



ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE

DECREE N 13

03 July, 2015

On Awarding Institutional Accreditation to MKHITAR GOSH ARMENIAN-RUSSIAN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

General Information on the Institution

Full name of the Institution: **Mkhitar Gosh Armenian-Russian International
University**

Acronym: **MGU**

Official address: **30a Tigran Mets street, Vanadzor, RA**

Decree and date of previous accreditation: **Certificate N025, 17.10.2002
without validity period**

Guided by the regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs” approved by the RA Government on 30 June, 2011 N978 decree; by N959-Ն (30 June, 2011) decree on approving 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 27 June, 2015 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 Mkhitar Gosh Armenian-Russian International University (MGU) with the presence of Chair of the expert panel and ANQA coordinator of the accreditation procedure.

Having examined the self-analysis presented by MGU, the expert panel report, MGU’s action plan for 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 following the below-given time-frame:

Submission of the Application	12 June, 2013
Submission of the self-assessment report	13 December, 2013
Site-visit	21-23 April, 2014, Vanadzor 25-26 April, Yerevan
Submission of the Expert panel report	02 September, 2014
Submission of the Follow-up plan	01 October, 2014

The expertise was carried out by an Expert Panel formed in compliance with the requirements set forth by the ANQA regulation on the composition of expert panel. The assessment was carried out based in line with 10 criteria of institutional accreditation established by N959-Ն (30 June, 2011) decree on approving RA Standards for Professional Education Accreditation.

While conducting the evaluation the expert panel took into account the fact that the mission of Mkhitar Gosh International University is to ensure the employability of the alumni as well as to provide students with affordable education. It should be mentioned that MGU pay attention also to the trends of economic and social development both in Vanadzor and in Yerevan.

MGU underwent the process of accreditation according to the state standards and regulation operating until 2011.

MGU provides academic programs in two levels: bachelor and master. The programs cover such spheres as humanities, social-economic and medical sciences and research in different fields. 5 faculties of MGU were combined because of the lack of financial and human resources. Nowadays MGU has 2 faculties instead of 5:

1. Faculty of Economics and Pedagogy
2. Faculty of Law, Foreign Languages and Medicine.

On the level of learning outcomes the University has still works to do as learning outcomes of the academic programs are very generic. The involvement of internal and external stakeholders in the development and review of the academic programs is limited. Teaching methods are weakly linked with assessment principles. The transition to student centered education is not completed yet and the University should make additional efforts in this respect. Written examinations do not assure and guarantee academic honesty and absence of plagiarism. During the meetings, the stakeholders themselves mentioned that the assessment policy and procedures need to be reviewed. It should be mentioned that the academic programs have weak links with research. In spite of the fact that the research component is distinguished in master programs, most of the students are not involved in research activities.

In order to accomplish all the points of MGU's mission the University does not have necessary resources. The libraries in Vanadzor and Yerevan campuses are not enriched with contemporary literature and ICT, the number of books and journals is limited. Foreign language literature is very limited; there are no international journals in spite of the fact that some of the courses at the University require international journals.

Techniques are not sufficient for the organization of teaching with new methodology. Having electronic (digital) library is currently considered a not real action by the University as there is a lack of financial and human resources. Library and education center are important components in the formation of research environment and culture however the resource base is very limited. The University hardly uses IT in its internal procedures in spite of the fact that in the Strategic Plan of the University the investment of IT is a separate objective. Strategic priorities and goals do not contain clearly planned financial resources. Despite the clear distribution of the budget it gives little opportunities for new initiatives hence MGU should try and find ways of fund raising.

MGU has teaching staff appropriate for the implementation of the academic programs. Teaching staff recruitment is carried out according to regulatory acts however clear description of professional qualities of the teaching staff per academic program is missing in the available documents. The University has classified positions of the teaching staff according to the regulation on the formation of the teaching staff but the university doesn't have a clear regulation on the promotion of the teaching staff. There is little involvement in research activities. Very few cases of teaching staff mobility have been registered. Regular trainings based on the needs assessment of the teaching and support staffs are not developed and conducted at the University. The trainings will enhance the professional qualifications of the teaching staff and will foster the better accomplishment of goals of academic programs.

There are criteria in MGU for student recruitment, selection and admission, the selection policy is transparent but not targeted. Profession orientation activities as well as activities for raising the awareness of the University's educational opportunities are organized, but there is no policy set for it. One of the teachers of professional courses is attached to the students as a consultant. The result analysis of the surveys among students showed that students highly appreciate the work and advice of these consultants. There is also a schedule for the consultancy hours. Yet the mentioned mechanism does not fully reveal the effectiveness of consultancy and there is no basis for the comparison of students' needs and the effectiveness of the provided services. Some of the services provided to the students by the Career Center are planned or in process and there are differences of organization of the mentioned process in Vanadzor and Yerevan. Some of the students were familiar

with the works and functions of course instructors but some of them were unaware of that system which states that the instructors' institute is not fully made yet.

The participation of students in QA and evaluation processes is not clearly regulated in MGU, and the mechanisms of QA implementation /surveys, suggestion and complaints box/ are not generalized and analyzed.

The real picture of MGU's management functions is not clear and comprehensive, which is illustrated by the fact that the duty assignment of MGU management functions and the decision making process are not explicit enough and transparent. Decision making generally has a nature of situational solutions. MGU's management as well as QA system is not justified/logical in terms of workload. MGU has a problem in actively involving external and internal stakeholders in the decision making procedures and there are gaps in the communication mechanisms. The needs of the region are observed, but the collected information is treated and used ad hoc without formal procedure for transforming it into well motivated actions on the curricula and the educational processes.

Most of the QA activities at MGU are in the planning phase. The awareness of stakeholders of the management problems as well as of plan-do-check-act cycle and its functioning is low.

MGU's QA manual which has been elaborated by MGU staff introduces documents regulating the internal QA process in details but it does not give the information about what kinds of best practice were chosen to put at work the mentioned policy and approaches and to monitor to which extent the stakeholders are aware of it and satisfied. Nevertheless quality culture is not fully introduced at MGU because the existing QA human and professional resources and their expertise level are insufficient to carry out a good QA job, the majority of stakeholders are not aware of the University's processes, the QA mechanisms do not function clearly, and the mechanisms evaluating the efficiency of the internal QA system are absent.

The University is advised to follow the below mentioned recommendations within the framework of its strategy. The recommendations are meant to assist the University in coping with the issues and problems revealed by the expert panel during the accreditation procedures and foster the further development of the University's activities.

Mission and goals

- 1) Write a brief and clear vision and a realistic mission statement involving MGU's main features, describing in what concrete aspects MGU wants to reach excellence and how MGU

wants to be perceived by others. What is the characteristic through which MGU wants to be known not only among its peers and the society but also at the international level? How will the university reflect its mission in the curricula, modules and teaching methods? What are the distinctive features for the alumni of MGU, etc?

- 2) Review the strategic plan. The mission and strategy of the University should be relevant to the University's opportunities and compatible with the resources.
- 3) Expand, formalize and improve the process of keeping the stakeholders aware of the university's strategic plan /first of all internal stakeholders/.
- 4) Improve, introduce and implement a regulated policy on revealing stakeholders' needs to ensure on the one hand the reliability of surveys and other mechanisms of feedback, on the other hand the transparency and justification of the decisions made on the basis of the survey results.
- 5) Along with the review of MGU's strategic plan and mission, plan and differentiate expected outcomes of the activities and indicators for the evaluation of their quality and performance, in order to outline necessary human and financial resources.

Governance and administration

- 6) Review the organizational structure, clearly define and approve functions, duties and responsibilities of all structural units/departments and the regulations and mechanisms of staff selection and recruitment. If possible, the nature of these structural units have to be mentioned (e.g. it is designed to have a participatory function or decision making function or management function or other)
- 7) Complement non formal communication through formal documentation /protocols, reports, etc. / to fill the gaps of communication (only non-formal communication is insufficient for guaranteeing a sustainable PDCA cycle). ICT methods will have to be implemented to respond to this recommendation /in addition to the current non formal communication/.
- 8) Develop a code of ethics which has to be in line with the University's mission/vision.
- 9) Develop and formalize the study of factors influencing the activities of the University.
- 10) Replenish short-term plans with mid-term and long-term ones with the appropriate indicators for measuring the expected outcomes.
- 11) Organize regular formal meetings with the representatives of the professional field outside the University with the aim of gathering the opinion of external stakeholders.
- 12) Regularly give feedback to the stakeholders about the results of the surveys and the gathered information, using encouraging methods.
- 13) Thoroughly and deeply study the best practice on education management, to adapt it as well as train MGU administrative staff in this respect that will have a large impact on the development of the University's governance and administration.

- 14) Disseminate the principles of PDCA cycle mentioned in the QA manual of the University among the stakeholders.

Academic programs

- 15) Actively involve external stakeholders in the formation and review of educational programs, possibly to develop and implement joint programs with other universities (internationally), as a means to import extra expertise and boost common research.
- 16) Develop procedures and a policy on doing comparative analysis of best experiences which will foster the increase of compatibility of educational programs at the international level as well as the mobility of students.
- 17) Take steps and activities to ensure the alignment of learning outcomes of academic programs with teaching, learning and assessment methods.
- 18) Implement a regular evaluation of MGU's educational programs, agree on a fixed procedure for their further development based on the principles of the plan-do-check-act cycle, disseminate the results in an open, systematic and transparent way, and incentivize the stakeholders for putting the results and improvement decisions into practice.
- 19) Foster the development of critical thinking among students, particularly in defining their role and rights in the university. Learning outcomes and teaching methods should contribute to the development of such features among students.

Students

- 20) Enhance the efficiency of the unit dealing with issues of graduates and career, for better coordination of the activities in the faculties related to the career of graduates, labor market demands, information gathering and disseminating. The development and implementation of a united policy on students' internships and career services is of great importance.
- 21) Take steps to involve students in different research activities.
- 22) Take steps for the enhancement of the procedure concerning the protection of student' rights.
- 23) Review the procedure on providing consultancy to the students based on its analysis and evaluation, in order to extract lessons for the enhancement of the university's governance and functioning.

Teaching and support staffs

- 24) Encourage the teaching staff to be involved in scientific-research activities.
- 25) Involve more teachers from other universities for extending the expertise and ensuring extra professional development of the teaching staff.

- 26) Inform the stakeholders about the results of the evaluation of the teaching staff using flexible mechanisms of encouragement and disseminating better practice.
- 27) Form and develop systems for the formation, selection, promotion and qualification improvement of MGU teaching staff.
- 28) Clarify the research component in the contracts with the teaching staff, letting the more talented staff spend more time on research, and take into consideration the results of their research in promotions and evaluation of their career.

Research and development

- 29) Develop regulations on the evaluation of research activities, on academic honesty and on research ethics. Plagiarism is mentioned in the self-evaluation report as a threat. This threat can be reduced by appropriate available software programs, regulation on research ethics and other mechanisms. Plagiarism is only one specific aspect of academic honesty mentioned earlier.
- 30) Choose one concrete direction in research field that can be developed and brought to excellence /e.g. pedagogy, stomatology, law, language and literature, management, etc/.
- 31) Take steps for encouraging publications made by the university staff in internationally peer reviewed journals (e.g. co-publications with international partners – see also next recommendation)
- 32) The research component in the University's strategy should refer to the formation of mechanisms for choosing precise research areas, for organizing research activities, for identifying financial sources for research, for applying the research results and commercialize it as well as for the enhancement of students' involvement in research activities.

Infrastructure and resources

- 33) Develop a primary plan for the improvement of the academic environment giving priority to phased investments in ICT and the provision of academic resources (e.g. better access to journals and books, possibly in the framework of interlibrary exchange agreements). The ICT deployment plan includes trainings for the teaching, support and administrative staffs.
- 34) Based on the analysis and comparison of best practices, and new financial incomes (e.g. foreign student tuition fees, as was explained during the visit), continuously improve university's library, classrooms, environment for interactive teaching and learning, including all this in the strategic plan of the university.
- 35) Plan the use of indicators evaluating resources which will describe the quantity, quality, change of resources, the effectiveness of their use, and the mechanisms of defining the needs and priorities for specific new resources.
- 36) Take steps for the enhancement of external funding of the University and invest in projects for the increase of financial flows.

Social responsibility

- 37) Finalize and summarize the University's planned actions referring to the social responsibility and develop indicators for their evaluation.
- 38) Besides governing bodies, banks and lawyer's offices, activate internships in a number of other spheres /e.g. industry, business, small and medium enterprises/.
- 39) Strengthen and improve the mechanisms of feedback, to enlarge and develop links with the private and social sectors.
- 40) Regulate professional orientation activities in different schools and other institutions, make them targetly organized and relevant to the needs and feedback of stakeholders.
- 41) There is an urgent need to review MGU's website content and make it more informative, usable and user-friendly.
- 42) Gradually develop a strategy for technology and knowledge transfer which will not only help the graduates to find a work (some initial examples were described already) but also has to foster the flow of extra financial income to the university. This will give an opportunity to be involved in international research projects as well as in grant projects fostering students' and teachers' mobility.

External relations and internationalization

- 43) Develop a concept of University's internationalization and/or strategy with short-term and long-term activities and methodology for monitoring progress. Start with developing appropriate regulatory documents involving internal and external stakeholders.
- 44) Encourage the participation of teaching and administrative staff in the international exchange and training programs.
- 45) Develop international and interuniversity links, evaluate the effectiveness of such links and define some indicators (proxies) evaluating the progress of the planned activities.
- 46) Review the contracts of international collaboration /international contracts should provide some privileged agreements, for example financial resources for students' exchange, tuition fee waivers, housing at reduced costs, .../ and ensure that they help solving your own urgent problems, e.g. solving the eventual problem of language, lack of human and other resources /literature, ICT, etc./.
- 47) Increase the mobility of the teaching staff and students giving an opportunity to participate in trainings or exchange programs, and improve the policy on internationalization and make it more relevant to new developments.
- 48) Taking into consideration that the number of contracts with international universities is increasing in MGU, joint publications can also be initiated in such contracts to make the price of publishing in international journals lower as well as creating an opportunity to be involved in the international research area.

- 49) It is of high importance for the international relations department to find new opportunities and disseminate that information among all the stakeholders of the university (mostly among students and the teaching staff).

Internal Quality Assurance

- 50) Urgently take steps for the study of gained experience, for the evaluation of effectiveness of QA system and for the further development of that system based on the evaluation results.
- 51) Review the professional requirements set for the staff of the QA department and organize regular trainings and courses with evaluation mechanisms of their effectiveness.
- 52) Make precise the mechanisms of surveys, their analysis, publication of results in the university, continuously improving the reliability of feedback.
- 53) Develop and introduce mechanisms for the evaluation and improvement of the quality assurance system based on the results of periodic and precise evaluation.
- 54) Take urgent steps to enhance the transparency and involvement of stakeholders in internal evaluation procedures.
- 55) Develop and apply a realistic plan for the development of a quality culture and the enhancement of its effectiveness.

Having examined the presented package of documents, having heard the opinions of the head of the expert panel and the representatives of the University, the Committee finds that Mkhitar Gosh Armenian-Russian International University mainly solves the problem of the local area by providing students with affordable professional education.

The University should continue renovation of education programs in line with the local needs by activating the involvement of employers and enhancing the comparative analysis with other similar programs. It is necessary on the institutional level to set the requirement of fixing expected learning outcomes and to clarify research components of MA programs.

Though MGU has sufficient teaching staff for the implementation of academic programs their involvement in research activities is rather limited. Shortcomings revealed in the field of “**Research and development**” endanger the formation of research skills in line with NQF requirements among MA graduates.

Lack of resources does not allow to accomplish all the points of MGU mission. The more disturbing issues are the ones related to the formation of proper education environment which is linked with the difficulties in acquiring necessary literature for the library, modern technical resources and equipment, involving quality professionals, etc. These issues and the ones identified in the filed of

“Infrastructure and resources” are related to the modern teaching and learning methods and the opportunities of applying student-centered approach.

The problem is not only the fund raising but also further allocation of financial resources according to strategic priorities in case when long-term planning is not carried out and decision making mainly has a situational problem solving nature. Works should be done towards the elimination of shortcomings in the field of “Governance and administration” which are related to the clarification of authorities and functions of governing bodies, enhancement of transparency of decision making procedures, more active involvement of stakeholders in decision making, dissemination of best practice and information within the University, etc.

In order to be able to ensure the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel report and follow the recommendations MGU should give importance to the investment of QA system which should be viewed as a driver for all the fields, MGU should put into action the activities planned according to QA manual firstly conducting trainings for QA staff and teaching staff.

Accepting all the recommendations mentioned in all 10 criteria, the University has developed an Action Plan for the elimination of the shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel report which, however, has partially considered the results of peer-review given by international expert. The action plan is aimed at the further improvement of University activities however the implementation of some part of it can be risky.

Taking into consideration that the University will manage to eliminate the shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel report as well as implement the recommendations, as a result of voting the Committee

DECIDED

1. **To award** Mkhitar Gosh Armenian-Russian International University a **Conditional Institutional Accreditation with a 2 /two/ year period.**
2. Within two months after the publication of the Decree on Awarding Institutional Accreditation to submit a reviewed action plan and corresponding time-schedule to ANQA taking into account:
 - a. the necessity of finding solutions primarily to the problems existing in the fields of “Governance and Administration”, “Research and Development”, “Infrastructure and Resources” and “Internal Quality Assurance System”.

- b. the results and recommendations of the peer-review according to international standards.
3. In order to improve the activities of the University in line with current demands it is necessary to pay special attention to the improvement of QA system, modernization of material-technical base required for the implementation of the academic programs, the mobility of teaching staff and students, strengthening of the link between teaching and research as well as the training of the teaching staff.
4. According to the requirements of clause 12 of the Regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs” every six months to submit a written report to ANQA on the results of the carried out activities

Chairman of the Accreditation Committee

V. Urutyun

July 10, 2015
Yerevan