



**CONCLUSION
ON ACCREDITATION OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES
OF EUROPEAN REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL ACADEMY**

General information on the Institution

Full name of the TLI	European Regional Educational Academy
Acronym	EREA
Official Address	Davit Anhaght 10, Yerevan, Armenia
Decree and date of previous accreditation	Not available

LEGAL BASIS

The National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance, Foundation (hereinafter ANQA) guided by the regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs” approved on 30 June, 2011 N978 decree of the RA Government, as well as by N959-Ն (30 June, 2011) decree on approving RA Standards for Professional Education Accreditation, the ANQA Regulation on the Formation of Expert Panel, with the participation of ANQA representatives, expert panel, and the coordinator of the ANQA procedures discussed the draft of ANQA conclusion on European Regional Educational Academy (hereinafter EREA) institutional accreditation based on the EREA Self-assessment report, expert report, follow-up plan of the EREA and the opinion of the expert on the latter.

As an outcome of the discussion, the following has been highlighted:

the main phases of accreditation procedure were carried out following the below-given time-frame:

Submission of the application	May 19, 2017
Submission of the SER	July 7, 2017
Site-visit	02-05 October, 2017
Submission of the Expert panel report	December 14, 2018
Submission of the Follow-up plan	January 30, 2018

OUTCOMES OF THE PEER REVIEW

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While carrying out the expertise the expert panel took into consideration the fact that the EREA is a HEI which carries out transnational education (established on the agreement between the governments of the Republic of Armenia, Republic of France, and Federative Republic of Germany). The mission of the TLI is “To provide multi-profile higher professional education, regional coverage, European standards, international scientific education developments, implementation of scientific-research activities”.

The Academy has not undergone any accreditation in line with State Accreditation Standards operating before 2011. The current process of accreditation has been launched on the written application form of the Academy.

The EREA positions itself as an intergovernmental TLI and its mission is targeted at multi-profile higher professional education, regional coverage, European standards, international scientific education developments, implementation of scientific-research activities. However, the operations undertaken by the Academy are not in line with its mission. In particular, the TLI is aimed at carrying out education in line with European standards, yet the reflection of the latter in the Academic Programmes (hereinafter referred to as AP) is weak. The undertaken research is limited and does not reflect latest European and regional developments. In general terms, both internal and external stakeholders share the element of “professional education” reflected in the mission. Yet, the concepts “European” and “research” are less clear (vague) for stakeholders. The goals set in 2017-2020 SP are not precisely linked with the mission, which does not guide towards the implementation of the latter. Operating mission and the Strategic Plan (hereinafter referred to as SP) mainly do not reflect the opinion of internal and external stakeholders. Moreover, the lack of a holistic approach to evaluation and improvement of mission and aims, as well as that of precise and reliable mechanisms endangers the process of revealing achievements and drawbacks of the TLI, transparency of operations, as well as steps towards further precise and correct planning.

The EREA carries out 11 undergraduate and 10 graduate APs. Academic process is organized also in 4 regional branches of the TLI: those located in Gyumri, Vanadzor, Gavar and Ijevan cities. The APs are formulated in line with current state academic standards. The Academy has started carrying out the academic process aimed at intended learning outcomes (hereinafter referred to as ILO). In generic terms, the ILOs described in APs are in line with National Qualifications Framework (hereinafter

referred to as NQF), yet, the ILOs need diversification as far as separate components are concerned. ILOs are mapped per discipline. The contextual sequence of the latter is ensured. The policy on credit allocation is described, yet the said allocation is not carried out in line with ILOs.

Teaching and learning methods (hereinafter referred to as TLMs) are formulated in the APs per separate ILO. Yet, in the majority of cases, methods are generic for all outcomes: there is no method differentiation per knowledge and skills, and those are more aimed at knowledge formation, rather than that of skills and competences. The EREA underlines the importance of creating an environment conducive to student-centred learning. Notwithstanding the fact that at present the overwhelming majority of methods exercised are teacher-centred, it is evident that there is a strong inclination towards student-centred approach: the teaching staff does its best to implement modern methods of teaching.

As far as assessment system is concerned, the TLI has a multi-component system. The assessment methods utilized in the Academy are more aimed at assessing the knowledge, rather than competences and skills. Assessment, teaching, learning and ILOs face the need of alignment. The TLI has requirements put forward to theses and assessment rubric per component, yet the examination of theses revealed that irrespective of existing requirements, not all theses compile with them, in particular, certain theses have a research and applied components, and some do not. Positive is the fact that the TLI has a procedure assisting academic honesty. Course and graduation papers and graduate theses are checked via plagiarism checking on-line programme.

The Academy carried out comparative analyses of APs with similar APs of other universities with the aim ensuring alignment as far as content of the said APs is concerned; however, the implementation of benchmarking outcomes in APs is encouraged.

Fully realizing the importance of having teaching staff with high professional qualifications, recruitment is carried out either by means of competitions or inviting professors. Notwithstanding the fact that the TLI does not carry out evaluation of effectiveness of mechanisms of teacher recruitment and selection, both the students and administrative staff are contented with the teaching staff. Teacher recruitment is carried out based on requirements put forward to each category, yet those are very generic and are not described per separate APs. Worth mentioning is the fact that the Academy has adopted a policy of having only part-time teachers (hourly paid), stating that this way it is able to involve more specialists from practical fields. Yet, the teachers are not only representatives of practical fields; there are also many teachers who teach in other TLIs as well. Of concern is the issue of teacher stability, especially given the fact that almost all teachers are part-time, one and the same teacher teaches a number of disciplines (up to 6-7), which can have an impact on the quality of teaching on the one hand, and endanger the smooth academic process on the other hand. The TLI has certain mechanisms aimed at analyzing and evaluating the effectiveness and quality of teaching and support staff operations; student surveys, lesson-observations, discussions. The Academy realized the importance of professional development, yet, either financial resource allocations (1% of the budget) or operations undertaken are but limited. Hence far, there are no serious achievements; moreover, the training carried out hence far are mainly due to personal ties of the teachers and on their own

initiative. The TLI has certain mechanisms of teacher and support staff promotion (publications in the scientific journal of the Academy, monetary encouragement); however, these must be further developed with the aim of enhancing professional progress of the staff.

Currently resource base of the TLI is sufficient for AP implementation, which serves as a base for improvement and stability of operations aimed at AP implementation. Positive is the endeavour of the Academy to ensure the academic process with necessary resource base. The Academy is open and ready as far as resource allocation is concerned. Moreover, it strives to improve auditoria and laboratory conditions, modernize academic infrastructures. However, the classrooms are not adapted to implementing interactive methods and organizing different role plays, the number of auditoria with Smart boards and projectors is limited. Enrichment of resource base is mainly carried out either within the framework of international grant projects or donations. TLI budget is mostly accumulated from tuition fees, which is vulnerable from the prospective of stability. The TLI lacks a precise system of financial resource management and diversification of flows, which would otherwise be the token of financial stability. Financial resource allocation is not carried out based on strategic goals.

Student recruitment, selection and admission are carried out on corresponding regulations. Currently, the Academy has 1375 students (out of the said number 1010 study in Yerevab, and 365 in branches). Students get necessary support from the Academy. With the aim of enhancing effective learning of students, the TLI creates necessary opportunities to organize additional classes and provide recommendations. However, notwithstanding the fact that the TLI has Career and Alumni Centre, almost no operations aimed at student assistance are carried out, the centre is almost not integrated in academic procedures of the Academy, student awareness of the Centre is low. There is no alumni database, analyses on alumni employability are not conducted in a systematic way, data on student employability are received non-formally and are not thorough.

Research is one of the priorities of the Academy, yet its main directions and principles are not yet determined. Notwithstanding the fact that the issues to be found in the field of research are highlighted in the 2017-2020 SP, their formulations are generic and do not reflect concrete research interests. There are no budget allocations for the implementation of research-scientific operations, development and stability. No precise policy and procedures aimed at implementing and developing research are elaborated hence far.

No tangible steps to find financial means, aimed at enhancing research are being undertaken. Research directions find their reflection in chair annual operational plans. In certain cases the members of the teaching staff are involved in research thematic groups at a chair and infrastructure levels. Scientific seminars are scarce at the TLI.

The TLI does not yet have a concept of viewing research and its outcomes as a stable source of income which would otherwise allow for commercialization of research procedures and its outcomes, as well as enhancement of a more applied and up-to-date research (in particular in line with modern trends of research operations at an international scale) and consequently have a considerable input from the

perspective of ensuring stability of financial flows. No inter-chair and interdisciplinary research activities are carried out. Student involvement in research is very limited.

The research carried out by teachers is mainly done on the initiative of the latter. There is a need to undertake more active and practical steps with the aim of ensuring harmonious link between research and academic operations and providing continuity.

Encouraged with its mission, the Academy underlines the importance of international relations both with local labour market and international colleagues. The TLI views the establishment of external relations and internationalization as one of its strategic directions, yet, there is a necessity to precisely elaborate internationalization policy and procedures, which can enhance precision of operations, activate cooperation and enhance student and teacher mobility.

Cooperation with local companies is effective which has also been stated by employers. The lack of financial resources aimed at enhancing international cooperation, the fact that the TLI almost does not participate in grant projects hinder the process of effective cooperation with local and international establishments and bodies. Worrying is the fact that being an intergovernmental TLI, cases of teacher and student development are extremely scarce; moreover, there are no mechanisms enhancing mobility.

The existence of documents regulating the functions of administration bodies, infrastructures, as well as those of separate posts, the existence of sectorial regulations and procedures ensure the viability and operations of management bodies. Since there is no regulated procedure on effectiveness evaluation of the management system and the operations of separate infrastructures, the TLI does not carry out evaluation of efficiency with human, material and financial resources, thus endangering the purposefulness of its expenditures. The system of governance of the TLI has minimal human resources, mainly through transferring the functions of infrastructures to one person-responsible, and within opportunities, combining different posts. The risk of such an approach is that the person in charge can be incompatible with the requirements of effective management of this or that post. The system of governance in formal terms allows for teacher and student participation in decision-making operations. However, de facto participation of students in decision-making operations is quite passive, and no mechanism, aimed at revealing the reasons and enhancing their activity, is being implemented in the TLI. As an outcome of a non-rooted nature of mechanisms and tools of implementing the SP and the loose link between the short-term plans and the SP, the latter does not serve as a document to plan and guide the daily operations of the TLI. No precise review of current procedures has been carried out, since the lion portion of the latter has only recently been elaborated and no precise mechanisms of review have been implemented. Environmental scanning is not systematic.

The TLI IQA is quite young and not thoroughly integrated in the procedure and is not carried out in a systematic way. Despite the policy, including some principles and guidelines, the existence of many processes, hierarchical IQA system is not yet in place. Although the TLI has developed quality assurance policy and procedures, those mechanisms, which would give the opportunity to evaluate the continuous improvement of all the activities and quality assurance culture formation processes,

are not clarified and comprehensive. There are no systematized measures taken for the efficiency of the system, the collaboration with different subdivisions is very weak. The imperfection of the mechanisms and the toolkit for evaluating the effectiveness of different processes and the lack of analysis do not give the opportunity to evaluate the QA processes influence on APs and improvement of academy's operations. Although there is some perception of PDCA processes and cycles, the existing procedures and processes are not segregated per cycles and are mixed. Because of the absence of the systematized feedback system, with the exception of students' evaluation of professors' performance, as well as because of internal and external stakeholders' infinitesimal structural involvement, the young IQA system is not viable and the loop of cycles is not closed. IQA is not connected with strategic objectives and cycles. It has not yet defined qualitative and quantitative data to measure its performance and to improve its functioning.

Taking into account the goals and aspiration of the TLI, the expert panel has provided some recommendations aimed at solving the revealed challenges and improving further operations of the TLI.

STRENGTHS OF THE INSTITUTION

- 1) Generally successful structural integrity of APs and their alignment with state criteria.
- 2) Implementation of holistic approaches aimed at provision of academic honesty.
- 3) Environment mainly conducive to implementation of APs and its continuous development as a priority of development.
- 4) Opportunities to establish international relations, in particular on the account of founders.
- 5) Valuable experience of close cooperation with local companies.
- 6) Attractiveness for regional foreign students and incoming flow of the latter.
- 7) Striving for transferring to student-centred teaching
- 8) Motivated and devoted teaching staff.
- 9) Accessibility of consultations and other services to students.
- 10) Involvement of internal stakeholders in decision-making procedures.

WEAKNESSES OF THE INSTITUTION

- 1) Rupture of the link between the functioning mission and de facto operations.
- 2) Lack of a guiding vision which unites operations and changes.
- 3) Lack of indicators of implementing goals and, as an outcome, operations not targeted at aims.
- 4) An incomplete involvement of external stakeholders in SP elaboration and QA procedures.
- 5) An incomplete provision of the system of governance with information on external environment.
- 6) Imperfections in separate phases of HR management process: planning, evaluation, training, progression.
- 7) Vagueness of research operations.
- 8) Centralized nature of financial incoming flows, dependence on mainly one source: tuition fees.

- 9) Lack of conditions for students with special needs.
- 10) Lack of integration of the IQA system with other infrastructures.

From the perspective of Academy's integration into European Higher Education Area, the expert evaluated the degree of implementation of the first part of European Standards and Guidelines on QA, at the same time referring to other spheres of the TLI to ensure that the EREA can be considered, or can become a full member of the EHEA. This is especially true as far as the Academy is concerned, since the term "European" is included both in its name, and the mission.

The state of arts at the EREA (from the perspective of European Standards and Guidelines on QA) is meticulously analysed in the observations of the international expert. His recommendations are directed at solving the problems revealed.

He concludes that the EREA is currently in the stage of "thorough and necessary transformation". Making use of the best currently at hand, and the quality culture anchored at the European element of the mission, there is a strategic need (mission, universities having participated in the foundation of the EREA, good relations with the labour market) to refresh the Academy, the education it provides and the organigram, to increase the number of students, to improve research and financial resources.

EREA OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS ON THE PRELIMINARY EXPERT PANEL REPORT

The EREA sent its observations and suggestions on the preliminary report of the expert panel on November 11, 2017. The Armenian version of the corresponding document was handed over to the ANQA. The document was passed over to local experts. The said document has been translated and sent to the international expert. On December 7, 2017 a meeting between the EREA representatives and the expert team was organized by the ANQA. Throughout the said meeting the observations of the expert team were presented. The international expert also participated in the said meeting via Skype. Taking into consideration the observations of the University, the expert team introduced certain amendments into the final formulations of the document. Footnotes on changes made are available in the text of the final report.

THE FOLLOW-UP PLAN OF THE EREA

The EREA acknowledges the fact that recommendation of the expert panel are within the framework of the SP of the TLI and hence, has presented a follow-up plan and corresponding timetable to overcome the issues mentioned in the expert panel report.

The expert panel, having studied the follow-up plan of the EREA and the corresponding timetable to overcome the issues mentioned in the expert panel report, concludes:

1. A follow-up plan has been elaborated per field /criterion/. The said plan includes one aim per criterion, which has corresponding activities underlying the latter. The follow-up plan is massively anchored on recommendations provided by the expert team. Anyway, there are some recommendations that are included into the “Needs Analysis” section of the follow-up plan, and there are no steps elaborated for their implementation. The most critical of those are the following:
 - With the aim of activating the role of founders in the process of elaborating certain policies and ensuring a more stable presence of European values, it is either necessary to activate the role of the Board of Trustees, or involve representatives of foreign founders in different cycles of management system (Recommendation N 5).
 - To foresee a mechanism of taking into account the opinion and conclusion of student-representatives in decision-making procedures. This should be done with the aim of enhancing student participation and interest (Recommendation N 8).
 - To activate the involvement of internal and external stakeholders in QA procedures and to turn the feedback on internal and external stakeholders more systematic by involving the latter as structural partners. The involvement of external stakeholders in QA procedures can also enhance the establishment of Alumni Union (Recommendation N 60).

Referring to branches:

- To unify administrative systems operating in the branches and to implement mechanisms ensuring the thorough transfer of information to stakeholders. This should be done with the aim of ensuring the balance between rendering academic and other services (Recommendation N 12).
- To activate research in branches by means of involving teachers and students into research operations of the University. To enhance on-the-spot research for separate directions (Recommendation N 38).
- To enhance the formation of QA skills, especially via training and development of infrastructures (Recommendation N 62).

As far as peer observations and recommendations of the international experts are concerned (from the prospective of integrating into the EHEA), those have also been taken into account to a certain extent.

2. The follow-up plan is only partially presented in line with the ANQA requirements. The current state-of-affairs of operations, the steps aimed at the implementation of the said operations, the intended deadlines and indicators are mentioned in the plan.

The examination of the plan allows for assertion that the EREA attaches more importance to documenting the procedures; the elaboration of an array of policies, procedures and mechanisms, rather than planning, implementation of operations and analyses of corresponding effects of the aims.

The sequence of the majority of steps is logical and is in line with corresponding aims, yet the steps, which considerably repeat the formulations provided in recommendations, do not have precise operations, that is to say it is not evident how the University is going to solve these issues.

3. The follow-up plan indicates a person responsible per step, however, the whole responsibility for the implementation of the plan lies on the shoulders of heads of higher cycles. In certain cases, the highlighted operations are not always within the scope of responsibilities of people concerned. For

instance, the follow-up plan indicates that the head of the Career Centre is responsible for pedagogical training of the teaching staff.

4. Resources foreseen for the implementation of the follow-up plan are comprised but of human resources, but an array of operations require additional material and financial resources, yet, the latter are not foreseen in the plan. There is no information as to what financial and material resources will be required for carrying out the operations highlighted in the follow-up plan. In this respect, the planning is a bit risky, unless financial flows are made stable.
5. The majority of steps do not have precise deadlines; they have but indications of the start day, which can endanger the implementation of operations. This limits the realistic implementation, and the opportunities to evaluate the grounded nature of the plan to a certain extent.
6. The outcomes of separate steps are formulated in line with aims, notwithstanding the fact that in certain cases the main accent is put of having outcomes in the form of corresponding documents.
7. Notwithstanding the fact that indicators per step are highlighted in the plan, the majority of those is not measurable. Moreover, certain indicators thoroughly repeat the outcomes or steps. Not always are indicators evaluating the effectiveness of outcomes determined (raising satisfaction level, involvement, managing the skills). This will not allow the University to evaluate what qualitative changes can occur as an outcome of the said operation.

Hence, the analysis of the follow-up plan presented by the EREA has highlighted that the Academy has mainly taken into consideration the recommendations, and points in need of improvement highlighted by the expert panel and that it has expressed its eagerness to rectify those. The implementation of the main part of the follow-up plan does not pose any risks, taking into account that the steps aimed at their rectifications are logically sequenced and are directed at the implementation of aims, and there are people responsible for the implementation of the steps. Yet some part of the steps highlighted in the plan is not precise, the plan does not foresee any financial and material resources, there are no deadlines for operations, and the lion share of indicators is not measurable. The implementations of the steps highlighted in the follow-up plan can create grounds for the elaboration and implementation of the new model. The main articles of the said model will be targeted at the improvement of the normative field, raising the effectiveness of administrative, academic and scientific-research functions. Moreover, the effective implementation of the said articles can enhance the solution to the current issues and ensure University progress and stable development.

By making use of “Satisfactory”, “Non-satisfactory” grading scale throughout its expertise, the expert panel has evaluated the correspondence of the EREA institutional capacities to the requirements of accreditation criteria as follows:

CRITERION	CONCLUSION
I. Mission and Purpose	Unsatisfactory
II. Governance and Administration	Unsatisfactory
III. Academic Programs	Satisfactory
IV. Students	Satisfactory
V. Faculty and Staff	Satisfactory

VI. Research and Development	Unsatisfactory
VII. Infrastructure and Resources	Satisfactory
VIII. Social Responsibility	Satisfactory
IX. External Relations and Internationalization	Satisfactory
X. Internal Quality Assurance	Unsatisfactory

Taking the aforesaid information into consideration, the ANQA suggests that Accreditation Committee includes the below-given points into its decision, thus drawing the attention of the EREA on the following:

- To give priority to solving the issues present in the domains of **Mission and Purpose, Governance and Administration, Research and Development, Internal Quality Assurance System.**
- Being guided by article 12 of “State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs” regulation or within the deadlines determined by Accreditation Committee to regularly present a written report to the ANQA as far as the outcomes of implemented operations are concerned.
- To review the follow-up plan taking into account the observations present in the said document.

The ANQA considers that the suggested improvements will enhance the implementation of ambitions of the EREA presented in the SER and will serve basis for coming evaluations.

Institutional and Programme
Accreditation Division Head

Expert Panel Chair

ANQA coordinator

COMPOSITION OF EXPERT PANEL

The external evaluation of institutional capacities of EREA was carried out by the expert panel having the following composition (find attached the Appendix 1. CVs of Expert Panel Members):

- **Anna Hovakimyan:** acting head of Computer Programming Chair of Armenian-Russian Slavonic University, candidate of technical sciences, professor.
- **Tigran Mnatsakanyan:** assistant in the Chair of Management of Armenian State University of Economics, candidate of economical sciences.
- **Tigran Sargsyan:** associate professor in the Chair of Service of Yerevan State University, candidate of geograppfical sciences.
- **Lucien Bolaert:** Board Member AEQES, invited lecturer at Columbia University New York.
- **Kamsar Gharakhanyan:** 2nd year student of the Faculty of Informatics of Armenian National Politechnical University.

The activities of the expert panel were coordinated by Ani Mkrtychyan, senior specialist of Institutional and Program Accreditation Division, responsible for ANQA Internal Quality Assurance.

The translation was provided by Zaruhi Soghomonyan, Head of the Chair of Foreign Languages at French University of Armenia.

The recordings were taken by Srбуhi Michikyan, 2nd year student of YSU, Faculty of Sociology.