



National Center For Professional
Education Quality Assurance
Foundation

C O N C L U S I O N
on
Accreditation of Institutional Capacities of
"Goris State University" Non-Profit Organization

General Information about the Institution

Full name of the Institution:	"Goris State University" Non-Profit Organization
Acronym:	GSU
Official address:	Avangard 2 str., Syunik region, Goris, Republic of Armenia
Previous accreditation decree and date:	Not available

LEGAL BASIS

Guided by the regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Institutions and Their Educational Programs” approved by 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” as well as by the Procedure on the Formation of Expert Panel of “National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance” foundation, the “National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance” foundation (ANQA) discussed the ANQA's draft conclusion on the institutional capacities of Goris State University (GSU or University) on the basis of self-evaluation presented by GSU, Expert Panel report, GSU Action Plan on the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the Expert Panel report as well as Expert panel opinion on the GSU's Action Plan with the presence of the ANQA representatives, the Expert Panel, and ANQA coordinator of the accreditation procedure.

As a result of the discussion the following was registered:

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

Submission of application	31 March 2017
Submission of self-evaluation report	18 July 2017
Site-visit	1-3 November 2017
Submission of Expert Panel report	16 January 2018
Submission of improved action plan on elimination of shortcomings	9 February 2018

RESULTS OF PEER REVIEW

GSU expertise was carried out by an independent expert panel formed in compliance with the requirements set by the ANQA regulation on "Formation of Expert Panel"¹. 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.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While carrying out the expertise the expert panel took into consideration that Goris State University is among leading higher education institutions in Syunik region of the Republic of Armenia which aims "to prepare specialists holding BA and MA degrees in the spheres of education, economy, industry and information technologies for the region who are highly professional, competitive and responsive to current challenges, as well as to create student-centered environment which promotes flexible professional academic programs (PAPs), academic courses and relatively modern teaching and learning methods in line with educational and technological needs of the society and economy".

GSU's activity is mainly in compliance with its mission. However, the anticipated outcomes and key performance indicators (KPIs) are not measurable and they do not reflect the achievement of strategic goals and achievements. The absence of generic approach to efficiency evaluation and improvement of fulfilled strategic goals as well as lack of clearly set and reliable mechanisms puts at risk the processes relating the identification of GSU's achievements and shortcomings as well as further proper and efficient planning.

The mechanisms of stakeholders' involvement are not sufficient for ensuring their proactive participation in GSU's activities. The inefficiency of mechanisms identifying the needs of GSU's external stakeholders, their passive involvement in the development of the strategic plan as well as the absence of market research put at risk the full implementation of the goals set by GSU's mission taking into consideration the University's commitment to prepare specialists in line with regional needs and market demands.

GSU is currently undergoing changes in terms of its legal status which significantly hinders the regular processes of strategic management. According to the top management of the University, the new status should enlarge GSU's activity fields and have a positive impact on the University's financial capacity and diversification of its entrepreneurial activity. This transitional period is viewed as the main obstacle which impedes the development of the new strategy.

GSU's organizational structure needs to be more clarified taking into account the importance of implementation of its prioritized directions and strategic goals. The whole administration of GSU management system is not based on the principle of quality management. Although there are planning and implementation processes at different levels, the processes of evaluation and improvement are missing.

¹ **Appendix** - Expert Panel Composition and ANQA Support Staff

It is commendable that GSU involves its students and teaching staff in almost all governing bodies and gives them an opportunity to freely express their viewpoints and participate in making decisions regarding their activities.

Currently surveys are considered to be the main mechanism of identifying factors having an impact on GSU's general and educational activities, however, the targeted direction, regularity and methodology of their implementation as well as the frame of respondents' representativeness do not enable surveys to be viewed as an efficient way of identifying internal and external stakeholders' opinions.

GSU implements 20 BA and 11 MA PAPs in full-time and part-time studies. GSU PAPs are in line with its mission and state educational standards, and the University makes some attempts to also ensure their consistency with market demands. There are anticipated learning outcomes defined in PAPs and they are mostly compatible with the RA NQF and are often generally articulated. The applied teaching and learning methods are mostly teacher-centered, however, some attempts have been made in recent years to make a transition to student-centered approach.

GSU has an assessment policy and criteria for evaluation of final papers and master theses, however, assessment methods used in the University are not always in line with the anticipated results which does not allow to measure the factually achieved results. Although the University has taken some steps to maintain academic honesty, the activities taken in the direction of ensuring academic honesty and preventing plagiarism are not coordinated. It is praiseworthy that GSU has developed a regulation on development, approval, evaluation and monitoring of GSU's PAPs and curricula but it hasn't been fully put into process.

The process of selection and admission of GSU students is carried out by clearly set mechanisms which has a positive impact on efficient and transparent implementation of the process. The University gives importance to students' participation in decision-making processes. There are a number of mechanisms of identifying students' needs, however, further processes directed to the satisfaction of their needs are not regulated.

The majority of GSU students are involved in part-time study. At the same time the mechanisms of identification of students' needs and protection of their rights and other suchlike mechanisms are predominantly being applied in full-time study which may have an impact on the quality of part-time study, its continuous improvement and preparation of competitive specialists.

GSU gives importance to the necessity to ensure teaching staff with high professional qualities. For this purpose GSU has developed a temporary regulation on selection of teaching staff which promotes the regular selection of teachers, however, from the perspective of efficiency, the selection mechanisms haven't been evaluated. The procedure on competition-based selection of support staff is missing which may negatively impact the objectiveness and targeted implementation of processes relating the selection of support staff. The heads of faculties and those of some chairs are employed as acting heads in GSU for many years which definitely has a negative impact on the efficiency of management.

GSU has defined mechanisms for carrying out regular evaluation of teaching staff but the analysis of developed mechanisms is missing which does not allow to make any judgments about their efficiency. Besides, the University mostly doesn't take steps to eliminate the identified shortcomings which hinders

the improvement of teaching quality. The low level of efficiency of foreign language courses and the absence of activities taken towards enhancement of professional qualities impede the continuous development of teaching staff and processes directed to the mobility and internationalization of PAPs. The activities taken for freshman teachers are not coordinated at the University, and the mentoring institute is missing which may impede the development of freshman teachers and influence teaching quality.

GSU has registered the increase of quality of GSU teachers' activity in recent 5 years; such indicators are encouraging and they definitely lead to the enhancement of teaching quality. Nevertheless, the recruitment with teaching staff is not fully ensured. It is a positive point that for the implementation of PAPs some employers having an experience in industry are also invited to teach at GSU on double-jobbing basis as far as they contribute to the investment of practical component into PAPs. The practice of conducting several courses by one and the same teacher is worrisome as far as it may impact on the quality of teaching and hinder the regular academic process.

In the GSU Concept there are general provisions reflecting the University's ambitions in the field of research. However, the fact that the provisions are overambitious and the research directions are redundant, especially taking into account the absence of a structural unit responsible for the coordination of scientific-research activities of the University, puts at risk the implementation of the above mentioned provisions. The absence of precisely defined priorities in the field of research doesn't create a favorable environment for GSU from the perspective of the University's special role in the region.

GSU doesn't carry out financial planning in scientific-research field, neither it allocates sufficient financial means from its budget for the development of scientific-research activities. Research activities aren't viewed as a source of income by the University. Research activities are mainly carried out based on personal initiative of GSU staff members in accordance with their preferences which are not linked with GSU's strategy which in its turn may have a negative impact on coordination of research activities, control of their organization, evaluation of efficiency, quality of teaching as well as interlink between the content of provided courses and educational process.

GSU gives importance to the internationalization of research activities. However, the steps directed to the involvement of students and teachers in international research initiatives are not tangible yet.

It is positive that an Educational-Scientific Center has been established in GSU and a number of national and international conferences have been held at GSU. Research activities carried out in the University, which are actually rare cases, are published without taking into account the impact factor and are mostly published in local journals which hinders the internationalization of research outcomes. The link between scientific-research activity and learning is ensured by teachers' initiative without any defined mechanisms which may have a negative impact on the coordination of processes interlinking research and educational process.

GSU makes efforts to allocate respective resources for the implementation of its mission and strategic goals. Although the University tries to allocate financial means and enhance fundraising for equipment, improvement, modernization and enlargement of classrooms, laboratories, library fund and other infrastructures, GSU financial means are limited and the enrichment of resource base is mainly made within the framework of international grants. GSU budget is mostly formed by students' tuition fees

which from the perspective of sustainability may cause problems. The analyses on efficiency of distribution and use of financial resources are missing which doesn't allow to evaluate and analyze the indicators of financial sustainability and opportunities of the University's development.

GSU resource base is mainly sufficient for the implementation of PAPs. It is positive that there is a procedure for management of information and documentation processes which GSU plans to improve. GSU has taken its first step to create necessary conditions for people with limited abilities. Another positive point is that the University regularly conducts surveys on satisfaction with GSU resources and provided services, however, GSU doesn't take steps towards elimination of identified shortcomings based on evaluation results.

It is positive that there is a clearly set accountability system in GSU which requires regular reports which are summed up in rector's annual reports and are published. However, the content of reports needs to be improved as far as they mainly comprise facts and statistic data about the University's activities; the direct link with the strategy/Concept, the analytical approach and suggestions on improvement activities based on identified shortcomings are missing.

It is also positive that the University takes steps in the direction of making its processes available and transparent to the society. However, GSU official site which is one of the most important tools in terms of ensuring accountability, urgently needs to be improved as far as it can have a crucial role for shaping a positive image of the University. It's commendable that some feedback domains promoting the establishment of links with the society have been formed, but there are a number of problems in terms of ensuring sustainability and efficiency of feedback.

GSU takes some steps towards internationalization and external cooperation at national level. In this regard, GSU has defined strategic goals which, however, are too ambitious and respective human and financial resources haven't been provided for their proper fulfillment. In addition, the policies and procedures regulating the mentioned field are absent which puts at risk the implementation of the coordinated activities. Another crucial point is that the level of GSU internal stakeholders' participation in activities directed to the development of foreign language proficiency is at low level, and no steps are taken to improve this process. Although the University carries out some activities towards internationalization, GSU doesn't have an environment fostering practice exchange, development and internationalization yet.

The expert panel positively evaluates the existence of QA Division in the University and the developed manual on "GSU Quality Assurance System". However, the steps GSU takes towards investment of internal QA system are not coordinated yet. The absence of analyses on efficiency of mechanisms and toolset regulating different processes doesn't allow GSU to evaluate the impact of QA processes on improvement of its PAPs and overall activity. The non-regular implementation of QA processes based on PDCA cycle as well as passive participation of external stakeholders in the mentioned processes may hinder the continuous improvement of GSU activity.

Taking into consideration the ambitions and goals of the University, the expert panel has provided consultancy in the direction of solution to the identified problems and further development of GSU's activity.

Strengths of the University

- 1) The University has an important role in the educational eco-system of the region.
- 2) The University is attractive to applicants of the region.
- 3) The PAPs are in compliance with the University's mission and state educational standards.
- 4) There are available mechanisms of identification of full-time students' educational needs and consultancy provision.
- 5) The University ensures teaching staff with respective qualifications in compliance with PAPs.
- 6) There are sufficient services directed to the assurance of the University's environment and maintenance of health and security.
- 7) There is a formulated system of internal and external accountability.
- 8) The University's staff members participate in a number of international projects directed to capacity building.

Weaknesses of the University

- 1) The current strategy of the University is missing.
- 2) The system of interconnected short-term, mid-term and long-term planning of actions is missing.
- 3) The external stakeholders' participation in the processes of the University is at low level.
- 4) The components of evaluation and improvement of PDCA cycle in management and in QA processes are missing.
- 5) The identification of needs of part-time students and their involvement in decision-making processes (relating them) are not ensured.
- 6) The participation of teaching staff members in professional trainings is at low level.
- 7) The University doesn't allocate sufficient human resources for the efficient achievement of strategic goals.
- 8) The priorities of the research field are not clear.
- 9) The financial inflow is dependent on one main source – students' tuition fees.
- 10) The coordinated policy on establishing a favorable environment for the University's internationalization and practice exchange is missing.
- 11) The proficiency in foreign languages among students and staff is at low level.
- 12) The steps taken towards establishment of internal QA system are not coordinated.

From the perspective of GSU's ambition to be integrated into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the international expert has submitted his observations. It is mentioned that GSU has an important role in the regional and local eco-system as far as it is the only higher education system available to the local community. GSU has a significant tradition of implementing education in a number of spheres and it provides quite comprehensive opportunities for students in both full-time and part-time studies. However, conditioned by the regional character and demographical tendencies, GSU has some financial difficulties which hinder the flexible development. The observations of the

international expert include the analysis of the University's situation and respective recommendations directed to the solution of identified problems.

It is concluded that the University should definitely carry out some activities which will be based on best practices of higher education institutions involved in EHEA. It is suggested that GSU should take the exceptional opportunity of current transitional period of its legal status change for organizing widespread discussions with stakeholders. Based on discussion results and GSU's current strengths, it is necessary to improve the spheres of strategic planning, University's structure and management, education organization, external relation and internationalization.

GSU COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS ON DRAFT REPORT OF EXPERT PANEL

On 12 December 2017 GSU sent its feedback on the draft report of the expert panel to ANQA. After examining the draft report of the expert panel, the University didn't provide any remarks and comments. The final version of the expert panel report was approved by the expert panel on 16 January 2018.

GSU ACTION PLAN ON THE ELIMINATION OF SHORTCOMINGS MENTIONED IN EXPERT PANEL REPORT

GSU accepts that the recommendations presented by the expert panel are within the scope of the University's strategy, and it has submitted for the action plan and time-schedule on the elimination of shortcomings.

Having examined the University's action plan based on the recommendations presented in the final expert panel report, the expert panel comes to the following conclusion: taking into consideration the expert panel's recommendations and with the aim to eliminate the identified shortcomings, the University has undertaken the commitment to improve all the aspects of its activity, in particular:

- based on the expert panel's recommendations, the University has ensured the understanding of the problems and research of needs relating all criteria;
- the University has made an action plan to ensure efficient implementation of strategies defined for all the ten directions;
- the actions overall have logically structured sequence;
- the staff members and teams responsible for the implementation of the actions are mentioned in the action plan;
- for the solution of majority of the problems, respective human resources are mentioned in the action plan but the acquisition of financial resources is not planned in all cases; the sources of generating the noted resources are not mentioned;
- the deadlines set for the implementation of the actions are mainly realistic;
- the outcomes of the presented activities are mainly directed to the fulfillment of the set goals;

- the indicators which evaluate the implementation of the mentioned actions and measure the impact are mainly reflected in the action plan, however, in some cases they are formulated as objectives or actions and not as evaluation indicators.

The study of the GSU action plan on the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in expert panel report has shown that the implementation of major part of the University's action plan does not contain risks. The actions and respective activities/steps directed to the improvement are mainly presented in compliance with the expert panel's suggestions. The proper implementation of the actions defined in the action plan on the elimination of shortcomings will foster the solution of problems existent in different fields of GSU's activity, thus ensuring the University's progressive development.

The Expert Panel presented its evaluation per accreditation criterion by using the “**unsatisfactory**” and “**satisfactory**” evaluation scale². The evaluation is presented in the following table:

CRITERION	CONCLUSION
1. Mission and Goals	SATISFACTORY
2. Governance and Administration	UNSATISFACTORY
3. Academic programs	SATISFACTORY
4. Students	SATISFACTORY
5. Faculty and Staff	SATISFACTORY
6. Research and Development	UNSATISFACTORY
7. Infrastructure and Resources	SATISFACTORY
8. Social Responsibility	SATISFACTORY
9. External Relations and Internationalization	UNSATISFACTORY
10. Internal Quality Assurance System	UNSATISFACTORY

Based on the aforementioned, ANQA suggests the Accreditation Committee to draw GSU's attention to the implementation of the following activities while making a decision:

- 1) To give urgent solution to the problems existing in the spheres of **Governance and Administration, Research and Development, External Relations and Internationalization and Internal Quality Assurance System.**
- 2) According to the requirements of the Clause 12 of the Regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Education Institutions and their Educational Programs” or according to the deadlines set by the

² The expert panel was guided by the following principles while carrying out the evaluation:

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

-**satisfactory** - if the University meets the requirements of the criterion yet there might be need for improvements.

Accreditation Committee, to regularly present a written report to ANQA on the results of the carried out activities.

- 3) To review the action plan on the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel report taking into account the remarks about the action plan mentioned in the conclusion made by the expert panel.

ANQA finds that the suggested reforms will foster the fulfillment of the University's ambitions mentioned in the self-evaluation report and will serve as a basis for the next evaluation.

**Head of ANQA Institutional and
Program Accreditation Division**

Chair of Expert Panel

ANQA Coordinator

EXPERT PANEL COMPOSITION

The external evaluation of GSU institutional capacities was carried out by the expert panel having the following composition:

1. **Robert Khachatryan** – PhD, Associate Professor, Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences, Head of Center for Quality Assurance, Head of Chair on Education Management and Planning, RA, Chair of expert panel
2. **Maciej Markowski** – PhD in Education Management, Quality Assurance Expert of Polish Accreditation Committee, Poland, expert panel member
3. **Varujan Atabekyan** – Doctor in Physics and Mathematics, Faculty of Mathematics and Mechanics of Yerevan State University, Head of Chair of Algebra and Geometry, RA, expert panel member
4. **Karen Mirzabekyan** – PhD in Technical Sciences, Faculty of Cybernetics of National Polytechnic University of Armenia, Associate Professor of Chair of Electronic Measurement Systems and Metrology, RA, expert panel member
5. **Anahit Hovakimyan** – Armenian State Pedagogical University after Kh. Abovyan, Faculty of Preschool Education, Elementary Pedagogy and Methodology, MA 1st year student, RA, expert panel member

ANQA Support Staff

- **Lilit Pipoyan** - Specialist at the Institutional and Program Accreditation Division of ANQA and Coordinator of GSU institutional accreditation process
- **Ani Shahinyan** - Translator, Coordinator at Center for Quality Assurance of Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences