



CONCLUSION

on

Accreditation of Institutional Capacities of NORTHERN UNIVERSITY

General Information about the Institution

Full name of the Institution: Yerevan Northern University

Acronym: Not available

Official address: 15a Alek Manukyan Str., Yerevan, 0025, RA

Previous accreditation decree and date: 2015, Conditional Institutional Accreditation with a 2 year period.

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 and Functioning of Accreditation Committee of “National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance” foundation (ANQA), the Accreditation Committee of “National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance” foundation (hereinafter referred to as the Committee) discussed the ANQA draft conclusion on the institutional capacities of Yerevan Northern University (hereinafter: YNU) on the basis of self-analysis presented by YNU, Expert Panel report, YNU action plan for the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the Expert Panel report as well as Expert panel opinion based on the YNU 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 time periods:

Submission of application	02 December 2016
Submission of self-evaluation report	02 May 2017
expert panel site-visit	18-21 September 2017
Submission of expert panel report	14 December 2017
Submission of action plan on elimination of shortcomings	25 December 2017

RESULTS OF PEER REVIEW

The expertise was carried out by an independent expert panel¹ 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 accreditation² approved by the RA Government decree N 959-N as of 30 June 2011.

BRIEF SUMMARY

While carrying out the expertise the expert panel took into consideration the fact "Northern University considers its mission to provide availability and transparency in education along with international advanced experience and best national traditions, implementation of education ensuring accessibility, availability, organization transparency and humanitarian values combining the best national traditions and international advanced experience-aimed at training specialists able to apply obtained knowledge for the following fields-enterprise economics and management, law, informatics, journalism, philology, psychology, education."

Back in 2015 the NU underwent accreditation according to 10 criteria set by the RA Government on 30 June 2011 N 959-Ն decree. As an outcome, the NU was granted conditional accreditation of 2 years. The TLI has appealed the said decision and in 2016 an additional expertise was carried out by an independent expert panel as far as non-satisfactory criteria were concerned (APs, Research and Development, External Relations and Internationalization). The committee in charge of carrying out additional expertise left preliminary assessment unaltered. The NU taking into account the recommendations provided has undertaken an array of improvement changes in various spheres.

Based on the outcomes of the previous accreditation procedure, the NU has changed its SP. With the ratification of the new SP the TLI has made the main directions of its operations more precise, referring to all aspects of TLI operations in the formulations of the SP; from material resources to societal responsibility. Praiseworthy is the fact that the TLI cooperates with its internal and external stakeholders with the aim of carrying out its strategic aims. Internal stakeholders have participated in the elaboration of the SP, and in the procedure of revealing the needs. However, the involvement of external stakeholders in the aforesaid procedures and the feedback with the latter is still loose. The expert panel states that the policy and the operations of the TLI mostly correspond to the mission adopted by the TLI.

The expert panel considers that even though the fact that started from 2016 certain steps aimed at reforms of its government system has been undertaken based on the recommendations provided throughout the previous accreditation procedure; a new Statute has been ratified, the SP has been reviewed, structural changes have occurred, the system of governance still needs further improvement and precision of functions of structural infrastructures. The model of governance is still at use and there is no resource planning for

¹ Appendix 1: The expert panel composition and ANQA support staff

² Appendix 2: Evaluation according to accreditation criteria

the realization of strategic goals. Financial planning of the TLI is not yet carried out based on strategic priorities (the importance is highlighted in the QA criteria of QA Manual). The TLI also faces an issue of financial transparency. The issues in the sphere of governance have not enhanced the complete improvement of research and development.

The TLI carries out undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate APs in both part- and full-time modes of study. The TLI carries out 14 full-time undergraduate, 12 part-time, 10 graduate and 3 PhD APs throughout 11 specializations in 3 faculties. The choice of professional APs is in line with the TLI's mission from the perspective of preparing highly demanded professionals in the labor market, and are in line with state academic criteria. Based on the outcomes of the previous accreditation procedure, start from 2015 the TLI has carried out certain operations aimed at modernizing its APs and improving the weaknesses revealed in the APs. In particular, there is an outcome-oriented approach to the APs. The intended learning outcomes of three APs presented are mainly in line with the undergraduate and graduate levels of NQF. National and international benchmarking and external evaluation have been carried out for undergraduate APs. The outcomes of the benchmarking and the external review witness that the APs are mainly in line with other similar APs and can enhance student and teacher mobility. The policy of assessing student knowledge undergoes constant improvement, a procedure of graduate theses defense has been elaborated. The meeting with students has highlighted that the TLI undertakes certain steps aimed at implementing student-centered teaching, which is more actively undertaken by young teachers. The expert panel considers that the manual on AP elaboration and regulations developed by the TLI are important preconditions for regular quality improvement of APs.

The expert panel evaluates positively the fact that the TLI has elaborated and implemented a policy and procedures on teaching staff selection and assessment, the requirements to professional qualities of the teaching staff, job descriptions of certain teachers and administrative staff has been elaborated. The expert panel finds that the TLI has corresponding teaching staff with appropriate qualifications to carry out its APs, which allows passing to the conclusion that the TLI takes into account professional qualities and spheres of professional functioning of the teaching staff, which will enhance the preparation of high-quality specialists. With the aim of ensuring the stability of teaching staff, the TLI has a set system of promotion/encouragement, and throughout the site-visit, it became evident that the said mechanisms are widely used in practice, and the teachers are contented with the existing procedure. The NU infrastructures and human resources are currently sufficient to carry out its academic process, its mission and strategic goals. The TLI has also undertaken certain steps aimed at implementing the recommendations provided throughout the previous accreditation procedure and has carried out surveys among its internal stakeholders as far as their satisfaction with resources is concerned, has undertaken certain steps aimed at saturating the resources (computers, projects and etc.). However, the library of the NU is still needed enrichment with professional literature.

To expand the process of student recruitment the cooperation between the NU and secondary institutions, VET of the Republic continues. The operations aimed at activating the dissemination of information on the TLI have been activated. An array of contracts with colleges and VETs have been signed which are aimed at student recruitment. Visits to schools and colleges have been carried out by certain employees of the TLI. The expert panel evaluates positively the fact that the TLI has mechanisms aimed at revealing the needs of the students and satisfying the latter, yet the expert panel considers that in certain cases the improvement of tools and methodology of conducting the said surveys, the implementation of an analytical approach to survey outcome in accountability reports will enhance a targeted revelation of needs, planning of operations aimed at improvement, achievement of trustworthy outcomes. It is positive the fact that the TLI has a policy and mechanisms aimed at revealing the social-economical needs of students and satisfying the former, which will increase the attractiveness of the TLI for the applicants. The TLI has certain functioning bodies that assist students and enhance the process of revealing their needs and finding solutions to the latter. Students have the right to participate in additional lessons and get consultations.

The TLI has elaborated 2013-2016 and 2016-2021 scientific-research and scientific-methodical plans reflecting its research interests. In 2013-2016 plan 29 scientific-research directions were singled out. In 2016-2021 plan there are 22 prime directions and 47 topics. Based on the outcomes of previous accreditation, the NU has undertaken certain steps aimed at developing the research field: activating the organization of conferences, setting a regulation on promoting those undertaking research works, enlarging the list of scientific-research works. Alongside the TLI has been granted permission to ratify Ph.D. topics and carry out Ph.D. exams  .00.03 from the Supreme Certifying Committee. However, the expert panel finds that the TLI still has many steps to undertake to satisfy the requirements of the criterion and to improve the drawbacks and core requirements; implementation of financial planning aimed at the development of scientific research field, improvement of the policy and procedures aimed at linking research operations and academic process, activation of teacher and student involvement in research operations, implementation of joint projects and research at an international arena. Current publications are mainly preconditioned by individual preferences of teachers rather than the plans of the TLI. Even though the fact that the TLI has created a corresponding center aimed at implementing prior research directions, ambitions, objectives and aims reflected in the statute of the center, the absence of other positions except the one of the Centre Head, diverse and myriad research directions and topics highlighted in the plan can be risky from the perspective of their thorough implementation. The TLI does not carry out a precise policy on research operations promotion of learners, though students have participated in conferences on their initiative.

Throughout recent years, the TLI has undertaken some works directed at internationalization and reinforcement of external relations, taking into account the recommendations provided throughout the previous accreditation. However, during the site

visit inclinations and steps aimed at internationalization were still in the initial stage of development. It is worth mentioning, that there is no financial planning directed at implementing the aims as highlighted in the SP, incoming and outgoing mobility of students is low and is not preconditioned by TLI encouragement and opportunities created. The level of English language acquisition among the students and the teaching staff is low, the same applies to the ability of teachers to teach in English. The website contains scarce information in English.

Throughout recent years, the implementation and development of QA system of the TLI have created favorable conditions for the formulation of quality culture, internal and external evaluations. The expert panel is of the opinion, that internal stakeholders are involved in the operations of the field, QA operations are periodically reviewed, and the PDCA cycle is at different levels for different operations. The TLI has a functioning system of IQA, which, however, is still in the process of being formed by continuously enhancing the ongoing development of TLI operations, the formation of quality culture and strives to ensure transparency of TLI operations. The expert panel considers praiseworthy the fact that the QA staff is very motivated and is well-aware of TLI issues.

The expert panel, taking into account the ambitions and goals of the institution, provided advice on the solution of the identified issues and further improvement of the university's activities.

STRENGTHS OF THE UNIVERSITY:

1. Affordable academic services.
2. Improved SDP.
3. Reviewed APs, determined ILOs, continuous improvement of the assessment system, alignment with other similar APs of the Republic.
4. Assistance and guidance rendered to students by the NU staff.
5. Sufficiency of teaching staff having necessary professional qualifications, student satisfaction with teaching staff.
6. Existence of conducive environment for teaching/learning.
7. Implementation of mechanisms for the transfer of knowledge and values.
8. Documentation necessary for carrying out IQA regulated operations, regular review of QA procedures.
9. High motivation of QA Department, the involvement of internal stakeholders in QA operations.

WEAKNESSES OF THE UNIVERSITY:

1. Incompliance of the structure and strategic goals of financial planning and strategic goals.
2. Scarcity of assessment of the system of governance, analyses of environmental scanning.
3. Weak involvement of external stakeholders in academic processes.

4. Generic nature of teaching/learning methods in APs and their generic description not in line with ILOs.
5. Loose link of research operations and academic process, weak involvement of students in research-scientific operations, lack of a precise policy to promote their research operations.
6. The fact that one and the same teacher is in charge of delivering an array of core disciplines.
7. Lack of policy to consider research outcomes as a means of income.
8. Scarcity of professional literature in the library.
9. Lack of analytical component in reports.
10. Scarcity of mobility among teachers and students, low level of foreign language attainment, scarcity of publications in international journals.

An international expert has presented his observations on the aspirations of the university to integrate into the European Higher Education Area. The conclusion is that internationalization trends at the university are still in the early stages of development, the basic rules and subject descriptions are not listed in English, an English-language site is not currently available, students' mobility through various exchange programs is low and there is a lack of teaching staff with a good level of foreign language skills, and regular visits of foreign teachers are lacking. All of the existing 11 study programs are thus taught almost exclusively in the Armenian language, only very few modules (language courses in the first and second year, one or two courses in the area of international law) are given in English. Therefore, it is necessary for the university to continue to make investments in foreign language.

There has been some progress in the preparation of advertising materials, subject descriptions, and important regulations in English. One of the right guidelines for internationalization is the organization of distance learning at Northern University. There are also positive developments in terms of involvement in international projects, as the university is already involved in a number of TEMPUS projects.

On the positive side, the first major steps towards promoting the internationalization of Northern University have already been taken. However, many initiatives need to be implemented in the future to strengthen this development.

YNU COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS ON DRAFT REPORT OF EXPERT PANEL

The academy sent its remarks and comments on the report to ANQA on 17.11.2017. On 07 December 2017 ANQA organized a meeting for the representatives of the University and the expert panel during which the expert panel gave its feedback. Taking into consideration the University's comments, the expert panel compiled the final version of the

report which was approved by the Expert Panel on 11.12.2017. In the text of the final report, the footnotes include the changes made by the group.

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

Yerevan Northern University accepts that the recommendations provided by the expert panel are within the scope of the Yerevan Northern University strategy, and it has submitted the action plan and time-schedule on the elimination of shortcomings.

Having examined the Yerevan Northern University's action plan based on the recommendations presented in the final Expert Panel report, the Expert Panel concludes:

Taking into account the advice provided by the expert group, the institution undertook to reform all areas of its activity, in particular:

- An action plan has been developed to effectively implement the strategies outlined for all ten areas.
- The sequence of actions are generally logical, with some exceptions
- Persons and teams responsible for actions are mentioned in the plan.
- Appropriate resources are available to address most of these issues, but in some cases both material and financial resources are missing.
- The timescales for implementation of actions are generally realistic, except of some cases.
- The outcomes are directed for accomplishing the objectives of the action.
- Performance measurement indicators are available for evaluating actions, but impact indicators are not available.

Thus, the study of the deficiencies plan identified in the expert report showed that the University mainly took into account the expert group's advice, identified the deficiencies and expressed a willingness to correct them. Most of the action plan does not contain risks. Improvement actions and implementation steps are generally in line with the recommendations of the expert panel.

Taking into consideration the above mentioned, ANQA suggests the Accreditation Committee to pay special attention to the implementation of the following activities while making decision:

- 1) To give urgent solution to the problems existing in the spheres of **Governance and Administration, Research and Development, External Relations and Internationalization;**
- 2) According to the requirements of clause 12 of the Regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs” or according to

the deadlines set by the 9 Accreditation Committee, regularly present a written report to ANQA on the results of the carried out activities;

- 3) To take into consideration the remarks about the action plan mentioned in the current conclusion while reviewing the Action Plan for the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the Expert Panel report.

Head of ANQA Institutional and
Programme Accreditation Division

Chair of the Expert Panel

ANQA Coordinator

EXPERT PANEL COMPOSITION

The external expertise of the SER and QA operations of the NU was carried out by the expert panel having the following composition:

- **Gayane Marmaryan:** Armenian State Agrarian University, Head of the Chair of Biochemistry, Microbiology and Virology, Doctor of Biology.
- **Irring Wasser:** Managing director of ASIIN, president of CEENQA.
- **Misak Markosyan:** PhD in Law, Head of the Department of Law and Criminality at the faculty of Law of Police Academy.
- **Mariam Momjyan:** PhD in Economics, lecturer at Russian-Armenian University.
- **Mariam Yevdokimova:** 4th-year student at ASPU.

The works of the expert panel were coordinated by:

- **Varduhi Gyulazyan** – senior specialist of ANQA Institutional and Program Accreditation Division.
- **Zaruhi Soghomonyan** – Head of the Chair of Foreign Languages at French University of Armenia

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

The Expert Panel presented its evaluation per accreditation criterion by using the “unsatisfactory” and “satisfactory” evaluation scale³. 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. Teaching and Support Staffs	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	Satisfactory

³ 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.