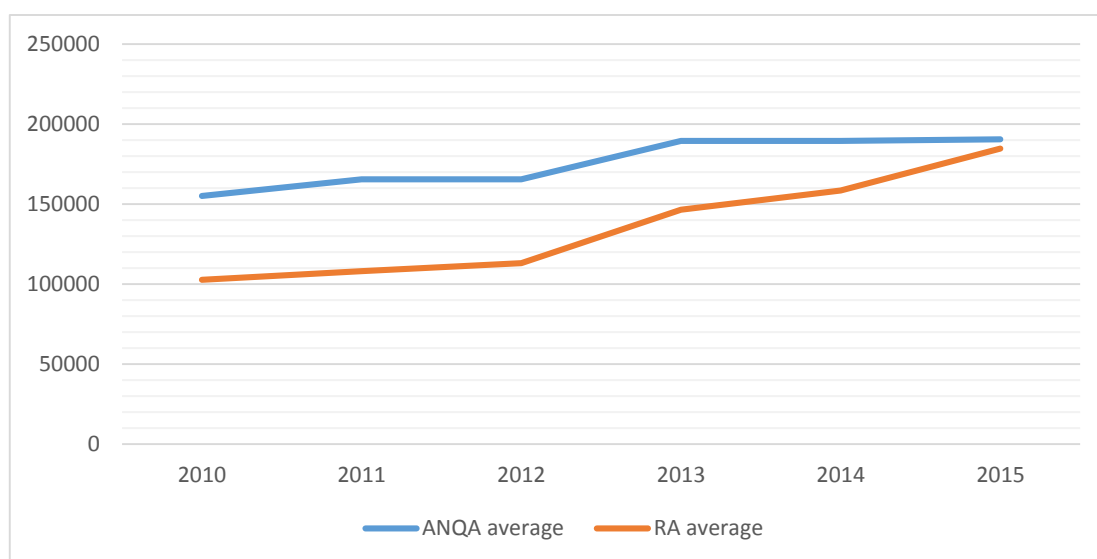

Figure 4: Average salary rate of the ANQA staff members compared to country's average salary rate

The graph above, shows the dynamics of the salaries received from state funding.

The actual salary is significantly higher than it is presented above due to the staff involvement in international programmes and due to the additional incomes received from accreditation processes as coordinators, translators, and minute takers. ANQA is also planning to review its whole financial policy to establish consideration of inflation indexes and to make corresponding increase in salary rates.

The new financial policy of ANQA has recently been development.

One of the quality areas of the ANQA internal quality assurance is human resource management, which aims to establish a collaborative and productive working ethos for staff members. Thus, periodic surveys are conducted to find out the level of staff satisfaction with the working ethos.

The results of the surveys have so far demonstrated that the staff is mainly satisfied with the working ethos (89% in 2015) and consider it to be collaborative and productive. The survey highlights the following factors:

		2013	2014	2015
1	Personal accomplishment of staff members	-	75%	89%
3	Workload is reasonable	-	58%	78%
4	Satisfaction from the opportunity for personal and professional development	92%	-	-
5	I receive the right amount of recognition and acknowledgement from my director	64%	75%	89%
7	My talents are used well in the workplace	75%	67%	78%
8	I have trust and confidence in my director	100%	100%	100%
9	I have the knowledge and experience to perform my duties	-	75%	100%
10	The people I work with cooperate to get the work done	-	67%	89%
11	Overall job satisfaction	-	78%	83%

Table 7: Staff satisfaction figures

Overall, as the development trend shows there has been a tangible improvement in the management within the last three years due to the in-depth analysis that the people in charge of the quality area are producing.

To ensure that all the staff members involved in agency's activities are competent and act professionally, ANQA has established a system of staff appraisal. The competency model for the agency has been developed, on the basis of which the director of the agency meets the staff members and implements SWOT analysis of their performance. The results of the discussion demonstrate the strong and the weak points of each staff member, thereby demonstrating the training needs.

Quoting from the feedback of the international experts and colleagues, who have worked with ANQA:"ANQA's professionals have strong professional capacities to implement the activities planned for their institution. With regard to material capacities, they appear adequate with regard to the implementation of the accreditation processes and projects. With regard to the allocation of material resources, they are quite adequate".

Each year ANQA calculates and presents its maintenance expenses to receive funding from the state budget. The institution, on the basis of a paid-service-provision contract signed between the applicant TLI and ANQA, covers all the expenses related to the accreditation process. The external evaluation fee is defined by ANQA depending on the nature and duration of the external evaluation, the number of experts involved, and other conditions. The external evaluation fee is calculated on a case-by-case basis and is endorsed by the Board of Trustees. With its financial policy ANQA

endeavors to reach a higher level of income diversity. Other fund raising mechanisms are participation in international projects, trainings for teachers and HEIs' QA staff, trainings for VET institution's staff, paid conferences organized by ANQA, etc.

The progress of diversification of income sources is shown below.

Source of income	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	Share (%)						
State budget	97.8	95.9	93.5	88.5	84.7	68.1	48.5
Accreditation fees	2.2	0.7	1.0	6.5	5.4	1.4	35.5
Trainings / Consultancy	0.0	3.4	3.8	0.0	0.0	2.1	0.6
International programmes	0.0	0.0	1.7	2.4	9.8	28.4	15.4
Other	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.6	0.2	0.0	0.0

Table 8: Sources of Income

The decrease in the share from state budget shows the increase in ANQA's financial independence.
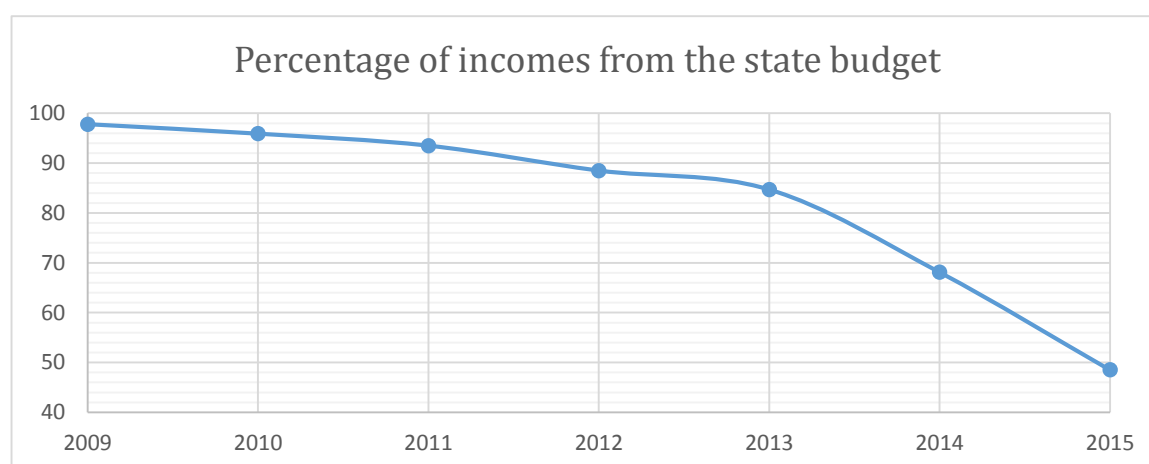

Figure 5: Percentage of incomes from the state budget

The efficiency of financial management can be seen through the comparison of the increase in ANQA budget income rates, the average of which is 113%, to the increase rates of RA budget income, the average of which is 109%. The increase rate for ANQA is progressive.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015

Increase rate of ANQA budget incomes	101.9	102.6	105.7	106.2	124.9	142.7

Table 9: Increase rates of ANQA budget incomes

3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Standard:

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

Guidelines:

Agencies need to be accountable to their stakeholders. Therefore, high professional standards and integrity in the agency's work are indispensable. The review and improvement of their activities are on-going so as to ensure that their services to institutions and society are optimal. Agencies apply an internal quality assurance policy which is available on its website. This policy

- ensures that all persons involved in its activities are competent and act professionally and ethically;
- includes internal and external feedback mechanisms that lead to a continuous improvement within the agency;
- guards against intolerance of any kind or discrimination;
- outlines the appropriate communication with the relevant authorities of those jurisdictions where they operate;
- ensures that any activities carried out and material produced by subcontractors are in line with the ESG, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance activities are subcontracted to other parties;
- allows the agency to establish the status and recognition of the institutions with which it conducts external quality assurance.

List of main evidences:	
ANQA IQA Policy and Procedures Protocols	**Web**
ANQA Code of Ethics and the Rules of Conduct	**Web**

All the activities run by ANQA are divided into 11 QA areas, correspondingly 11 protocols are used to perform and monitor those areas (see Standard 3.1):

1. Leadership and management:
    - To promote the reforms in the tertiary education system in the RA ensuring the implementation of Armenian Quality Assurance Framework;

- To foster Quality Culture in Armenian tertiary education system ensuring the implementation of independent and impartial programme and institutional accreditation processes;
- To enhance agency's visibility nationally, internationally and regionally ensuring continuous collaborative relationships and wider involvement of stakeholders;
- To enhance the quality of staff through aggressive recruitment of talented people in the education sphere, with keen attention to increasing diversity; and nurturing retention through professional development and support, supervisory training, and career advancement opportunities;
- Ensuring financial independence and growth for the sustainability of ANQA;

2. Institutional and programme accreditations:
   - To rate quality and observe quality improvement of tertiary level institutions functioning in RA through periodically conducted independent institutional and programme accreditation, as well as promote the formation of professional education quality system in compliance with international standards and to foster the development of quality culture;

3. Legal affairs:
   - To ensure the implementation of ANQA policy in line with the requirements of normative legal acts;

4. Human resources management:
   - To ensure effective and efficient performance through maintaining the existing and recruiting new staff members; to promote collaborative ethos;

5. Accreditation committee:
   - To ensure independent and unbiased decision making in all accreditation processes in RA;

6. International affairs:
   - to promote visibility of Armenian quality assurance at international level, to assume an active membership role in the international QA system;
   - to follow up on international developments in quality assurance and tertiary education;

7. Internal quality assurance;
   - To ensure that high professional standards and integrity in the agency's work are indispensable;
   - To ensure the accountability of the organizational processes and results to agency's stakeholders;
   - To make the results of the evaluation of ANQA's internal and external activities visible and transparent, and have a process of evaluation to determine whether these results meet the organization's goals to an adequate degree and contribute to the overall quality of the organization;

8. Secretariat:
   - To ensure ANQA's cooperation with ANQA Accreditation Committee and internal and external stakeholders;

9. Communication and PR:
   - To inform the public about ANQA processes and procedures, build confidence towards its activity through continuous coverage and communication;

10. Information technologies:
    - To provide a broad range of information technology services and capacity building in

support of the ANQA Office;

11. Resources:
   - To ensure sufficient resources for ANQA to implement internal and external QA processes effectively.

Indicators for every protocol are measured by the satisfaction level of all stakeholders' expectations with regard to the level of achievement of ANQA mission for current state.

Data is periodically collected from reliable, authentic sources.

The protocols provide information to reveal the gaps and to make necessary improvements. For each quality area, strategic goal, target, activity and performance indicator, effective evaluation and reporting mechanisms are formulated for the period of 1-3 years. To ensure the effective functioning of ANQA IQA system, as well as to assure the accountability in terms of the activities of each quality process, a responsible person/coordinator for each area has been established: regulatory documents, evaluation and reporting mechanisms and tools (both internal and external feedback mechanisms) have been developed. Both IQA protocols and evaluation were consulted with partner international agencies for feedback, as well as were piloted among the stakeholders. For each process, data is collected on annual basis to ensure the continuous improvement within the agency. The feedback is collected extensively: all the stakeholders (internal and external) provide feedback on relevant activity; different meetings and focus group discussions are carried out on a regular basis. After each meeting, satisfaction surveys are conducted. The responsible person for each quality area together with the ANQA sociologist takes care of the in-depth analysis of the data. Correspondingly the results are discussed with the relevant people, amendments and/or improvement measures are implemented, and are further fed into the annual report. Thus, each responsible person draws up/presents an annual quality report concerning its own process, draws preliminary conclusions on the effectiveness of the given process as well as sets the area for further improvement. The summary results from all the protocols feed into the revisions that are to be made to the operational plans so as to better achieve the strategic goals outlined in the Strategic plan.

The evaluation of the content and organization of the internal quality assurance proceeds as follows: through periodic meetings of the Internal Quality Assurance Working Group, both the quality assurance issues on each quality area, and issues concerning the ANQA's general quality assurances activities are discussed. The working group consists of responsible persons of all quality processes. To evaluate the performance of the working group as well as the effectiveness of the meetings, working group members complete a survey. Judging by the results of the conducted surveys, focus groups, and interviews, it could be noted, that the meetings of the Quality Assurance Working group are effective. The surveys conducted among the QA working groups throughout the last three years demonstrate improvement of IQA activities as well as their positive impact on the staff development and overall management. The discussions and debates held in the meetings throughout the year 2013 demonstrated the contribution of IQA to the development of problem solving capacity among 75% of the respondents. In 2015 this figure came to 80%. For planning and decision making capacities the figure of 87.5% in 2013 raised to 100% in 2015.

As for the external quality assurance, the mechanisms mainly evolve around feedback on the effective functioning of the accreditation expert panel; feedback from the HEIs and experts on the overall effectiveness of the accreditation process, organization and content of the procedures, and the coordinators' report; feedback on the process; and finally feedback from the Accreditation Committee (for more details see the thematic analysis on the effectiveness of the procedure and impact of Accreditation on the development of HEIs). ANQA also regularly communicates with other stakeholders on the improvement of the regulatory framework. Periodically, meetings with the representatives of MoES, Government and employers are organized. The regulatory documents have been changed or amended after ANQA carefully considers the discussions and suggestions put forward by the MoES.

ANQA protocols also provide reporting to external stakeholders through being published on ANQA website. In general, the shown above IQA model considers stakeholders' satisfaction with all the processes, including goals, tools, activities, achievements. ANQA has structured methods for obtaining feedback from the stakeholders (see Standards 3.1 and 3.4).

ANQA pays particular attention to the recruitment of competent staff and their professional development. ANQA has developed a code of ethics in order to professionally and ethically manage the interpersonal relations among the staff members, with the experts, Board members, Accreditation Committee members and with the representatives of HEIs. The protocol of human resources management, for example, is to assure the availability and professionalism of the staff, the efficient use of their skills, motivation, and the quality of services provided by individual contractors (though currently not many contractors are involved, ANQA accepts the possibility of delegating the function of coordinators to outer sources); also it is to reflect the level of tolerance and discrimination within the staff (though ANQA has never faced such issues because of the organizational culture, the Code of Ethics sets corresponding regulations).

Combined with the PDCA approach for all the activities, the periodicity of short-term and mid-term reporting via the protocols ensures cyclicality of internal QA.

The compliance with ESG terms and approaches of ANQA activities originates from the background of QA in RA: after signing the Bologna Declaration in 2005, one of the most important ambitions was establishment of a national centre for tertiary education quality assurance, which would meet the ESGs, thus promoting recognition of the qualifications awarded in the Armenian tertiary education system.

3.7. CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

Standard:
Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

Guidelines:

A periodic external review will help the agency to reflect on its policies and activities. It provides a means for assuring the agency and its stakeholders that it continues to adhere to the principles enshrined in the ESG.

List of main evidences:	
ANQA IQA Policy and Procedures Protocols	Web
ANQA Strategic Plan 2010-2015	Web

According to the strategic plan and "ANQA Internal Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures", ANQA should undergo external evaluation to promote the recognition of qualifications and enhance trust amongst HEIs/Quality assurance agencies at national and international level. According to ANQA Strategic Plan 2010-2015, the external review of ANQA to test it against fulfilment of the ESG, to apply for the full membership at ENQA and to be admitted to EQAR was planned for 2014. However, the application was postponed because the decisions on accreditations were made in 2015. The self-assessment report is submitted to the Board of Trustees for approval prior to submission for international recognition. This is the first attempt for ANQA to undergo external review against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area. So far, ANQA has developed appropriate mechanisms, tools for data collection, as well as for the improvement of ongoing activities and processes in order to provide basis for external review. The data collection and analysis processes started in 2015, The above mentioned activities are part of preparation for external review and ensure the sustainable cyclic approach to the review based on the PDCA approach. In 2013 ANQA underwent external proof evaluation organized by NVAO within the frames of ARQATA project to prepare ANQA for applying to ENQA for a full membership. Based on the external proof review report a follow-up plan was developed and accordingly implemented to overcome the shortcomings. The results of the external review formed the main directions of improvement for the last years. Accordingly, ANQA has fixed the shortcomings and is ready to apply for external assessment needed for ENQA membership. Within the framework of Twinning project, the partner organizations from Finland, Germany and Estonia also assisted ANQA to prepare for the external review.

11. COMPLIANCE WITH EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES (PART 2)

2.1. CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:
External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.
Guidelines:

Quality assurance in higher education is based on the institutions' responsibility for the quality of their programmes and other provision; therefore it is important that external quality assurance recognizes and supports institutional responsibility for quality assurance. To ensure the link between internal and external quality assurance, external quality assurance includes consideration of the standards of Part 1. These may be addressed differently, depending on the type of external quality assurance.

List of main evidences:	
Statute on State Accreditation of Institutions and their Academic Progarmmes in the RA	Web
ANQA Accreditation Manual 2015: Accreditation Ccriteria and standards	Web
Guide to Self-Assessment	Web
Glossary for Quality Assurance	Web
Mapping of RA criteria and standards towards ESG 2015	Web
Experts' reports	Web
ANQA conclusions	Web
Accreditation Committee decisions	Web

ANQA works purposefully for the development of a quality culture in Armenian HEIs and is committed to contributing to the quality developments in higher education institutions. Taking into account the internal quality assurance system of HEIs, ANQA encourages them to act in conformity with national and international quality standards and continuously improve the quality of provisions in higher education. ANQA creates a dialog about the setting-up and establishment of IQA systems at HEIs through regular cooperation with HEIs: organizing workshops, trainings, round table discussions, consultations.

The external quality assurance framework adopted by Armenian tertiary education entails:

- Mandatory institutional accreditation – it allows for periodic evaluation of how well an institution is operating and whether its governance is institutionalised to serve the mission for which it was established. Within the framework of institutional accreditation, 3 academic programmes are examined to evaluate the impact of the institutional regulations on the internal systems of teaching and learning.
- Voluntary academic programme accreditation - through the academic programme accreditation specific study programmes are examined. This type of accreditation is granted to separate programmes at specific levels based on learning outcomes and the extent to which the learning outcomes are in line with qualifications required. Programme accreditation is mandatory for academic programme offered by medical sciences. However, the experience of the agency conducting programme accreditation is not so large, because the country is in a cycle of institutional accreditation, which is a prerequisite for the programme accreditation. ANQA is in discussions with universities for properly planning a cycle of programme

accreditation in RA. Debates are about the issue as to how to be in line with stakeholder needs and ensure transparency for them concerning the quality of academic provisions in RA as soon as possible. ANQA is also planning to apply to the RA Government with the purpose of requesting the HEIs to have a certain percentage of the programmes accredited mandatorily. The other way to solve the problem will be the implementation of financial motivation mechanisms for the HEIs that have both institutional and programme accreditation. The primary purpose of such undertaking is to rectify the situation of financial difficulties caused by the decrease in students' number. After the cycle of institutional accreditation, the universities are engaged in the reforms of academic programmes to address the issues revealed during the institutional evaluation. Since 2011, RA has embraced the reform process of programmes prioritising student-centred approach, implementing outcome-based education and providing curriculum review with the aim of facilitating the implementation of adopted NQF. Institutional accreditation de facto stresses the gaps of tools used in country. As a result, all of the programmes in the country have to shift to Outcome Based Education (OBE) approach.

To implement accreditation processes, ANQA has established appropriate policies and procedures (Statute on State Accreditation, Accreditation Manual).

Accreditation procedures consider the peculiarities of internal quality assurance against the interpretation of ANQA accreditation criteria and standards. They are focusing on continuous improvement, requesting PDCA in IQA. Both institutional and academic programme accreditation criteria and standards (criterion 10 at institutional and criterion 7 at academic programme level) refer to internal policies and procedures for quality assurance adopted by institutions and academic programmes. In the document "Harmonisation of the criteria of ANQA for institutional and Programme accreditation with Part 1: European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance in the institutions of higher education" one can trace the conformity of Armenian evaluation and accreditation system with the relevant European standard. According to the mapping of the Armenian accreditation criteria and standards towards the compliance with the ESG, it can be noted, that ANQA covers all the peculiarities of ESG part 1. The text is published on the website of the Agency. It can also be noted, that the accreditation criteria and standards have been widely discussed with the institutions and are recognized by them as an important tool for development.

ANQA has evaluated the impact of accreditation processes on HEI IQA system. According to the results of the analysis, the impact is tangible and HEIs recognize a culture change.

ESG Part 1 standards	ANQA criteria and standards for institutional accreditation	ANQA criteria and standards for academic program accreditation
1.1. Policy for quality assurance	1 (1.1; 1.2; 1.3), 2 (2.1; 2.2; 2.3; 2.5); 4 (4.8); 5 (5.7); 10 (10.1; 10.2; 10.3; 10.4)	7 (7.1; 7.2; 7.4)

The assessment is highly concentrated on the programme management issues, as well as the development of institutional capacities in general to guarantee the culture of QA within the academic environment. The efficiency of internal QA system of institutions is also in focus.

1.2. Design and approval of programmes	3 (3.1; 3.2; 3.3; 3.4)	1 (1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4); 3 (3.1; 3.2); 5 (5.1; 5.2; 5.3; 5.4)

The outcome-based approach is of vital importance during assessment. The procedure of formation of an academic programme must be based on objective outcomes outlined with the involvement of internal and external stakeholders. Both formal and informal parts of creating and developing processes are assessed. All the components of academic programmes are assessed from the perspective of their accordance with the goals of the programme.

1.3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	3 (3.2; 3.3); 4 (4.2; 4.6)	3 (3.1; 3.2); 4 (4.1; 4.2; 4.3; 4.4; 4.5)

Learning, teaching and assessment methods are observed to ensure that all of them are based on learning outcomes, and students' active involvement in learning and fair assessment are appreciated. The transformation to student-centered approaches was one of the main challenges during the first cycle of institutional accreditation.

1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	4 (4.1; 4.2; 4.5)	1 (1.2)

Though being mostly addressed indirectly, these processes are discussed during site-visit with alumni and students. During the assessment, expert panels give importance especially to the recognition of students, observing it under different criteria.

1.5. Teaching staff	5 (5.1; 5.2; 5.3; 5.4; 5.5; 5.6)	2 (2.1; 2.2; 2.3; 2.4)

Having a separate criterion, the teaching staff is assessed by the means of its fitness to academic programmes or their capacity to execute the programmes. Issues of qualification, professional development, motivation and research are also taken into account.

1.6. Learning resources and student support	2 (2.1); 4 (4.2; 4.3; 4.4; 4.5; 4.7); 7 (7.1; 7.2; 7.3; 7.4; 7.6)	6 (6.1; 6.2; 6.3)

Learning and infrastructural resources are assessed through their accordance to requirements for conducive academic environment. Financial capacities of an institution are observed to ensure its stability and abilities to overcome challenges. The availability of learning for students with limited abilities is also assessed and thus encouraged.

1.7. Information management	2 (2.4; 2.5; 2.6; 2.7); 4 (4.2; 4.8); 5 (5.3); 7 (7.5; 7.7); 8 (8.3)	2 (2.2); 3 (3.3); 7 (7.3)

through information management the assessment is focused on the efficiency of documentation and its digitalization, the surveys to measure the level of satisfaction among students and other stakeholders, as well as other methods of collecting information and its use for improvements.

1.8. Public information	8 (8.1; 8.2; 8.3; 8.4); 10 (10.6)	

The publicity and transparency of qualitative and quantitative information on all the activities of the institution are assessed keeping focus on the permanent availability of full and reliable information for the stakeholders.		
1.9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	3 (3.4; 3.5); 4 (4.2; 4.8)	1 (1.5; 1.6; 1.7); 3 (3.3); 7 (7.3; 7.5)
The properly and regularly carried out benchmarking is of a high importance for the expert panels during their assessment. Internal QA system must have working procedures for the efficient review of programmes.		
1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance	10 (10.5)	
The institutions are either currently implementing or have just passed the first cycle of external QA, and that is why there is not much reference to the cyclicality of external QA during the assessment. Still, one of the standards requires that the IQA system should provide valid and sufficient background for the success of external QA processes.		

Table 10: Mapping of ANQA criteria and Standards towards ESG 2015

2.2. DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard:

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specially to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

Guidelines:

In order to ensure effectiveness and objectivity it is vital for external quality assurance to have clear aims agreed by stakeholders.

The aims, objectives and implementation of the processes will

- bear in mind the level of workload and cost that they will place on institutions;
- take into account the needs to support institutions to improve quality;
- allow institutions to demonstrate this improvements;
- result in clear information on the outcomes and the follow-up.

The system for external quality assurance might operate in a more flexible way if institutions are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance.

List of main evidences:

ANQA Mission	**Web**

ANQA Accreditation Manual 2015: Accreditation Ccriteria and standards	**Web**
Guide to the Establishment of Internal Quality Assurance System in TLIs	**Web**
Laws and regulations	**Web**
Experts' reports	**Web**
ANQA conclusions	**Web**
Accreditation Committee decisions	**Web**
Follow-up plan (sample)	**Web**

The objectives and aims of the processes for accreditation were determined before the development of the processes itself taking into account stakeholders' opinion (including higher education institutions). The description of the processes is publicly available along with a description of the procedures.

The aims and objectives set for the quality assurance processes are in line with ANQA's mission and evolve around:

- providing the systematic enhancement of tertiary level education;
- promoting Armenian higher education visibility and recognition at international level;
- being receptive to the needs of the national stakeholders through its institutional and programme accreditations;
- complying with international standards for quality assurance;
- valuing close cooperation with stakeholders in the process of developing a quality assurance system.

The procedures for external quality assurance, realized by the agency, have clear objectives and are made public on the Agency's website (see Accreditation Manual).

As for the procedure, stipulated in ANQA Accreditation manual, a standard approach to a self-assessment is pursued by an institution or programme under review, a desk-review of the self-assessment is reported by the expert panel, a site visit, a production of a draft and final reports as well as a follow-up plan are envisaged   Aiming to continuously improve each of these phases, and to practically ensure the process is effectively and justly organized. ANQA regularly gathers feedback from all the parties involved (TLIs, national and international experts, student experts, coordinators). Their reflections are regularly analyzed, discussed and considered in the improvement activities: for example, during the revision of ANQA accreditation manual or the proposals relating to the changes in the legislative framework.

Due to ANQA's capacities to consult the legislative and executive bodies on policy-making, the external quality assurance policy and procedures and relevant regulations are always in place. For instance, the Statute on State Accreditation has been changed based on the ANQA proposal. Proposals for the amendments in the Law on Education (regarding the quality assurance issues),

in the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Education and improvements of the Armenian National Qualification Framework have been submitted to MoES.

EQA system development started from stakeholders' needs assessment and their involvement into the development of EQA framework. The involvement of stakeholders was ensured in multiple ways:

- through organizing focus groups and discussions with HEIs, MoES and students about the aims and objectives of quality assurance to form mutual understanding of QA;
- through discussions with the RA Government and round table discussions with employers;
- through circulating the drafts of quality assurance framework, accreditation criteria, standards and procedures among the stakeholders for feedback;
- through piloting the newly developed criteria, standards and procedures at institutional and academic programme levels.

The discussions and focus groups helped to define the needs of the system, and set the aims and the objectives. During these meetings, it was agreed that the system needed to move towards enhancement rather than control. Hence an enhancement-led evaluation was adopted. Consultations with MoES and Government are carried out in order to harmonize the goals set for the external quality assurance (accreditation). ANQA has revised its strategic plan with the full consultation and involvement of all the stakeholders.

As for the development of QA criteria and standards, they were circulated among the stakeholders for feedback, were revised and adopted by the RA Government on June 30, 2011. Prior to the adoption, a series of pilots of both institutional and academic programme criteria, standards and the procedures were undertaken to ensure legitimacy of the adopted framework and acceptability by the stakeholders. Both the regular meetings and the results of the pilots pointed out the lack of the strategic management in the country, that's why the criteria and standards were developed placing great emphasis on the change in the right direction. The QA criteria and standards were developed with the involvement of all the stakeholders and were approved by the Government. Currently ANQA is refining QA criteria and standards through analyzing the self-assessment of HEIs and Experts' reports as well as the feedback received from HEIs and experts. Also, ANQA had different meetings with the representatives of HEIs and experts for the development of indicators for QA criteria and standards. Written feedback on criteria and standards was received from the HEIs After all these processes, ANQA has finalized the indicators for institutional and programme accreditation criteria and standards.

Starting from 2011 pilot accreditation procedures were carried out in three VET institutions. Currently regular meetings and discussions with VET system representatives and institutions are being implemented for the purpose of the development of quality assurance culture in VET institutions. Currently, the QA criteria and standards for the VET system are being clarified. A pilot designed to define thresholds for the VET system is foreseen to be implemented.

In the development of the accreditation procedure, the opinions of national and international experts and colleagues have regularly been observed and taken into account. International experts' opinion has been of outmost importance to ANQA from the very beginning. After each accreditation process, ANQA has received international peer feedback on each accreditation stage including criteria and standards. In general, internationals have so far given a positive feedback

regarding the organization and management of the accreditation. According to the international experts' opinion ANQA is on the right track. This means that ANQA operates the whole process in a very efficient and careful way what's more, the competence of the local experts, coordinators and interpreters have met very high professional standards. Hence, the overall process is very effective for the university to discover its strengths and weaknesses, from the perspective of enhancement through recommendations. As for the recommendations offered by the international experts, they are mainly related to the details of the accreditation process rather than to essence of the process. The main feedback from the international experts was first related to the Accreditation Manual: to include an overview of Armenian tertiary education system in the Accreditation Manual. This proposal was taken into account while revising the Manual. Respective information and materials were added to the experts' packages.

Essential adjustments to the procedures were agreed with the HEIs and experts (both national and international).

Regular feedback and evaluations from HEIs, experts (national and international) and students are provided to assess the effectiveness of methodology, the extent to which it is fit for purpose, the impact on the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning, the management of academic programmes, and the HEI as a whole.

Significant changes in the legal acts of the foundation were made based on the stakeholders' feedback:

- Regulatory framework (Accreditation Statute, ANQA Charter, Accreditation Manual) was developed in full consultation with the stakeholders: tertiary level institutions, ANQA coordinators, experts (both local and international), and MoES. Changes to the ANQA accreditation policies, procedures were also made drawing on the accreditation procedures conducted by ANQA. "Conditional accreditation" was included as one of the major results of the changes. All the regulatory documents are available on Agency's website.
- On November 23, based on the 14.1/{97088} decree of ANQA Board of Trustees the "Accreditation committee composition and operation procedure", "The experts' panel composition procedure" as well as Accreditation Manual were approved. The Statute of Accreditation Committee was refined with the full involvement of the stakeholders. In the Statute of Accreditation Committee some changes were made and accordingly the number of members, the decision making process and the regulation of electing the president were also changed.

For the institutions, the only two extra expenses that arose during the external quality assurance process were mainly related to the investments made for the self-assessment and the accreditation expenses included into the accreditation cost. During the first cycle, universities had some extras because the process was new and HEIs did not have much experience. From our estimation, during the second cycle universities will be more prepared since most of the preparatory activities will be based on the results of the regular internal QA activities. The required self-assessment report is mostly based on results and reports of internal quality assurance. As a result, not so much extra effort will be needed to produce a self-assessment report. To reduce the extra expenses needed for the accreditation process, some flexible approaches are propounded, especially for academic programme accreditation.

For stakeholders, most valuable part of the accreditation process outcomes is the final report and the recommendations made by the expert panel aimed at supporting the quality enhancement in the institutions. The overall processes are designed to be more consultative and not inspectional.

Both self-assessment and expert reports are in accordance with the templates, and are based on PDCA approach, which means that institutions are to show their mechanisms and achievements for the last 5 years.

As a conclusion of the whole process of external quality assurance, final reports include clear evaluation (satisfactory or unsatisfactory) on each criterion with justifications. The decisions of accreditation committee define whether full or conditional accreditation is rewarded or the accreditation is rejected. Final reports and committee decisions become publicly available.

Institutions also present their follow-up plans based on the recommendations made by the experts. The follow-up plans are examined by the experts.

2.3. IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Standard:

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include
     - a self-assessment or equivalent;
     - an external assessment normally including a site visit;
     - a report resulting from the external assessment;
     - a consistent follow-up.

Guidelines: External quality assurance carried out professionally, consistently and transparently ensures its acceptance and impact. Depending on the design of the external quality assurance system, the institution provides the basis for the external quality assurance through a self-assessment or by collecting other material including supporting evidence. The written documentation is normally complemented by interviews with stakeholders during a site visit. The findings of the assessment are summarized in a report (cf. Standard 2.5) written by a group of external experts (cf. Standard 2.4). External quality assurance does not end with the report by the experts. The report provides clear guidance for institutional action. Agencies have a consistent follow-up process for considering the action taken by the institution. The nature of the follow-up will depend on the design of the external quality assurance.

List of main evidences:	
A Guide to Self-assessment	**Web**
ANQA Accreditation Manual 2015: Part 4_Accreditation Process	**Web**

Self-assessment report (example)	**Web**
Site visit agenda (example)	**Web**
Experts' reports	**Web**
ANQA conclusions	**Web**
Accreditation Committee decisions	**Web**
Follow-up plan (example)	**Web**

The aims and objectives set for the quality assurance processes are in line with ANQA's mission.

External quality assurance processes and procedure are described in "ANQA Accreditation Manual", which is publicly available. Both institutional and academic programme accreditations are carried out in three consecutive phases:

- self-assessment (a written report of the institution's internal review according to ANQA template) conducted by the educational institution;
- external evaluation;
- decision made by ANQA's Accreditation Commission regarding the granting or denial of accreditation status.

Though ANQA recommends that the TLIs should annually conduct internal evaluation of their activities, the self-assessment report for accreditation must provide information on activities for the last five years. Institutions are also encouraged to raise issues on which they need external expert advice.

Next to the "Guide to Self-Assessment", ANQA provides self-assessment forms to ensure the efficiency of further phases of accreditation. Experts and HEIs are mostly satisfied (75%) with both the structure and the content of the forms. They think that those forms guide them during the process. Institutions submit self-assessment reports both in English and Armenian.

ANQA accepts or denies a self-assessment based on accreditation regulations. ANQA has a legal right to return a self-assessment if it does not comply with ANQA's standardized format, has contextual, technical, structural, or other imperfections, or has unreliable data. In such cases, the institution is to eliminate the inaccuracies and imperfections within one month.

External evaluation includes desk review, site visit, and report production, all of which is carried out by an expert panel. Once receiving the initial documentation (the self-assessment and the package of respective documents submitted by the institution according to the ANQA's template) from the ANQA coordinator, the expert panel examines the documents and completes a desk review report. During the meetings designed for the desk-review, experts introduce and discuss their findings on each standard, and as a result, outline the issues that are to be examined during the site visit, clarify the list of meetings, additional required information, its sources and the list of additional documents and specify major issues. The international experts' involvement in the desk-review process is assured via Skype meetings and e-mails.

During the site-visit, the expert panel verifies and validates the information provided in the self-assessment report and collects the missing information required for making clear conclusions on

ANQA criteria and standards. Site visit lasts 3-7 days depending on the type of accreditation, the size and specifications of the institution under review, etc. Typically the expert panel has meetings with all groups of internal and external stakeholders, observes additional documents and resources. The effectiveness of site visits in general and experts' contribution in particular is evaluated through a survey addressed to the HEI representatives. According to the results of the surveys the effectiveness of the site visits have been evaluated quite positively. The latter covered the questions related to the experts' skills to reveal necessary information for evaluation (89.2% was positive). The questions were also concerned with the effective organisation and management of the meetings (91.9%), etc.

The final report production by the expert panel is based on both the self-assessment and the outcomes of the site visit. The report consists of:
- a descriptive part (executive summary, description of the review process, overview of the assessment and annexes) to enable the reader to understand the context and the purpose of the review and
- experts' evaluation of an institution/programme against ANQA criteria (findings on each ANQA standard, considerations on each ANQA criterion, judgement and recommendations based on which the decisions were made (see Standard 2.6).

The surveys conducted among the HEIs demonstrate, that the language of the experts' review reports is clear (92%), and the reports provide basis for future analysis (91%). As for the recommendations HEI representatives consider them to be useful (92%) and realistic for implementation (75%).

The accreditation procedure adopted by the system also stipulates follow-up activities based on the recommendations in the experts' review report. To effectively manage the follow-up, a detailed follow-up plan of improvement is submitted by the HEI to ANQA (see ANQA Accreditation Manual, part 4.6). The preliminary follow-up plan is also to be submitted to ANQA. The expert panel evaluates the follow-up plan by its tangibility and accordance to the recommendations and issues. All the procedures on follow-up (its evaluation, execution and reporting on results) are pre-defined by the relevant guidelines. The results of the conducted surveys show that the HEIs and the experts are mostly satisfied with the form and the template for the follow-up plan is quite reasonable (75%).

Self-assessment reports, expert panel review reports and Accreditation Commission decisions are all published and available on ANQA website.

The whole accreditation process is bilingual(Armenian and English).

To continuously improve the process, to monitor the procedure, and evaluate the effective implementation of the accreditation process, ANQA implements regular studies among involved parties: experts, HEIs, coordinators.

The study of the effectiveness of the accreditation processes carried out by ANQA, allows to identify the actual state of arts of the process, to reveal the best practices, challenges and obstacles, to review and improve (according to goals and objectives) the regulatory framework and the process itself. The aim of the conducted evaluation is to study the accreditation process by the following consecutive phases:

- self-assessment of educational institutions
- external evaluation by the independent expert panel
- final report production

According to the results of the analysis carried out among the main stakeholders, it could be noted, that the workload of the process is reasonable and the time periods for each activity are realistic.

2.4. PEER REVIEW EXPERTS

Standard:
External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).
Guidelines: At the core of external quality assurance is the wide range of expertise provided by peer experts, who contribute to the work of the agency through input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students and employers/professional practitioners. In order to ensure the value and consistency of the work of the experts, they • are carefully selected; • have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task; • are supported by appropriate training and/or briefing. The agency ensures the independence of the experts by implementing a mechanism of no-conflict-of-interest. The involvement of international experts in external quality assurance, for example as members of peer panels, is desirable as it adds a further dimension to the development and implementation of processes

List of main evidences:	
Regulation on the Formation of ANQA Expert Panel	**Web**
ANQA Accreditation Manual 2015: Part 5_Guidelines and criteria for Peer-Review Experts	**Web**
ANQA Code of Ethics and the Rules of Conduct	**Web**

The expert panels consist of specialists and students who are selected according to clearly defined procedures developed by ANQA and ratified by the Board of Trustees.

According to the established statute, ANQA's announcement of candidate expert recruitment is published on ANQA website; it is also sent to co-partner organizations (universities, National Academy of Sciences, unions of employers, etc.). Candidate experts send their CVs to ANQA. The committee formed from ANQA's experienced staff is making the initial selection of candidate experts. Candidate-experts are invited for an interview during which they present all the necessary documents validating the information provided by them. The selected candidates are included into

the expert pool, which ensures their participation in the trainings organized by ANQA. Candidates who successfully complete the trainings acquire the status of an external expert and are registered in the expert pool by ANQA.

Expert panels are composed of academic staff representatives, education management and/or quality assurance professionals, representatives and/or employers from specific field of industry. To ensure students' views are considered in the evaluation the expert panels include one student representative. To ensure new wave of approaches are introduced each expert panel has one to two international experts. International experts are selected from the expert pool of an authoritative international accreditation (quality assurance) agency, from the international networks/associations (EURASHE, INQAAHE, ECA, etc.), from the EU and regional project partner institutions and from the international expert pool of ANQA. The involvement of the international experts is highly evaluated by the HEIs.

The students are given equal treatment as panel members and room to voice their concerns. The students for accreditation process are recruited by ANQA Student Voice Programme. The Student trainings are organized with the involvement of ANQA experienced experts, coordinators, representatives of the HEIs, etc.

It is practiced to involve one education management and/or quality assurance professional and two academic staff representatives.

Employers are involved in expert panels for academic programme accreditation. During each institutional accreditation a meeting with employers in site visit is foreseen.

For each accreditation case, ANQA submits a selected shortlist of experts (7 to 10 experts) to the Accreditation Commission. Then the expert panel (5 to 7 experts) is formed from the agreed list. The preliminary list of the panel is sent to the institution for approval.

For each expert panel ANQA appoints a coordinator, who is responsible for the procedure and organisational part, but who is not a panel member and has no influence on evaluation and decision-making processes.

In order to ensure an equitable and fair distribution of responsibilities among the expert panel members, one of them is elected as the Panel Chair.

66 local experts, 28 international experts, 28 student experts and 13 coordinators have been involved in expert panels. ANQA strives to keep the gender balance in the expert panels and tries to combine the quantitative expansion of the experts' database with the qualitative expansion by on-going trainings and involvement for multiple times.

	Once	Twice	More	Total number
International experts	19	7	2	28
Student experts	25	3	0	28
Local experts	45	16	5	66
Coordinators	7	1	5	13

Table 11: Experts' and coordinators' involvement

Besides the initial trainings designed to instill confidence among candidate experts for their further proper and independent assessment, ongoing trainings and practical guidance are also provided during the processes. These trainings are designed to keep experts updated on new and evolving procedures and requirements. The training materials are periodically updated based on the experts' and coordinators' feedback. Such trainings are conducted by ANQA Policy Development and Implementation Division. As for the ongoing trainings, ANQA professional staff, coordinators, and sometimes the most qualified experts are in charge of them.

Within the framework of surveys and focus groups conducted among the experts on the effectiveness of the accreditation process, the experts evaluate effectiveness of the trainings provided by ANQA from the following point of view:

- to what extent the trainings were effective (86.8%)
- to what extent the trainings were well-organized (83.3%)
- to what extent the trainings were purposeful (88.9%)
- to what extent the trainings were targeted (75%)

The open-ended questions gave the experts opportunity to express their opinion and ground their choice regarding the effectiveness of the trainings. They stated that the trainings conducted by ANQA clarified the aim and importance of the whole accreditation process and presented the whole process step by step.

The performance of the experts is periodically monitored and evaluated during all the phases of accreditation after the panel composition. The panel is evaluated by ANQA staff (usually by internal quality assurance specialist or the specialist in charge of process monitoring), by the institution (after each site-visit meeting the representatives of the HEIs fill in the evaluation form and at the end of the process a survey on the overall satisfaction from the procedure is conducted) and by the coordinator (experts' evaluation form and a report on the effectiveness of the procedure). The results of these evaluations are discussed and used to improve the accreditation processes.

At the very beginning of the process (prior to the desk-review), the experts must disclose any professional, financial and work-related interest that could be construed as a conflict of interest. They must inform ANQA about any problem that might provoke a conflict of interest with the institution and must sign an agreement whereby any kind of conflict of interest is excluded. ANQA has adopted a strict conflict-of-interest policy for experts nominated for participation in the accreditation process. ANQA has also designed the Code of Ethics, which regulates the principles of experts' behaviour and independence. To ensure financial independence ANQA signs a paid-service-provision contract with each expert with above-average rate of payment.

The HE environment of RA can be described as a relatively small academic community, which considers some risks and difficulties regarding the recruitment of suitable experts both by quantitative and qualitative means. However, the presence of several institutions almost in all the academic areas assures sufficient availability of experts. Besides, the engagement of employers and international experts fully compensates the disadvantage of small academic community. The other efficiently implemented tool is the use of pre-defined methodology for external QA.

2.5. CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Standard:
Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.
Guidelines:
External quality assurance and in particular its outcomes have a significant impact on institutions and programmes that are evaluated and judged.
In the interests of equity and reliability, outcomes of external quality assurance are based on pre-defined and published criteria, which are interpreted consistently and are evidence-based. Depending on the external quality assurance system, outcomes may take different forms, for example, recommendations, judgements or formal decisions

List of main evidences:	
Procedure on Formation and Operation of ANQA Accreditation Committee	**Web**
Statute on State Accreditation of institutions and Academic Programmes in RA	**Web**
ANQA Accreditation Manual 2015: Part 4_Decision on Accreditation process	**Web**
Experts' reports	**Web**
ANQA conclusions	**Web**
Accreditation Committee decisions Institutional Accreditation State Register	**Web** **Web**
Follow-up plan (example)	**Web**

The procedure on decision-making of the Accreditation Committee is regulated by the procedure on "Formation and Operation of Accreditation Committee". The Accreditation Committee is an independent, collegial, permanently operating body, which carries out its functions and exercises its powers within the principles of legitimacy and liberty, guided by the RA Government decree N 978-N on approval of the Statute on State Accreditation of TLIs and Academic Programmes in RA, N 959-N on approval of the RA Educational Accreditation criteria, ANQA Charter, the procedure of formation and operation of the Accreditation Committee and other legal and normative acts.

ANQA has established a set of principles described in the Accreditation Manual, in the Code of Ethics and other guidelines, in addition to the pre-defined and published criteria and standards for both institutional and programme accreditations (see Standard 2.1). All the mentioned documents are disseminated among the stakeholders and are publicly available. These principles are addressed to experts and accreditation committee members and are absorbed via trainings by ANQA. One of the main principles of evaluation is to observe each case from the prospect of goals

of the particular institution without using direct comparison to any other institution during evaluation. Each finding is interpreted taking into consideration its benefits and potential risks for the institution, its importance to the learning environment and the accomplishment of academic programme. This approach is used by the expert panel to make judgements and come to final conclusion for each criterion, and by the accreditation committee to grant or reject accreditation.

ANQA has developed issues to be addressed under each standard and to ensure that the same set of information is observed and taken into account by different expert panels as an input. This particular issues are discussed with the experts during the trainings.

The final outcome of the whole process is the decision on accreditation and the follow-up plan for enhancement.

Aiming at checking the reliable accuracy of the implementation of ANQA policy and procedures by the expert panel, the level of adherence to RA Accreditation Criteria and the realistic nature of the institution's follow-up plan, the package of all the necessary documents (self-assessment report, the expert panel report, ANQA conclusion, the institution's follow-up plan, and the expert panel's opinion of that plan) is sent to the Accreditation Committee and the institution under the review at least two weeks before the Accreditation Committee Meeting.

The accreditation decision may be one of the following:

- to grant institutional accreditation for a period of 4 or 6 years (programme accreditation for a period of 5 years),
- to grant conditional accreditation for a period of two years,
- to reject accreditation taking into account the urgency of changes needed for an institution to manage the risks and to ensure the sustainable development.

The principles of decision-making are discussed and agreed with institutions and other stakeholders to guarantee the acceptance, transparency and equity of decisions by making the Accreditation Committee a predictable decision-maker. For the first cycle, the following actions were specifically highlighted: the management of the academic programmes; the existence of policies and procedures directed to revealing the students educational needs, and providing them with necessary support and services; the reflection of stakeholders' needs; and the evaluation of achievements. Faculty and staff, infrastructure and resources, as well as internal quality assurance are also among important criteria and are attentively taken into account by the Accreditation Committee. The shortcomings of the above-mentioned fields are extremely urgent to overcome. The significance of the remaining criteria is lesser on the current stage, and so is the reflection in the decision and the follow-up plan. The latter is observed by the Accreditation Committee and taken into consideration by means of capacities of the institution (experience, human and financial resources) to overcome the gaps revealed during review processes.

The conclusions on institutional or programme accreditation along with the accreditation decision are published on ANQA's website. The panel reports are also published straight after the accreditation decision. To provide information on accredited institutions and programmes to the public and international organizations, in case of positive decision institutions and programmes are included in the State Accreditation Register.

Accredited institution carries out internal evaluation once every two years, which means assessment of the areas in need for amelioration as mentioned in the expert report via follow-up plan progress monitoring.

Upon gaining conditional accreditation, an institution submits a written report to ANQA once every six months on follow-up implementation. While preparing the reports, institutions should highlight the compliance with the follow-up plan and analyse the effectiveness of the implemented actions.

The rejection or granting conditional accreditation leads to several consequences for an institution, which are set forth in the Accreditation Statute. In case of a negative result of institutional accreditation, full tuition reimbursement in the form of student benefits allocated by state are terminated for the particular educational institution for all academic degrees. The financing of scientific and technical activities is also terminated dating from the next academic year till the gaining of institutional accreditation. In case of conditional institutional accreditation, an educational institution cannot apply for the programme accreditation and open a new academic programme. In case of a negative result of programme accreditation, full tuition reimbursement in the form of student benefits for the particular academic programme allocated by the state is terminated for all academic degrees dating from the next academic year till the gaining of programme accreditation. If the programme accreditation result is negative for a bachelor's programme, then full tuition reimbursement in the form of student benefits allocated by the state is terminated for the all three academic degrees dating from the next academic year until the gaining of programme accreditation. All these limitations are set to prevent the risks of receiving ineffectual educational services by students as the highest priority.

2.6. REPORTING

Standard:

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

Guidelines:

The report by the experts is the basis for the institution's follow-up action of the external evaluation and it provides information to society regarding the activities of an institution. In order for the report to be used as the basis for action to be taken, it needs to be clear and concise in its structure and language and to cover

- context description (to help locate the higher education institution in its specific context);
- description of the individual procedure, including experts involved;
- evidence, analysis and findings;
- conclusions;
- features of good practice, demonstrated by the institution;

> recommendations for follow-up action.
>
> The preparation of a summary report may be useful.
>
> The factual accuracy of a report is improved if the institution is given the opportunity to point out errors of fact before the report is finalised.

List of main evidences:	
ANQA Accreditation Manual 2015	**Web**
Experts' reports	**Web**
ANQA conclusions	**Web**
Accreditation Committee decisions	**Web**

The main report production process starts right after the site visit during six weeks, though some major decisions (evaluation of QA criteria and standards) are made on the last day of the site-visit and some preparations for the report are usually done by the expert panel during the observation of self-assessment report at desk-review phases

All the reports are required to fit the template designed by ANQA, which ensures that reports are understandable for all readers. Reports include:

- an executive summary, in which the expert panel outlines the overview of the institution or the programme and the main results of the assessment by mentioning strengths and weaknesses of the institution or the programme and the main recommendations;
- a peer-review written by the international expert aiming at strengthening the institution's competitiveness at international level, emphasizing its compliance with the international benchmarks and promoting its integration into the EHEA;
- a brief introduction of expert panel members;
- description of the process, including the stages of application for accreditation, expert panel formation, preparatory visit, site visit, report producing;
- general information on the institution or the programme, including the background, history and summarized current situation on educational, research, internationalization and internal quality assurance processes;
- the main part, which include:
  — detailed findings on each standard brought out from the self-assessment report, its appendices, other documents and site visit meetings;
  — considerations on each criterion based on findings to bring out the key elements resulting from the assessment of the criteria and recommendations;
  — a panel conclusion on each criterion, which is panel's position whether or not the institution or programme meets the minimal requirements of each criterion;
  — recommendations on each criterion, which indicate the problems that need solutions without pointing out specific actions;
- overview of the assessment by summarizing judgements on all criteria to provide quick information;

- appendices usually including panel members' CVs, site visit agenda, list of reviewed documents and resources, organizational structure (in case of institutional accreditation), list of used abbreviations.

The Panel Chair with the support of the ANQA coordinator makes the preliminary version of the expert report. However, all the experts are to participate in the report production. During their discussions instead of simple voting procedure panels make decisions only based on consensus ensuring the consideration of opinion and active role of each expert.

Preliminary version of the report is being sent to the institution after all the experts have come to an agreement on it. The institution has the opportunity to make clarifications found in the preliminary report. Within two weeks, the institution prepares and presents its objections and comments related to the findings and information about the institution or programme. This list of objections is being passed to the expert panel, which scrutinizes the written response and, if need be, makes respective changes in the report or rejects objections, in both cases giving written explanation. Recently, ANQA has practiced discussions between expert panels and institutions on the comments and objections of the institutions to increase mutual understanding and satisfaction of the institutions and to ensure higher level of transparency and objectiveness. After this, the reports have been finalized and sent to the Accreditation Committee.

All the reports both in Armenian and English are published on ANQA website with the decision of the Accreditation Committee. Instead of separate summaries, the ANQA conclusions together with the decisions on each university are published.

ANQA pays much attention to the usefulness of the reports, thus regularly collecting feedback on them. In the evaluation, the following issues are taken into account:
- to what extent the language of the expert panel report was understandable
- to what extent the panel report reflects perception of university environment
- to what extent the panel report takes into consideration the university history and the directions of futher development,
- to what extent the expert panel report reflects the university strategy,
- to what extent the university accepts the weak points mentioned in the report,
- to what extent the report has impact on the development of the university's new strategy
- to what extent the report has impact on the governance of the university.

The recent evaluation of results has shown that, on a whole, the expert panel reports, fulfil their purpose, and the panel reports have had impact on the further development of the university. As for the HEIs they agree with the vast majority of the recommendations given to them as, in their estimation, those recommendations are useful and applicable.

2.7. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Standard:
Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

Guidelines:

In order to safeguard the rights of the institutions and ensure fair decision-making, external quality assurance is operated in an open and accountable way. Nevertheless, there may be misapprehensions or instances of dissatisfaction about the process or formal outcomes.

Institutions need to have access to processes that allow them to raise issues of concern with the agency; the agencies, need to handle such issues in a professional way by means of a clearly defined process that is consistently applied.

A complaints procedure allows an in situation to state its dissatisfaction about the conduct of the process or those carrying it out.

In an appeals procedure, the institution questions the formal outcomes of the process, where it can demonstrate that the outcome is not based on sound evidence, that criteria have not been correctly applied or that the processes have not been consistently implemented

List of main evidences:	
ANQA Accreditation Manual 2015: Part 5.7_ Appeal of a decision on accreditation	Web
Procedure on Formation and Operation of ANQA Accreditation Committee: Point 10_ Appealing the Decision of the Committee	Web

An educational institution that disagrees with the Accreditation Committee decision is entitled to an appeal, in addition to the objection procedure (see Standard 2.6).

The logic of review is the second chance for the HEI.

Within a month after receiving the accreditation decision, an institution may appeal to the ANQA Board of Trustees against the Committee's decision. The appeal must clearly and convincingly demonstrate adversely assessed criteria and/or alleged procedural violations against the institution. Within ten working days after receiving, the appeal the head of ANQA Board of Trustees makes a new three-member expert committee from ANQA expert pool for additional review. An international expert is being included in the expert committee. The experts involved in the initial accreditation process cannot be included in the new expert committee. The staff of expert committee must be agreed with the educational institution. The appellant presents the self-assessment of appealed standards to ANQA by the approved format. The other stages of assessment are similar to those of standard process, including SAR observation, site visit, expert report producing, and objection opportunity for the institution. The expert committee submits the final report to ANQA. The complete documentation package of appeal is sent to the ANQA Board of Trustees. After getting the final expert report, ANQA convenes a meeting of the Accreditation Committee within two months to make a new decision, which cannot be appealed to ANQA again.

Another mechanism for the institution to get another opportunity to take part in the accreditation process and voice its objections is participation to Accreditation Committee meeting. The institution is also entitled to disapprove of the expert panel candidates on the stage of its formation.

Since a paid service contract between the institution and ANQA is signed at the beginning of the whole process, the ultimate complaint making mechanism is to apply to court and dissolve the contract if any rational reason exists.

In practice, only accreditation denial and conditional accreditation decisions have so far been appealed yet. However, the university that was denied an accreditation terminated the process after the submission of the final report to the institution.

12. INFORMATION AND OPINION OF THE AGENCY' S KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Currently quality assurance of Armenian higher education institutions is one of the priorities in the Armenian Government agenda. One of the key factors for success for ANQA is the quality of the stakeholder relations. ANQA has a wide range of external stakeholders:
- The Higher Education Institutions (especially their boards, their quality assurance officers and academic staff)
- Students and prospective students of Armenian Higher Education
- The Government, the Minister of Education and Science of the RA
- Employers and employee organizations, and agencies that bear responsibility for a proper functioning of the labor market
- Quality Assurance Agencies in other European countries and in other countries of the world
- European organizations of Universities
- International networks for quality assurance and education.

ANQA also supports the **"Students' Voice"** programme (launched in 2011 by ANQA) urging students to be more demanding to their education quality enhancement. .
The "Students' voice" programme strategy is:
- to increase students' awareness on educational reforms,
- to reveal the main issues of concern for students via research,
- to replenish the student-experts' database and provide student- experts for accreditation processes through continuous trainings,
- to establish a students' network for collecting and studying their opinions and presenting the results.

Stakeholders are part of all the processes of policy development and implementation in an appropriate way. This means that a consultation process in all policy-making activities is an essential part of the ANQA's day-to-day work. Methods of interactive policymaking are part of the normal practice of ANQA policy development.
Apart from involvement in policy-making on specific subjects, it is also important to establish procedures to communicate with different stakeholders on a permanent basis. A website,

newsletters, regular meetings and for instance focus groups are in place to ensure effective communication with the stakeholders and their proactive involvement in ANQA activities.

Referring to ANQA's international colleagues' and stakeholders' reflections on ANQA and its role in the country, it has been noted, that: "ANQA is actively seeking ways to improve the external quality assurance system in the country. The agency regularly gathers feedback from stakeholders and uses it in its internal quality assurance. ANQA is doing a lot to foster the development of the quality culture and build up the capacity for institutional self-assessment skills. This happens for instance through regular seminars, workshops, round-table discussions and projects. It is vitally important that the institutions that underwent accreditation processes present the benefits and lessons learned from their own accreditations, thus acting as models and motivating other HEIs to apply for accreditation".

In the reports, the ANQA's international experts and representatives from the foreign agencies mentioned, that they were impressed by the high level of awareness of the recent developments and trends of the European external quality assurance among the ANQA staff members.

In the Twinning project monitoring report, the experts, came to the conclusion, that in the sector of HE, ANQA is in the best position to establish its donor coordination role, due to its sufficient professional capacities and natural role in the process of QA in HE.

ANQA was involved in the Project "Council of Europe, Strengthening Integrity and Combating Corruption in Higher Education in Armenia", within the framework of which a risk analysis of issues affecting the integrity of the Armenian higher education system was implemented. Regarding the position of ANQA in the country, the international experts came to the conclusion that the universities accept ANQA, they were impressed by the amount of work ANQA has undertaken, and the many ways in which it has progressed to 'European good practice' approaches in its activities. For example, the actual accreditation process is consistent with key aspects of the Western European approaches they are familiar with.

13.A FEEDBACK REPORT ANALYSIS ON QUALITY AND CONSISTENCY OF THE SERVICES OF THE AGENCY

ANQA implements comprehensive analyses of the accreditation process to evaluate the effectiveness and continueously improve it on a yearly basis. This implies:

- Revealing the drawbacks and shortcomings related to the accreditation process;
- Revealing the best practices;
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the process itself;
- Reviewing the regulatory documents;
- Pointing out the areas in need of improvement.

The objectives of the study are:

- to describe the current state of the accreditation procedure,
- to collect feedback and reveal issues related to:

    — experts training
    — the information and the document package provided by ANQA
    — application procedure
    — procedure for submitting self-assessment
    — ANQA e-form
    — experts panel structure and composition
    — self-assessment
    — desk-review
    — site-visit
    — expert report
    — HEI follow-up plan
    — expert's independence
    — expert-coordinator relations
    — professional skills of the coordinator
    — cooperation with the international expert
    — work ethos
    — accreditation process deadlines
    — advice/consultation provided

A mixed methodology is applied for the study: quantitative and qualitative (survey among HEIs, experts, coordinators, focus group meeting with experts and HEI representatives, evaluation of the experts after each meeting during the site-visit). The research is implemented according to its consecutive phases: self-assessment, desk–review, sitevisit, preparation of the experts' review report:

The effectiveness and usefulness of accreditation process by phases:	% Frequency
1. self-assessment	75%
2. desk-review	96.7%
3. site-visit	100%
4. preparation of the experts' review report	97%
Total	100%

Table 12: effectiveness of the accreditation process

Comprehensive analysis of Accreditation process   **Web**

14. CURRENT CHALLENGES AND AREAS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

One of the most important indicators of the successful formation of the QA system in the field of tertiary education is the stakeholders' realization of their own interests and aspiration to participate in QA processes. Thereby, during the period of transition the main challenges were the formation of quality areas, quality culture and capacity-building, while at the current stage, when ANQA has turned into a well-structured organization with efficient QA system, the challenges mainly arise from the needs of the stakeholders.

Taking into account the results of research studies and surveys carried out by ANQA, current challenges are to support the enhancement of internal QA systems in TLIs, to organize the process of programme accreditation effectively and efficiently and to ensure its public recognition, to protect competition and the rights of consumers in the market of educational services, to manage the risks, to promote local TLIs internationally, to ensure the transparency and availability of information about the quality of education. Heading toward these challenges, the strategic priorities for upcoming development are the following:

- Efficient fruition of programme accreditation process, its recognition, focus on student-centred learning, and the establishment of clustered accreditation,
- Promotion of the establishment of cluster accreditation in the country, and the Agency's internationalization with both regional and European vectors aiming at enhancement of international recognition of Armenian tertiary education,
- Development of the agency's potential as an institution realizing external quality assurance in the field of tertiary education,
- Launch of accreditation process for VET institutions.

All these challenges and priorities are reflected in the ANQA 2016-2020 strategic plan.

15. LIST OF THE ANNEXES

1. ANQA Strategic Plan_2010-2015
2. ANQA Strategic Plan_2016-2020
3. ANQA Charter
4. Procedure on "Formation and Operations of ANQA Accreditation Committee"
5. ANQA Accreditation Manual_2015
6. Statute on State Accreditation of Institutions and their Academic Programmes in RA
7. Mapping of RA criteria and Standards towards ESG 2015
8. Regulation on the Formation of ANQA Expert Panel