



National Center For Professional
Education Quality Assurance
Foundation

CONCLUSION

on

Accreditation of Institutional Capacities of “Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences” Foundation

General Information about the Institution

Full name of the Institution: **“Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and
Social Sciences” Foundation**

Official address: RA c. Yerevan, Tumanyan 42

Previous accreditation decree and date: № 9 (11.04.2015)
4 years

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 “Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences” Foundation (hereinafter YSULS) on the basis of self-evaluation presented by YSULS, Expert Panel report, YSULS Action Plan on the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the Expert Panel report as well as Expert panel opinion on the YSULS'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: 7 April, 2018

Submission of self-evaluation report: 13 December, 2018

Submission of the revised version of self-evaluation report: 08 February, 2019

Site-visit: 14-17 May, 2019

Submission of Expert Panel report: 24 July, 2019

Submission of improved action plan on elimination of shortcomings: 9 September, 2019

RESULTS OF PEER REVIEW

YSULS 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". 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

Evaluation of the measures taken by the University showed that the issues mentioned in the previous expert report were mainly highlighted and solved by the institution. Guided by the action plan on the elimination of shortcomings, YSULS has undertaken relevant reforms in almost all areas of its activities except "Research and Development" and "Infrastructure and Resources".

The expert panel evaluates positively the changes made in YSULS mission after the previous accreditation on which the stakeholders have almost unified understanding. This allows to conclude that the role of the University is certain among the stakeholders. However, the lack of clear quantitative indicators for the evaluation of the results of TLI's strategic goals makes it difficult to assess the YSULS progress.

The indication of new approaches in the University's management processes have already ensured tangible results, particularly, over the past two years, the University has managed to overcome the large budget deficit and form the surplus budget for 2019. At the same time, the allocation of the budget is not carried out according to strategic goals.

There are mechanisms for the faculty and students to be involved in TLI management system, but the lack of involvement of MA students in the Student Council does not provide equal opportunities in terms of voicing their problems.

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

Corresponding reforms have been implemented in the academic programs based on the recommendations mentioned in the previous expert panel report. YSULS's academic programs are in line with the mission of the institution, form an integral part of the institution's activities and promote the mobility of lecturers and students.

YSULS is taking steps to elaborate academic programs as a result of the analysis of the demands of the labor market and global challenges, as well as measures aimed at the implementation of academic programs with the double diploma. However, when offering new academic programs, the TLI must evaluate and analyze its own resources.

TLI should pay attention to the organization of education process in the courses with a small number of students, teaching methodology and hours of the second foreign language, teaching and learning methods in distance learning, number of elective courses, as well as foreign language teaching, especially in the language of specialization. The expert panel believes that TLI should enlarge the involvement of targeted employers and graduates in the monitoring, evaluation, and review of academic programs.

TLI makes efforts to staff the faculty with employers and foreign native speaker lecturers, but due to the lack of knowledge of the Armenian language, their teaching becomes less accessible for first and second year students.

There are procedures for the evaluation of the teaching staff, their development, as well as the mentoring mechanism for the young lecturers in some chairs, however, in this and other respects, the University should organize exchange and localization of the best experience in different chair and RACs.

It should be noted that the absence of substitute lecturers creates risks for the effective organization of the educational process, especially in the case of the languages the specialists of which are fewer in the Republic.

The University takes steps to diversify financial inflows, however they have not guaranteed financial stability yet, as the main part of the budget of the TLI is generated from the students' tuition fees.

The University's material-technical base is insufficient for the effective implementation of academic programs in terms of the number of students and the available resources. The University hasn't made any tangible progress in this direction since the previous accreditation.

There are students' recruitment procedures at TLI. However, taking into account only GPA for the admission to the Master's program creates unequal conditions for competition, since students with high GPA can study another specialty (even free of charge) that has nothing in common with their profession and for which they lack the basic knowledge.

The TLI has adopted open door policy, thanks to which the students can freely apply to the administrative and teaching staff with their concerns. Students are provided with supplementary training and counseling opportunities. International cooperation ensures students' participation in

mobility programs. Students are not motivated to be involved in research activities. The TLI has not yet taken steps to address the issues mentioned in the previous expert report in this regard. It is still early to assess the effectiveness of the Student Council's activities (the main body responsible for the protection of students' rights) since it is in the process of reorganization. However, there is a need to increase the reputation of this structure among the students, as students often address the administrative circles rather than the Student Council. It should also be highlighted that the activities of the Career Centre contribute to the professional advancement of students.

Although scientific-research activity is one of the strategic priorities of YSULS, the TLI has not yet taken serious steps in this direction since the previous accreditation. Financial allocations in this direction are insignificant (business trips). Research carried out by the teaching staff is mainly due to the personal initiatives of the lecturers, within their own interests and self-financing. This fact, as well as the low percentage of students engaged in research, is the result of the lack of motivation mechanisms for the development of the research. There are few publications of the lecturers in international journals and impact factor journals. The inclusion of the research results in the educational process is of a situational nature and is not implemented through clearly functioning sustainable mechanisms.

YSULS implements transfer of knowledge to various groups of the society, as well as provides supplementary educational and consulting services.

The reforms in external relations and internationalization have been implemented after the previous accreditation: there are numerous international programs, access to international databases. However, the University would have benefitted, if it had increased the number of students and employees participating in different international programs as well as if it had implemented academic programs in foreign languages.

Reforms in quality assurance have also been carried out as a result of the previous accreditation. Quality assurance culture is disseminated among YSULS stakeholders but the TLI has to make efforts in this field.

STRENGTHS OF THE INSTITUTION

- 1) The University's revised mission and strategic goals is shared by internal stakeholders.
- 2) Implementation of new, more effective approaches in management processes.
- 3) The steps taken to introduce new academic programs that meet the demands of the local labor market.
- 4) The compliance of academic programs with other similar academic programs.
- 5) Students' satisfaction with the support provided by the University.
- 6) Effective activities of the Career Centre.
- 7) Dedicated teaching and administrative staff.

- 8) The faculty is staffed by employers and foreign lecturers.
- 9) Active cooperation with the society.
- 10) Effective cooperation with foreign universities, involvement in international projects, mobility of lecturers and students.
- 11) High motivation of the employees of the Centre for Quality Assurance and Reforms.

WEAKNESSES OF THE INSTITUTION

- 1) The absence of quantitative indicators for the evaluation of outcomes of the Strategic Plan.
- 2) Not always justified nature of implemented changes according to the evaluation of the HEI processes.
- 3) Inadequate development of different chairs and RACs due to the lack of best practice exchange procedures.
- 4) Low motivation among BA graduates to apply to Master's program with the same profession (judging by GPA during the admission to Mater's program)
- 5) Ineffective organization of the education process in the courses with a small number of students.
- 6) Dissatisfaction of students with the second foreign language teaching.
- 7) The application of non-effective motivation mechanisms for students to participate in University management and decision-making processes.
- 8) The issue of sustainability of lecturers on languages that is not common in the Republic.
- 9) Low involvement of lecturers and students in scientific-research activities and lack of encouraging mechanisms.
- 10) Insufficient material-technical base and lack of facilities for stakeholders with special needs.

From the perspective of YSULS's ambition to be integrated into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the international expert has submitted his observations.

Building upon an over 80-year-old tradition of teaching foreign languages, YSULS is currently reinventing itself as a University combining humanities and social sciences. The effort to throw bridges between different areas of teaching and research, between the East and the West, between the pressures of the market and academic standards, between professional training and scholarly pursuits is visible in the documents submitted to the expert panel for review and it also surfaced during meetings with various groups of stakeholders. International cooperation, including international mobility, has been a priority for YSULS from the beginning of its history. YSULS has partners both in the East and in the West and in its policy of reaching out to Armenian Diaspora, its international relations are indeed worldwide. Nevertheless, it consistently seeks integration into

European Higher Education Area and strives to meet the standards that would enable its staff, students, and graduates to compete with scholars in Europe and worldwide.

It is commendable that YSULS seeks to internationalize various areas of its activity, including QA processes, career management, education, and research. The administrative staff of YSULS participated (in one case as a coordinator) in a range of Tempus programs, whose aim was to improve management and to effect alignment with international standards. All these efforts are praiseworthy and during the site visit it was possible to observe that the awareness of QA is gradually spreading throughout the TLI. It has not yet reached every stakeholder, and one can hardly claim that the TLI has already attained quality culture. The QA Manual actually requires revision and the process of making internal stakeholders aware of their role in shaping the mission, vision and strategic plans of the TLI needs to go on. It is commendable that career management is internationalized. The Career Centre plays a major role at YSULS and its dedication to work on both national and international level is praiseworthy.

The site visit confirmed internationalization of education at YSULS and numerous examples have been quoted both in the self-evaluation report and during meetings. Students travel abroad and foreign students come to YSULS, but the figures so far are not impressive. Clearly, it demands further efforts to make YSULS attractive and accessible to foreign students and to prepare YSULS students for study abroad. One of the ways to attract students from abroad would be to offer academic programs in foreign languages. The TLI mentioned in the self-evaluation report its intention to teach academic programs in Russian and English to attract foreign students to YSULS. The site visit showed that these plans had not yet materialized and the few foreign students who study at YSULS rely on the generous help of teachers, administration staff and fellow students if they do not know Armenian. No academic programs are offered entirely in Russian or English.

Although the percentage of students proficient in foreign languages is high, meetings with students showed that academic programs in specific foreign languages are not always consistently taught in the language of specialization. Furthermore, the quality of language teaching varies from one teacher to another. There are some excellent teachers, but there are also some who miss classes or use outdated methods of teaching (for example, teach English or Italian using more Armenian than the language of the specialization). Students argued that foreign languages should be taught in the languages of the specialization, and not in Armenian. Students in non-philological study programs in humanities and social sciences learn foreign languages within a certain limited scope but feel they would benefit from a greater exposure to foreign languages, especially English. Academic programs in foreign languages would also be beneficial to Armenian students and could pave their way to international exchange and careers.

The TLI declares the use of ECTS and offered a selection of syllabi (or course guides) for review. Most of the syllabi were written in Armenian with elements of foreign languages. Only some were written in English. The course guides viewed during the site visit contained mistakes. For

example, the syllabus for Romanian Language and Literature gives very confusing information about the level (according to the CEFR description): at first – A2, then in preconditions – B1, and in brief description – A1 to B1. The brief description is actually quite long and contains information that is repeated later on, such as rationale, teaching methods and evaluation process. The information about course objectives is missing. Learning outcomes are stated vaguely and are not defined in terms of knowledge, skills, and competence. Bibliography is very long and includes 22 publications. The table with the scale of rating is not quite comprehensible and if retained would need to be explained to students. A detailed plan of topics for each week is helpful and indicates that the level is actually quite basic.

It is crucial to keep in mind that the addressees of the syllabi are students both Armenian and international, as well as external stakeholders who host interns. The wording, and especially the formulation of outcomes, needs to be clear, succinct, and to the point. Syllabi need to be consulted with students to make sure that they understand them. Syllabi of different courses need to be compared for the sake of uniformity, consistency, and to make sure that put together the courses offered within an individual academic program add up and reinforce each other, meet the students' needs and are feasible. All syllabi should follow the same format and there needs to be a limit set on the number of sources to be studied.

The European system of higher education makes a clear distinction between BA and MA programs based on the level of teaching. The TLI introduced the division into BA and MA programs, but meetings with students have shown that they do not really see the difference. Some of them voiced the opinion that MA programs repeat the content of BA programs. For this reason, students who choose to continue studies at YSULS change majors in order to learn something new and improve their chances on the job market. When students switch majors, teachers at MA level work with students who have little or no knowledge of the field, and in turn feel obliged to adjust the level of teaching to the level of the students who at the MA level begin a new major. Hence teachers may well be repeating at the MA level the content of the BA program. This state of affairs is aggravated by the decision of some faculties and chairs not to hold entrance exams for or interviews with candidates for MA studies. The criteria and policy of recruiting students should be transparent and uniform or at least comparable. During the site visit, the expert panel received contradictory statements concerning methods of recruiting students: some stakeholders claimed they had entrance exams or interviews, others did not.

During the site visit, the expert panel was confronted with contradictory information about the languages in which BA and MA theses are written. Some stakeholders claimed that students were free to choose the language of their theses, others that they had to request the right to write a thesis in a foreign language, and still others claimed that all theses have to be written in Armenian by law. The idea of having an external reviewer at MA thesis defences is good and the final reports of the Attestation Committees read during the site visit were informative and praiseworthy. They

contained the statistics of grades in a given group of students, as well as comments on various shortcomings of the theses. A selection of theses and reviews read during the site visit demonstrated a good quality of theses and their definitely practical orientation. It is a pity that theses (graduation work) at YSULS are written almost exclusively in Armenian. Even if the intention is to protect the native language, which is commendable, some parts of the theses, or at least a summary, could be written in one of the major languages taught at YSULS. This would help students become “internationally competitive”, which is the aim of YSULS stated in its new mission. Another way of preparing students for international study would be to allow them a real choice of subjects and languages studied at YSULS. The percentage of elective courses named during meetings is still relatively low (20%). What is more, during meetings students indicated that the actual choice of languages and subjects is still more limited. Compliance with European standards means allowing students to choose.

Internship needs to come at the right moment in students' educational development. It also needs to be adequately assessed and useful to students.

The self-evaluation report presents convincing numerical indices of the TLI's academic staff participation in international programs and business trips as well as the numbers of foreign lecturers on both short- and long-term basis, but the doubt concerning the distribution of activities and funding across Chairs and RACs has not been resolved.

The internationalization of research exists at YSULS, though it seems to be a matter of individual contacts of researchers, rather than a more general strategy. The international exchange in fact concerns mostly teaching. Presentations of scholarly work at conferences and invited talks are still a minor part of internationalization at YSULS. Even though YSULS has included research and especially international research in its new Strategic Plan, allocation of funds for research is still very limited and there are too few incentives to really promote research. There are always more urgent issues than research, for example, construction works and repairs in the TLI's buildings. The question needs to be addressed by different groups of YSULS' stakeholders, how important research really is for the TLI and how it is understood.

Coping with heavy teaching workload, teachers have little time for research. What is more, they can only hope for moral support of their work and often have to pay for publications or participation in international conferences out-of-pocket. In other words, those teachers who do research in addition to teaching, do so out of passion. Rank-and-file teachers do not even apply for funding to cover the cost of participation in international conferences because they know the TLI would not be able to help and would turn their application down.

YSULS has demonstrated in the self-evaluation report and during the site visit that it has health and safety mechanisms, including the system of medical check-ups for students and the activities of the Chair of Physical Education and Civil Defense. These activities are commendable.

There are nevertheless spaces in the TLI's buildings that are not accessible to students with disabilities (for example, restrooms).

An apparently minor point that makes a big difference is the need for consistency in using names and acronyms of the TLI, its units, programs, and documents. In the submitted documents and on site the same units and documents often have different names, which is confusing. The same applies to the names of internships vs. practica. The English equivalents of Armenian names need to be used consistently for the sake of clarity.

TLI's COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS ON DRAFT REPORT OF EXPERT PANEL

On 12 July 2019 YSULS 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 24 July 2019.

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

YSULS 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:

- The recommendations made by the expert panel are taken into consideration in YSULS action plan on the elimination of shortcomings,
- The link between the defined intermediate results and the intended outcomes is generally clear, and in the case of the acquisition of intermediate results, the intended outcomes are mostly realistic; at the same time, there are no clear quantitative intermediate results defined in the program,

- there are relevant circles responsible for the assessment of the each result of program, but in some cases it is not clear which subdivision will oversee the achievement of separate intermediate results;
- there is an article in YSULS action plan for elimination of shortcomings on the budget allocated for the acquisition of each intended outcome, however, the amount of financial resources is largely not represented by digital data;
- most of the timeframes for evaluating the acquisition for the intended outcomes of the program are too long,
- the defined indicators for progress assessment are qualitative, there are no quantitative indicators, and impact assessment is largely carried out through accountability, analysis, and other documentation.

The study of the YSULS 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. However, there are issues in defining target quantitative indicators for assessing the progress of intended outcomes and in clarifying the timeframes for assessing the availability of intermediate results and the amount of funding available for the acquisition of each outcome. 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 YSULS'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
I. Mission and Purpose	SATISFACTORY
II. Governance and Administration	SATISFACTORY
III. Academic programs	SATISFACTORY
IV. Students	SATISFACTORY
V. Faculty and Staff	SATISFACTORY
VI. Research and Development	UNSATISFACTORY
VII. Infrastructure and Resources	UNSATISFACTORY
VIII. Social Responsibility	SATISFACTORY
IX. External Relations and Internationalization	SATISFACTORY
X. Internal Quality Assurance System	SATISFACTORY

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.

Based on the aforementioned, ANQA suggests the Accreditation Committee to draw YSULS'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 **“Research and Development”** and **“Infrastructure and Resources”**.
- 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 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 made by the expert panel.

ANQA finds that the suggested reforms will foster the fulfillment of the YSULS'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 the SER and QA operations of YSULS was carried out by the expert panel having the following composition:

1. **Margarita Poghosyan** – PhD in Economics, a lecturer at Northern University’s Chair of Economics and Management, RA, member.
2. **Angin Martirosyan** – PhD in Engineering, Head of the Division of Academic Programs and Teaching Methodology of National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia , RA, member.
3. **Lilit Bekaryan** – PhD in Philology, Assistant at YSU chair of English for Cross-Cultural Communication, RA, member.
4. **Mirosława Buchholtz** - Ph.D. in English and American Literature, Head of the English Department of Nicolaus Copernicus University, Poland, member.
5. **Haykanush Harutyunyan** - 2nd year MA student of the Faculty of Primary Education at the Armenian State Pedagogical University after Khachatur Abovyan.

ANQA Support Staff

- **Lilit Pipoyan** – Specialist at the Institutional and Program Accreditation Division of ANQA and Coordinator of YSULS institutional accreditation process
- **Shushanik Melik-Adamyan** –lecturer at Russian-Armenian University (RAU), interpreter.
- **Lilit Muradyan** – Junior Researcher at YSU Institute for Armenian Studies, translator.