



ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE

DECREE N 22

15 June 2017

**ON ACCREDITATION OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES OF
GAVAR STATE UNIVERSITY**

General Information about the Institution

Full name of the Institution: Gavar State University

Acronym: GSU

Official Address: Hrant Hakobyan 1 str., Gavar, Republic of Armenia

Previous Accreditation decree and date: Not available

Guided by the regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs” approved by the RA Government on 30 June, 2011 N 978-Ն decree; by RA Government decree N 959-Ն (30 June 2011) on “Approval of RA Standards for Professional Education Accreditation”; by the Procedure on the Formation and Functioning of Accreditation Committee of “National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance” foundation (ANQA) as well as by ANQA Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel, in the open session held on 17 June 2017, the Accreditation Committee of “National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance” foundation (hereinafter referred to as the Committee) discussed the issue of state institutional accreditation of Gavar State University (hereinafter: GSU or the University) with the presence of the representatives of the RA Ministry of Education and Science, Chair of the expert panel, ANQA coordinator of the accreditation procedure and GSU representatives.

Having examined GSU's self-analysis and the University's comments and suggestions on the draft expert panel report, the expert panel report, GSU action plan on the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel report as well as ANQA conclusion, the Committee stated the following:

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

Submission of the application 12 July 2016

Submission of self-analysis of the University 29 September 2016

Site-visit 5-8 December 2016

Submission of the expert panel report 6 April 2017

Submission of action plan on the
elimination of shortcomings 4 May 2017

GSU expertise was carried out by an independent expert panel formed in compliance with the requirements set by the ANQA "Regulation on the Formation of Expert Panel". The evaluation was carried out according to the 10 criteria of institutional accreditation approved by N 959-Ն (30 June 2011) Decree of the RA Government.

While carrying out the expertise the expert panel took into consideration that “Gavar State University is the only state higher education institution in Gegharkunik region of the Republic of Armenia which has ambitions to efficiently implement professional academic programs, to prepare competitive specialists with Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees, to carry out educational-methodical, scientific-research, teaching and learning activities, to expand external cooperation as well as to foster socio-cultural development of the region”.

The University didn't undergo accreditation according to the state accreditation criteria and respective regulation which functioned until 2011. GSU has undergone the current process of accreditation according to its application.

GSU implements 16 BA full-time and part-time academic programs and 13 full-time MA academic programs. The programs are structured on the credit basis and in accordance with the state educational standards developed till 2009. They were reviewed in 2015. With the aim to improve some of the GSU academic programs, the curricula of National Polytechnic University of Armenia were studied. GSU doesn't implement academic programs in foreign languages but some courses in foreign languages have been developed to ensure internal mobility. Within the framework of RETHINKE in cooperation with University of Coruna (Spain) GSU implements a double diploma program in the profession of “Environmental and Natural Resources Management”.

GSU has launched the educational process by applying the outcome-based approach and has developed intended learning outcomes for academic programs and separate courses. However, the University needs to review its formulations and to do mapping in accordance with the descriptors of the respective descriptors of NQF.

GSU has necessary administrative, teaching and support staffs to fulfill its mission and to implement academic programs. The formation of the staff with qualifications necessary for the implementation of the courses serves as a basis for the selection of the teaching staff, however, the requirements set for the professional qualities of the teaching staff are generic. The University has 145 teaching staff members, 15 of them are Doctors of Sciences, and 60 of them hold PhD. The 31% of teachers are associate professors, and 5,5% of them - professors. There are mechanisms of evaluating teachers' professional qualities and their performance according to which the scientific-pedagogical and educational activities of the teaching staff are being evaluated. However, the application of the current mechanisms needs to be coordinated, and the efficiency of the tools and mechanisms isn't evaluated. A number of trainings have been held at GSU, and the processes directed to the professional development of the teaching staff are currently at the stage of investment. The University is quite active in terms of involving young teachers; 43,4% of the teaching staff members are young teachers.

The current resources of GSU are not sufficient for ensuring efficient learning environment and formulating learning outcomes of academic programs. Except for the laboratory of Natural Sciences, the major part of other laboratories, lingaphone cabinets and classrooms is not equipped with necessary

material-technical base. GSU libraries need to ensure availability of international library funds. Besides, GSU needs to modernize and digitize its literature resources, and computer rooms need to be equipped with licensed packages of programs of research and statistic analyses. The main financial inflows are formed by the tuition fees and state funding. The financial management of the University does not imply resource allocation according to strategic directions and academic programs. The financial resources are distributed in short-term (annual) period and are mainly allocated to the salary fund and some part of them – to other articles. The data management electronic system is at the stage of investment, and the operation of the system is not full yet which would allow the University to coordinate the amount of the necessary information and the activities relating its acquisition, research, analysis and dissemination.

The recruitment, selection and admission of GSU students are carried out in accordance with the respective regulations. In order to promote efficient learning of students, the University creates opportunities for the organization of facultative classes and provision of consultancy. It is a positive point that students can apply to the administrative staff and to the rector for support and guidance and accordingly to receive feedback, but at the same time the process of identifying students' academic needs to be coordinated. The University isn't active in terms of undertaking activities directed to students' career orientation.

GSU gives importance to the transition from teacher-centered approach to student-centered approach. However, the transition is not clear and complete yet. As the meetings with students stated, students' insight and comprehension about the new approach are not clearly formulated.

In GSU interactive teaching is being organized but the selection of teaching and learning methods is not coordinated yet which is conditioned by the lack of generic approach to the selection of teaching and learning methods. In the University the multifunctional assessment system is being functioned about which students are kept informed by means of guidebooks of academic programs. GSU has developed and invested a regulation on consideration of student appeal and a concept on academic honesty. There are some problems in terms of the weak link of assessment methods with teaching and learning methods and learning outcomes. The University doesn't apply mapping of teaching, learning and assessment methods and learning outcomes yet.

The strategy reflecting the interests and ambitions of the University in research as well as the steps directed to them are not clearly defined yet. The research activity is limited in GSU in terms of both implementation of international research and involvement of students and teachers in research activities. The long-term strategy and mid-term and short-term action plans reflecting the University's' research interests and ambitions are lacking. There are research directions at chair level but they are not clearly formulated as plans, and the research directions of the chairs are not always linked with the strategic priorities of the University. In spite of the fact that GSU is the only regional education institution, the research directions of the University are not derived from the issues of regional development. There isn't any structural unit or a responsible staff member, except for the Scientific Council, Faculty Councils and Vice-rector on Scientific Affairs, regulating the scientific activity of the University. GSU hasn't yet adopted a united strategic approach for developing its scientific-research activity, and the achievements in research are mainly reached due to personal initiatives. The scientific-research activity of the University is not managed in a regulated way, and the lack of inter-chair research and exchange of practice accumulated by

chairs does not foster the proportional development and dissemination of best practices. The research, final papers and master theses are viewed as a mechanism interlinking the research activity and educational process, however, as the observation of research papers and theses has shown, the research and innovative components form a little part of the papers.

The top management of the University gives importance to the creation of environment which fosters practice exchange, development and internationalization. GSU has partnership agreements with a number of both local and international organizations. The University is involved in 22 international projects within the framework of which it cooperates with 75 international organizations. In the scope of international projects some of the staff members have participated in a number of seminars, trainings and workshops. There is a need to disseminate best practices achieved within the framework of international cooperation as well as to evaluate the impact of the projects on GSU's activities.

It is appreciated that GSU makes efforts to efficiently carry out educational and other activities. Nevertheless, GSU management system needs more clarification and further simplification. The existence of documentary basis regulating the activities of GSU's structural units is another good point, but there is a need to evaluate the efficiency of the management system. Teachers and students have the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes relating them but the efficiency of mechanisms of involving stakeholders isn't evaluated yet. The study of factors having an impact on the activity of the University is not coordinated. The administration of GSU's policies and procedures is partially implemented in accordance with the PDCA cycle of quality management; the main processes are at the stages of planning and implementation.

The University's efforts towards investment and operation of internal QA system are also appreciated. However, steps taken to the efficient operation of the system are not coordinated yet. Although the University has developed a QA manual, the mechanisms which would give the University an opportunity to evaluate the process of continuous improvement of all the processes are not clarified and complete. The imperfection of mechanisms and toolset evaluating the efficiency of different processes as well as the absence of analyses do not give an opportunity to evaluate the impact of QA processes on the improvement of academic programs and the activity of the University. Although GSU has developed a documentary basis and a structural unit has been established respectively, the QA system is not fully integrated in the University's processes.

GSU is suggested to implement the following recommendations within the scope of its strategy. The recommendations are aimed at the solution of problems identified by the expert panel during the accreditation as well as at further improvement of the University.

Mission and Goals

1. To review and clarify the mission of the University by defining more realistic, measurable and more comprehensible (for stakeholders) ambitions in terms of awarded qualifications and intended outcomes.
2. To amend the Strategic Plan (SP) of the University by defining strategic directions and/or priorities, to develop short-term and mid-term action plans and precise time-schedule for SP implementation.
3. To clarify the steps in the SP monitoring plan, deadlines set for their implementation, responsible staff members as well as mechanisms and sources of data collection.

Governance and Administration

4. To clarify and simplify GSU management structure by ensuring compliance of GSU strategic goals and management system, responsibilities and functions of the staff of all structural units and to ensure their interaction. To clarify the list of necessary documents available in different structural units.
5. To invest mechanisms of evaluating the efficiency of activities of administrative units as well as identifying and disseminating best practices of chairs and faculties.
6. To develop short-term and mid-term action plans and respective mechanisms enabling their implementation, monitoring and evaluation in order to guarantee the fulfillment of the goals set by the SP.
7. To review the current mechanisms and regulations in order to operate the administration of policies and procedures at all levels of the University's management in accordance with the PDCA cycle of quality management.
8. To develop mechanisms and procedures which will enable to scan the factors having an impact on the activity of the University, as well as to collect necessary valid data on the efficiency of current academic programs and ongoing processes of in the University.

Academic Programs

9. To map the learning outcomes of academic programs with NQF by pointing out their compliance.
10. To invest a policy on the selection of teaching-learning-assessment for reaching the outcomes of academic programs and courses by emphasizing their compliance with the outcomes and the student-centered approach.
11. To clarify the policy on credit allocation and calculation by linking it with the learning outcomes.
12. To review syllabi of the courses, aimed at ensuring compliance of the content of part-time courses with the learning outcomes as well as arranging the differences between full-time and part-time syllabi of the courses.
13. To develop clear criteria for the evaluation of master theses, research, final and individual papers by ensuring the link of the criteria with the content-related (research and analytical components) and technical requirements.
14. To carry out benchmarking with the aim to make the academic programs in line with other academic programs having similar content.
15. To enroot processes of monitoring of academic programs, evaluating the efficiency of their implementation and improving them by broadening the scope of identification of stakeholders' needs and their involvement in the processes.

Students

16. To develop mechanisms of evaluating the efficiency of functions which are being fulfilled in the direction of applicants' professional orientation.
17. To improve the mechanisms of identifying and evaluating students' academic needs, to regulate the processes of organization of facultative classes and provision of consultancy.
18. To regulate the processes providing guidance and support to students, to create an opportunity for

professional orientation directed to the selection of selective courses.

19. To direct the university-employer cooperation and the activity of Alumni and Career Center to the research of labor market needs and GSU alumni employability as well as to the assurance of their sustainable feedback.
20. To develop mechanisms which will promote the enlargement of students' involvement in research processes and the formation of students' research skills and abilities.
21. To create an academic environment which will be available for students with special needs by ensuring the accessibility of learning for them.

Faculty and Staff

22. To develop a clear and transparent mechanism of HR management and to involve it in the SP as a strategic direction. To stipulate the process of involving young teachers.
23. To set clear requirements for professional qualities of the teaching staff in accordance with each academic program of the University, taking into consideration the peculiarities of the concrete academic programs.
24. To invest a system of regular identification of teachers' needs and to use it as a basis for teacher trainings.
25. To invest clear and regulated mechanisms of evaluation, promotion and progression of faculty and support staff.

Research and Development

26. To clarify the ambitions, interests and specific directions of research activities of the University. To develop a long-term strategy which will reflect GSU's ambitions and interests in research.
27. To plan the scientific-research activities of chairs in accordance with scientific-research priorities of the University and to monitor them. To foster the implementation of research activities at individual, chair and inter-chair levels.
28. To invest clear mechanisms for ensuring the link between scientific-research activity and learning process. To develop a policy according to which the implementation of scientific research will become a learning method.
29. To make respective financial investment in the direction of scientific-research development and creation of favorable conditions for carrying out scientific activity. To allocate financial means to research development from the budget and to continue searching for external financial sources for research projects.
30. To promote the commercialization of research outcomes by reinforcing the university-research-business link.
31. To develop a strategy on internationalization of research activity, to foster the implementation of joint research projects in cooperation with other universities and international publications.

Infrastructure and Resources

32. To improve the resources of GSU structural units by providing material-technical means to re-equip the

classrooms and laboratories and to acquire modern facilities. To consider it as one of the strategic directions of the University's development. To take steps towards ensuring structural resources for students with special needs. To analyze to what extent the existing resources ensure necessary environment for the implementation of academic activity which derives from the goals mentioned in the SP.

33. To coordinate the processes of identifying GSU stakeholders' needs aimed at efficient fulfillment of the University's mission and strategic goals as well as assurance with necessary resources.
34. To make analysis of resources necessary for the assurance of implementation and continuation of each academic program, thus promoting the operation of mechanisms of top-down and bottom-up planning.
35. To develop and invest a policy on financial management which will foster the fulfillment of goals of academic programs and the assurance with necessary means and equipment. To invest mechanisms of allocation of financial resources, evaluation and analysis of cost-effectiveness in accordance with the strategic directions and priorities of the University.
36. To develop a unified policy on management of information and documentation processes by investing electronic system of documentation circulation and date collection.
37. To develop mechanisms of evaluating the efficiency, applicability and availability of resources provided to students and teachers.

Social Responsibility

38. To improve the mechanisms of ensuring accountability from the perspective of implementation of the goals set by the SP. To regularly evaluate the efficiency of the process by respectively improving the mechanisms and tools which check the validity and efficiency of accountability means.
39. To improve mechanisms of ensuring feedback by the large scope of society with the aim to regularly receive feedback on the quality of carried out activities and education provided by the University.
40. To create a policy on information collocation with respective time-schedule and ensure the availability to target stakeholders.
41. To develop a policy and strategy, procedures and respective mechanisms of transferring knowledge to the society and implementing facultative educational and consultancy services.

External Relations and Internationalization

42. To develop and invest procedures of promoting the establishment of external relations and internationalization.
43. To clarify the operational functions of external relations and international cooperation of the University.
44. To make identification of needs/analysis(es) in order to evaluate the efficiency of activities directed to the internationalization and development of external relations as well as to raise the level of awareness. To evaluate the efficiency of facultative courses which aim to develop language skills.
45. To develop and invest mechanisms of planning financial means for internationalization.

Internal Quality Assurance System

46. To review the policy on internal quality assurance and goals making the activity of the University in line with them. To establish a base of indicators of education quality assurance and to ensure the improvement of the indicators through the implementation of the SP.
47. To evaluate the satisfaction and efficiency of human, material and financial resources provided by the University for the implementation of internal QA processes.
48. To regularly make evaluation on the efficiency of QA Division's activity, to identify needs of the staff and carry out trainings and courses of professional development based on the results in order to guarantee the fulfillment of the goals set by the mentioned Division. To take steps towards increasing the autonomy of the QA Division.
49. To regularly evaluate the efficiency of provided services and implementation of academic programs.
50. To regulate the data management processes and to clarify the mechanisms of information management and dissemination among different structural units of the University. To segregate certain amount of information and to operate mechanisms of information collection which will provide necessary bases for the internal and external evaluations of quality assurance.
51. To ensure the application of PDCA cycle in all the processes and at all levels of management of the University ensuring the reinforcement of quality culture.

Observing the presented package of documents and considering the opinions of the Chair of expert panel and the representatives of the University, the Accreditation Committee finds that GSU sufficiently fulfills its main goal - the efficient implementation of professional academic programs, provision of necessary knowledge, competences, skills and values as well as preparation of competitive and high quality specialists in Gegharkunik region of the Republic of Armenia.

GSU takes the position that it is a higher education institution of regional significance in the RA education field, and it has some achievements in ensuring specialists holding higher education in the region. At the same time the University still needs to improve some fields of its activities, in particular, *development of distance learning, improvement of ratio of main teaching staff, double-jobbing staff and those teaching on hourly-paid basis*, assurance of compliance between academic programs and research problems of regional development, development of infrastructures and internal quality assurance system, integration of education and research, and increase of efficiency of management.

GSU should take steps towards diversification and increase of financial incomes to make the distribution of budget in accordance with strategic directions realistic and to ensure technical modernization of laboratories, lingaphone cabinets and classrooms. The acquisition of licensed packages of research and statistic analyses, the assurance of availability of international library funds, the digitization and modernization of existing literature will foster the creation of academic environment necessary for the formation of learning outcomes of academic programs.

GSU should allocate resources to the full operation of the data management electronic system which would allow the University to coordinate the necessary information and the activities relating its acquisition, research, analysis and dissemination, thus fostering the increase of efficiency of management system.

Driven by the clarified ambitions, the University should define its strategy in the research field giving importance to the identification and study of problems of regional development as well as to the enlargement of students' involvement in research activities. The formulation of teachers' personal initiatives through programs, the clarification of research directions of the chairs, the organization of exchange of accumulated practice and research activities among chairs will promote the fulfillment of the strategic objectives and development of the University. In this case necessary conditions will be created for the formulation of critical thinking among students involved in research activities, and students' research papers being instructed by researcher-teachers will be in compliance with the NQF descriptors for Master's degree by involving some research and innovative components.

GSU has attained some achievements in terms of establishing QA system, however, it isn't fully integrated in the processes of the University. GSU needs to operate the developed documents and to take coordinated steps towards elaboration and development of QA mechanisms and toolset which will allow to evaluate their impact on the improvement of academic programs and overall activity of the University. GSU should also ensure that the role players of the QA system are informed about their responsibilities and they totally fulfill them.

The elimination of the shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel report and the fulfillment of the provided recommendations will ensure student-centered and research approach to the education services and will promote the University's efficient management and integration into international education area which is in line with GSU's ambitions.

Taking into consideration the fact that the University can eliminate the shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel report and fulfill the recommendations by efficiently using the current resources and methodically applying its internal QA mechanisms in a reasonable time period, as a result of voting the Committee:

DECIDED

1. **To award institutional accreditation** to Gavar State University for **4 /four/ years**.
2. After the publication of the decision on accreditation award, to submit the action plan on the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel report and respective time schedule within two months taking into account:
 - a) the necessity to give urgent solutions primarily to the problems existing in the fields of “**Research and Development**”, “**Infrastructure and Resources**” and “**Internal Quality Assurance System**”;
 - b) the peer review results and recommendations provided by the international expert in regard to the University's ambition to integrate into the European Higher Education Area.
3. Based on the necessity to improve the activity of the University and to taking into consideration the current requirements, to pay special attention to the strengthening of the link between learning and research, improvement of management system, modernization of necessary material-technical base, training of teaching staff, mobility of students and teachers as well as internal quality assurance.

4. In accordance with the Clause 12 of the Regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Education Institutions and their Educational Programs” every 2 /two/ years to submit a written report to ANQA on the results of the carried out activities.

Chairman of the Accreditation Committee
20 June 2017, Yerevan

S. Avetisyan