

National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation



**MANUAL FOR CONDUCTING EXPERT REVIEWS OF HIGHER
EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN
THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA**

(new edition)

Yerevan 2026

Approved by

**Decision No. 6-L of the Board of Trustees of the National Center for Professional
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This Manual provides an overview of the quality assurance framework for Armenian tertiary education, external review process and procedures for the state accreditation of tertiary level institutions and academic programmes. It also outlines the roles of the quality assurance managers and stakeholders, as well as describes the scope of activities of the institutions and experts. The Manual is a methodical guide for tertiary level institutions, experts and other stakeholders.

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Foreword

This Manual is adopted pursuant to the Statute on State Accreditation of Tertiary Level Institutions and their Academic Programmes in the Republic of Armenia (hereafter Accreditation Statute), approved by the RA Government Decree No. 978-N of June 30, 2011.

This Manual was revised by the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance foundation, (hereafter “ANQA”) in 2015, 2021 and 2026.

The Manual provides an overview of the quality assurance framework (QAF) of the RA tertiary education, the procedures and duration of external review processes for the state accreditation of tertiary level institutions (hereafter referred to as “TLIs”, “education institutions”) and academic programmes (hereafter referred to as “APs”). It also outlines the roles of the quality assurance managers and stakeholders, as well as describes the scope of activities of the TLIs and experts.

The Manual revision is based on the following legal grounds:

- Decree No. 1374-N of the Government of the Republic of Armenia of August 29, 2024 on Additions and Amendments to the Statute on State Accreditation of Tertiary Level Institutions and their Academic Programmes in the Republic of Armenia;
- Law of the Republic of Armenia on the Approval of the State Programme for the Development of RA Education until 2030 (adopted on November 16, 2022);
- Law of the Republic of Armenia on Higher Education and Science (adopted on September 11, 2025);

- Law of the Republic of Armenia on Vocational Education and Training (adopted on May 22, 2024);
- Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel (Decision No. 3-L of ANQA's Board of Trustees, dated May 5, 2025);
- Procedure on the Formation and Operation of the Accreditation Committee of the "National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance" foundation (Decision No. 1-L of May 8, 2020 and Decision No. 5 of April 8, 2024 of ANQA's Board of Trustees);
- Procedure on the Submission of Complaints Concerning the Accreditation Process of the "National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance" foundation (Decision No. 4-L of ANQA's Board of Trustees, dated May 5, 2025);
- External review fees (Decisions No. 8-L, N 9-L and N 12-L of 2024 of ANQA's Board of Trustees).

During the Manual revision, the following were also considered:

- need assessment and situational analysis of the RA Tertiary education system, as well as current developments in the sector;
- the New Edition of the Decision-Making Policy on Awarding Institutional Accreditation by Accreditation Committee of "National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance" foundation (Decision No. 36-L of ANQA's Accreditation Committee, dated February 10, 2025)
- electronic questionnaires for the development of ANQA's TLI database;
- experience and outcomes accumulated from accreditation processes conducted during 2009–2025 as part of the formation of the national quality assurance system;
- priorities and developments of the Bologna process;

- recommendations and observations provided by local and international experts.

Another external driver was the revision of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (hereinafter referred to as “ESG”) and the Tirana Communiqué (2024), which provided a basis for that revision.

Drawing on prior experience, ANQA believes that the effective implementation of this Manual can only be ensured through the active engagement of all relevant stakeholders. This will contribute to the fulfilment of ANQA’s mission, the quality assurance of the RA tertiary education and the further recognition of qualifications awarded by education institutions at both national and international levels.

Acknowledgments

ANQA expresses its gratitude to all education stakeholders who strive to make the system recognisable and competitive at the national and international levels.

ANQA also extends its appreciation to everyone involved in the revision of the Manual for their feedback on required changes and support in needs identification.

ANQA extends special appreciation to international quality assurance agencies and experts for their active participation in surveys and discussions focused on the system effectiveness and enhancement, as well as for valuable observations on the Manual provisions.

All questions regarding the Manual or the processes described therein can be addressed to ANQA.

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I. Tertiary Education System in Armenia

Higher education reforms aim to implement the values and principles of the Bologna Process and related Communiqués. By signing the Bergen Communiqué in 2005 and officially joining the Bologna Process, Armenia undertook the responsibility to apply the key principles of the Bologna Process in line with the action lines and to become part of the European Higher Education Area (hereafter “EHEA”). The integration into EHEA entails fundamental and continuous changes in the RA higher education system to foster knowledge-based and innovation-driven education. Since 2005, the Armenian higher education system has undergone radical transformations, notably the introduction of a three-cycle degree system and the transition to a credit-based system. Meanwhile, academic programmes have been reformed to facilitate student-centred learning and mobility of students and teachers. On April 8, 2011, the RA Government approved the National Qualifications Framework (hereinafter “NQF”) by Decree No. 332-N. It was subsequently revised by Government Decree No. 714-N in 2016.

The RA Law on Vocational Education and Training adopted in 2024, the RA Law on Higher Education and Science adopted in 2025, as well as the State Programme for the Development of RA Education until 2030 constitute the strategic and regulatory framework for the development of the education sector. Meanwhile, the clear definition and achievement of the AP learning outcomes, supported by evidence-based verification of their achievement, continue to be recognised as key components in the evaluation of education quality. Since 2020, ANQA’s Accreditation Committee has highlighted the achievement of all AP outcomes and their evidence-based presentation. Accordingly, its decisions have required institutions to conduct internal audits of all academic programmes with the involvement of external experts.

1. Higher Education System

Higher education in the Republic of Armenia is implemented through basic and supplementary academic programmes. Academic programmes of higher education are carried out in two cycles, leading to bachelor's and master's degrees. The postgraduate academic programmes are one-cycle, preparing researchers and clinical residents. Higher education programmes correspond to the NQF levels 6-8. The APs are implemented by state, non-state and interstate HEIs, as well as HEIs with state participation, in both full-time and part-time modes of study and are offered on tuition-free and fee-paying bases.

According to the RA Government Decree No. 2307-N of 2005 on the introduction of a credit system in the higher education system of the Republic of Armenia, the student's annual full workload is equivalent to 60 credits.

Bachelor's degree (first cycle) programmes require the completion of at least 240 credits (four years of full-time study). Police programmes require a minimum of 180 credits (at least three years of study), while medical education programmes comprise 300 credits (five years of study). Master's programmes require the completion of 60–120 credits, or up to 180 credits in medical fields. In the case of part-time study, the duration of study is extended by one year.

The credit includes:

- participation in lectures, laboratory work, practical lessons, internships;
- completion of examinations and tests;
- independent study;
- assessment of performance and quality of individual works, course papers, theses and other works set by the curriculum.

The provision of higher education requires the licensing of education institutions and their programmes. The licensing is followed by the state

institutional and programme accreditation of HEIs. The programme accreditation is voluntary, while the institutional accreditation is mandatory (the RA Government Decree No. 978-N of 2011).

In the paid higher education system, the amount of tuition fees is determined by each HEI in accordance with the RA Government Decree No. 163-N on Maximum Tuition Fees Based on Academic Degrees and Accreditation Results, dated February 19, 2015.

The HEIs' governance is regulated by the legislation of the Republic of Armenia and the charter of the respective higher education institution. It is based on self-governance, combining the principles of sole management and collegiality, and is exercised through the functions of the HEI's governing council, which performs the highest governance functions, and its academic council. The rector or head is responsible for the day-to-day management of the HEI.

2. Vocational Education System

Vocational education and training is a systematic educational process that provides students with the professional competencies and opportunities necessary to gain work experience, perform qualified occupational activities, address current and future challenges, respond to labour market changes, adapt to new conditions, and engage in continuous professional development.

Vocational education and training (hereafter "VET") is offered at two levels, comprising the following main degree-granting programmes:

1) first level: handicraft education, the completion of which is concluded with a state final examination, leading to the award of the qualification of craftsman or junior specialist.

2) second level: secondary vocational education, the completion of which is concluded with a state final examination, leading to the award of a specialist qualification.

The duration of studies for the qualification of craftsman or junior specialist is from six months up to three years.

The duration of studies for a specialist qualification ranges from one year and ten months to five years.

Depending on the level of VET, academic programmes may be implemented in full-time or part-time mode, combining on-site, distance, or external forms of study.

A part-time VET student is required to accumulate credits equivalent to at least 50 percent of the annual study workload within the period specified for the respective academic programme. The total duration of study may be extended to up to twice the standard duration of the relevant academic programme.

Vocational education and training institutions (hereafter “VET institutions”) may be classified according to their founder as follows:

- 1) state VET institutions established by government decree or pursuant to an international agreement;
- 2) public VET institutions established on the basis of a cooperation agreement between the state and a non-governmental organisation (including a foreign one);
- 3) private VET institutions founded by legal or natural persons (including foreign).

A state VET institution is a non-commercial organisation. A non-state VET institution may have any organisational and legal form permitted by law.

The VET system includes a type of education institution known as a college.

II. Quality Assurance Framework in Armenian Tertiary Education

There has been a global rise in the demand for the development and strengthening of internal and external quality assurance systems in the tertiary education sector. This has been driven by the rapid growth in numbers of the TLIs and students, coupled with public and private investment over the last two decades. The education ministers of all Bologna Declaration signatory countries have acknowledged the need to establish independent accreditation or quality assurance systems within

the EHEA (Berlin Communiqué, 2003). The external quality assurance (EQA) is a mandatory process for all countries that signed the Bologna Declaration. Almost all European countries have responded to this need, designing and implementing systems for the enhancement of education quality and assurance of results. An emphasis is placed on the QA of the TLIs' operations, particularly the award of qualifications and dissemination of information to the public.

The Berlin Communiqué called on the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (hereafter referred to as "ENQA") to work with all its partners to jointly develop a set of commonly agreed standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance. The aim was to ensure consistency of quality assurance in Europe, thereby facilitating academic and professional mobility. Consequently, in 2005, the education ministers of the Bologna signatory countries (Bergen communiqué) established and adopted the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. In 2015, the ESG were revised, reflecting the continuous reforms of quality assurance processes. The ESG provide guidance to governments, quality assurance agencies and HEIs in the development of national QA systems, while also offering a common regulatory framework for the international recognition of the awarded qualifications.

In their early years, the ESG contributed to the development of national education systems. More recently, tertiary education has been shaped by key trends such as globalisation, massification, and internationalisation, fostering increased student mobility.

Internationalisation has also become a defining feature of quality assurance and accreditation agencies. Numerous national and pan-European accrediting bodies

have been established. Technologies and procedures for quality evaluation, applied by the national accreditation agencies, have undergone changes.

Developments within the EHEA provided the basis for the discussion and adoption of the second-generation ESG by the education ministers of the Bologna Declaration signatory countries at the Ministerial Conference in Yerevan in May 2015.

The policy, procedures, and quality assurance mechanisms adopted by the Republic of Armenia have been developed in compliance with the European standards and guidelines, adhering to national peculiarities.

The Paris Communiqué, adopted in 2018, stimulates academic freedom and integrity, HEIs' institutional autonomy, participation of students and stakeholders in the higher education governance, innovation in learning and teaching.

The Rome Communiqué, adopted in 2020, attaches importance to inclusive education for all learners and innovation in learning methods. This focus is closely linked to research and practice, particularly the interrelationship between educational reform, knowledge transfer and mobility.

The Tirana Communiqué, adopted in 2024, underscores academic integrity, the HEIs' institutional autonomy, the participation of students and academic staff in governance, and increased public accountability of HEIs.

1. Quality Assurance Context

According to the definition adopted in RA education system, quality implies “fitness for purpose”. According to this approach, external review processes determine the extent to which educational services and learning outcomes meet set objectives. The definition also enables institutions to set clear goals in their missions, with quality evaluated in terms of their level of achievement. External quality assurance agencies

primarily focus on the alignment of institutional objectives with the government-approved QA criteria, education development priorities and societal demands.

This approach implies that, first and foremost, the aims and objectives of tertiary education should be defined. Accordingly, educational services and learning outcomes are expected to satisfy the stakeholder needs and requirements. Furthermore, stakeholders should clearly express their needs and requirements.

The aims of tertiary education are reflected in institutional missions and are further translated into programme-level objectives and intended learning outcomes (ILOs).

The TLI demonstrates the fulfilment of its mission and provides evidence of effectiveness to external reviewers, who, in turn, assure stakeholders (the third party) of the outcomes.

Tertiary education quality is closely connected with the AP implementation, namely the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching. Effectiveness is related to the objectives of the academic programmes, whereas efficiency concerns the resources used to achieve the defined objectives. When evaluating the relevance of aims, the external quality assurance agency pays special attention to their conformity with the NQF, state academic standards, priority areas and requirements of the labour market. The extent to which the objectives have been achieved and the continuity of the processes has been ensured is also analysed. The QA in tertiary education is a continuous enhancement process designed to align education with the needs of students, stakeholders, and society as a whole. Quality assurance is guided by two primary goals: **accountability and enhancement**. The implementation of these aims fosters trust in institutional performance.

Thus, the education institution plans and carries out its activities, providing evidence of their effectiveness. The external reviewers assure stakeholders of the effectiveness of the achieved outcomes and promote the enhancement of institutional performance through recommendations.

Typically, the Armenian quality assurance system operates at two levels.

- **Political level:** Education stakeholders participate in the development and periodic review of state accreditation criteria and procedures. They also engage in further discussions on the interpretation of these criteria. In Armenia, ANQA, an independent quality assurance body, coordinates and facilitates these discussions, serving as a central platform for stakeholder interaction.
- **Procedural level:** It is essential to guarantee the full independence of the external quality assurance agency in all accreditation processes. Criteria or procedures may be modified while the accreditation process is underway. However, as a rule, such modifications do not have retrospective effect on institutions already under review, unless otherwise specified by the RA legislation.

Quality assurance is a mandatory process for all TLIs irrespective of their organisational and legal form, as well as subordination. **It is an officially adopted system designed to enhance institutional performance to ensure alignment with the NQF, state academic standards, and accreditation criteria.**

The main processes are formed within the framework of the RA Quality Assurance system and are grounded in the ESG.

2. Quality Assurance Principles and Framework

The Armenian Quality Assurance Framework for tertiary education is guided by

the following four EHEA principles:

- Education institutions bear primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance.
- Quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, education institutions, academic programmes and students.
- Quality assurance fosters the creation of quality culture.
- Quality assurance considers the needs and expectations of students, other stakeholders and society as a whole.

The Armenian quality assurance framework for tertiary education includes four processes:

- external quality assurance (EQA) of the TLIs;
- internal quality assurance (IQA) of the TLIs;
- recognition of quality assurance agencies by international organisations;
- information on the quality of educational services.

2.1 Internal Quality Assurance

The TLIs' internal quality assurance is a key component of the Armenian quality assurance system. IQA processes should be an integral part of the education institutions' activities and support their enhancement and development.

The IQA policy is particularly important. It should define the key mechanisms of the internal quality assurance system and promote institutional accountability. It should also support the formation and strengthening of a quality culture and the full participation of internal and external stakeholders in ensuring quality education.

The policy is grounded in the **principle of continuous quality enhancement**, comprising four key operations that form the Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) cycle:

- Plan — set objectives and formulate possible solutions.
- Do — implement measures in line with the established action plan.
- Check — conduct ongoing evaluation of the implemented actions.
- Act — sum up the outcomes and review further steps and actions.

This principle enables the TLIs to assure themselves and their stakeholders of the achievement of high standards in all aspects of their activities.

In the context of **accountability**, internal quality assurance serves as a monitoring mechanism. Students, alumni, employers and society expect TLIs to meet the educational goals.

The internal quality assurance is a key tool for the TLI activities, ensuring the fulfilment of the societal needs and expectations. To ensure the TLIs' accountability and transparency, an external review of internal quality assurance strategies and processes is required.

To comply with the accreditation criteria, the TLIs should ensure maximum clarity, accurate information flow and transparency of procedures in all aspects of their activities and functions. All documents regulating the TLIs' mission and performance should be published and made accessible to the teaching staff, students and all other stakeholders.

The TLIs are responsible for the quality of their academic programmes. To this end, the TLIs should have mechanisms for programme development, approval and monitoring. Academic programmes should align with the education institutions' missions and include well-defined learning outcomes. The involvement of all stakeholders in the AP development and review processes is also crucial. The TLIs should prioritise students' active engagement in the AP implementation. The student-centred approach to learning is essential for student motivation and their active engagement in the learning process. Teaching staff are key contributors to the

provision of a high-quality education. Therefore, the TLIs shall establish transparent mechanisms for the teacher recruitment and professional development.

Significant importance is also attached to the student admission, progression, qualification awarding and recognition processes, as well as regulations governing them. These regulations should align with the institution's mission and goals.

2.1.1 Quality Culture

Internal quality assurance processes should be aimed at and foster the formation, development and dissemination of quality culture in education institutions.

In organisations with a quality culture, both service providers and consumers share responsibility through collaborative processes. Quality culture is not the sole responsibility of quality assurance managers but of all employees. Therefore, each unit bears direct responsibility for the quality of its own activities.

It is essential that all activities are properly conducted from the planning stage. In cases of unsatisfactory outcomes, the process is analysed to implement corrective actions and prevent recurrence.

Quality culture implies the evaluation of effectiveness and the provision of feedback to the responsible units/structures.

The education institutions that foster a quality culture through their quality assurance processes, demonstrate the following characteristics at all levels:

- transparent and active performance;
- commitment to critical self-evaluation;
- internal regulations supported by clear-cut procedures and consistent implementation;
- well-defined and clearly communicated responsibilities for quality evaluation and enhancement;
- responsiveness to the identification of stakeholder needs;

- emphasis on the identification and dissemination of best practices;
- implementation of appropriate problem-solution actions based on reliable information.

2.2 External Quality Assurance

The external quality assurance processes have three key aims:

- **Accountability and transparency.** Quality assurance processes ensure alignment with accreditation criteria and the NQF descriptors, thereby safeguarding public interest. They also ensure the availability of information on the quality of educational services provided by TLIs at national and international levels.
- **Evaluation.** The institutions not only monitor the availability of minimum human, material and financial resources, but also demonstrate the achievement of strategic goals through the efficient use of available resources.
- **Quality enhancement.** The institutions conduct discussions and analyses to ensure the effectiveness of quality assurance processes and the formation and continuous development of quality culture.

In general, external quality assurance aims to ensure that TLIs address the following questions:

- Does the TLI have procedures that foster a quality culture and are applied throughout the institution and all its academic programmes?
- Does the TLI periodically evaluate the progress towards achievement of strategic goals, particularly in terms of the quality assurance and further enhancement of educational services?

- Are the data collected through the quality assurance system used to enhance the quality of educational services and meet the student needs?
- Does the TLI monitor the effectiveness of the student services?
- Are appropriate follow-up actions taken to address the shortcomings identified in the quality assurance process?
- Does the TLI provide its stakeholders with trustworthy information on the institutional effectiveness and quality of academic programmes?

The design, implementation and revision of quality assurance procedures should extend beyond quantitative indicators and incorporate qualitative assessment tools to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of processes and outcomes.

2.2.1 Mechanisms for External Quality Assurance

The EHEA employs various mechanisms for external quality assurance and evaluation, including external audit, certification, evaluation and accreditation.

External audit. The process is conducted at the institution's initiative, with the involvement of external experts. The aim is to evaluate the TLIs' procedures, processes and mechanisms. In the case of an external audit, the evaluation does not focus on direct alignment with stated aims; rather, it highlights quality assurance procedures, mechanisms, and processes that support the achievement of the TLIs' mission and goals.

Certification. The auditing body officially recognises the TLIs' adherence to predefined quality requirements and usually grants specific privileges. The process is mainly voluntary.

Evaluation. Generally applied at the programme level, the process determines whether the existing or newly developed APs meet relevant quality and specified requirements. The results inform decisions on their launch, or continuation.

Accreditation. Accreditation is conducted by a state-authorised external body to evaluate the quality of an institution or specific academic programme and officially recognise its compliance with the established minimum criteria and standards.

2.2.2 Armenian Approach

In Armenia, the external quality assurance is carried out through state accreditation. The process is administered by a state-authorised body, National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance foundation.

The external quality assurance is consistent with the TLIs' internal quality assurance processes, preserving institutional autonomy. It also draws upon information generated by the internal quality assurance system.

The external quality assurance in tertiary education comprises two types of state accreditation:

1. institutional;
2. programme.

Institutional accreditation is a state recognition that the TLIs' educational and quality assurance processes and academic programmes comply with the legal requirements applicable to their institutional type, the NQF descriptors and the state institutional accreditation criteria. It is a regular mandatory process that applies to all TLIs in the territory of the RA, regardless of their subordination, organisational and legal form. Institutional accreditation enables the evaluation of the effectiveness of the TLI activities, the fulfilment of institutional mission, their commitment to continuous enhancement and contribution to the development of academic programmes.

Institutional accreditation is a prerequisite for programme accreditation.

Programme accreditation is a state recognition that the academic programmes and the quality of specialist preparation comply with the NQF descriptors and the state programme accreditation criteria. Targeted at individual academic programmes, the process enables the periodic evaluation of programme effectiveness and the students' achievement of intended learning outcomes. Programme accreditation is carried out at the TLIs' initiative on a voluntary basis, except for medical academic programmes, for which the process is mandatory.

As a result of the process, the TLI or individual academic programmes may receive accreditation status for a specified period. Institutional accreditation is granted for four years, four years with conditions, or six years, while programme accreditation is awarded for a period of one or five years. Accreditation may also be rejected.

The accreditation process includes three stages:

1. **Self-evaluation** is an internal evaluation process of the TLI or its academic programme, resulting in a written report based on the accreditation criteria adopted by the RA Government.

2. **External review** is a process whereby an expert panel studies the self-evaluation report, supporting documents and submitted electronic questionnaire, as well as conducts class observations and a site visit to education institutions. During the visit, meetings are held with the representatives of the administrative and academic staffs, students, alumni, employers and other stakeholders. The expert panel evaluates the resources and documentation, as well as holds professional talks with the AP managers, teachers and students. Accordingly, the panel prepares a written report that includes an evaluation and recommendations for enhancement.

3. **Decision-making** is a process through which the Accreditation Committee studies the findings on the institution or its academic programmes, reaches a decision and identifies issues requiring urgent solution.

2.2.3 State Accreditation Criteria

State Accreditation Criteria provide a basis for education institutions to conduct self-evaluation of their activities and academic programmes and to identify enhancement areas.

The criteria are aligned with the international norms, the ESG and ensure diversity and sufficient flexibility for innovation, considering the institutions' distinct profiles and essential differences between adopted educational concepts and purposes. Meanwhile, the criteria are sufficiently clear, incorporating key elements that have been piloted and proven applicable.

To achieve accreditation status, institutions and academic programmes are evaluated against all established criteria.

Criteria are distinct statements that define, in measurable terms, the characteristics of institutional activities or academic programmes.

Standards are statements that specify the extent to which institutions satisfy each criterion and set the conditions required for objective evaluation.

The criteria and standards set by the RA Government may be revised periodically to ensure their relevance, validity and consistency with the latest trends and developments in quality assurance.

Institutional Accreditation Criteria

During the self-evaluation and external review, a guiding principle is that institutional governance and operations should be geared towards the continuous enhancement of education, research and societal services. This is intended to:

1. promote the formation and development of quality culture;
2. build an organisational culture that enables graduates to acquire transferable knowledge and skills relevant to the needs of an evolving environment;
3. enhance institutional effectiveness and strengthen accountability mechanisms;
4. foster the comparability of qualifications, competitiveness and transparency of the service provisions both nationally and internationally.

Institutional accreditation criteria and standards are:

I. Mission and Purpose

Criterion

The tertiaryTertiary Level Institutions' policy and practices align with its mission, which is in accordance with the Armenian National Qualifications Framework (hereafter the “ANQF”).

- 1.1** The TLI has a clear, well-articulated mission that represents the institution’s purposes and goals, in harmony with the ANQF.
- 1.2** The TLI's mission, goals and objectives reflect the needs of the internal and external stakeholders.
- 1.3** The TLI has established mechanisms and procedures to evaluate the fulfilment of its mission and purposes, with a commitment to continuous enhancement.

II. Governance and Administration

Criterion

The TLIs' system of governance, administrative structures and their operations are effective and directed towards the achievement of its mission and purposes, adhering to the governance code of ethics.

- 2.1** The TLI's governance system ensures regulated decision-making process in accordance with defined code of ethics and has necessary human, material, and financial resources to accomplish its educational and other purposes.
- 2.2** The TLI's governance system provides students and teachers with an opportunity to take part in decision-making processes related to them.
- 2.3** The TLI develops and implements short, mid, and long-term planning consistent with its mission and purposes and has clear monitoring and implementation mechanisms.
- 2.4** The TLI conducts environmental scanning and draws on reliable data in the decision-making process.
- 2.5** The management of the policies and the procedures draws on the quality management principle (plan-do-check-act).
- 2.6** There are established mechanisms for evaluating the collection, analysis and use of data on the effectiveness of the academic programmes and other processes.
- 2.7** There are mechanisms for evaluating the publications of up-to-date, impartial and unbiased quantitative and qualitative information on the quality of academic programmes and awarded qualifications.

III. Academic Programmes

Criterion

The programmes are in concord with the institution's mission, form part of institutional planning and promote mobility and internationalization.

3.1 The academic programmes align with the institution's mission, the state academic standards and are thoroughly designed according to the intended learning outcomes which correspond to an academic qualification.

3.2 The TLI has a policy for the selection of teaching and learning methods in line with the intended learning outcomes of academic programmes promoting student-centered learning

3.3 The TLI has a policy on students' assessment according to the learning outcomes and ensures academic integrity.

3.4 The TLI's academic programmes are contextually consistent with other relevant programmes and promote the internationalization and mobility of students and teachers.

3.5 The TLI has a policy to ensure the academic programmes' monitoring, as well as evaluation of their effectiveness and enhancement.

IV. Students

Criterion

The TLI provides student support services to ensure the effectiveness of the learning environment.

4.1 The TLI has clear mechanisms for the recruitment, selection, and admission of students.

- 4.2 The TLI has policy and procedures for the identification of students' educational needs.
- 4.3 The TLI establishes advisory services and extracurricular opportunities to support students' effective learning.
- 4.4 The TLI has established regulation and schedule for students to receive additional support and guidance from the administrative staff.
- 4.5 The TLI offers career support services for students.
- 4.6 The TLI promotes students' involvement in its research activities.
- 4.7 The TLI has responsible body for the students' rights protection.
- 4.8 The TLI has evaluation and quality assurance mechanisms for students' educational, advisory and other services.

V. Faculty and Staff

Criterion

The TLI has academic and supporting staff equipped with necessary professional qualifications to fulfil its mission and implement the goals set for academic programmes.

- 5.1 The TLI has policy and procedures for the recruitment of academic and supporting staff with necessary professional qualifications to implement academic programmes.
- 5.2 The clear requirements for the professional qualities of the teaching staff are defined for the TLI's each academic programme.
- 5.3 The TLI has an established policy and procedures for the periodic evaluation of the teaching staff.
- 5.4 The TLI offers professional development activities for teachers based on the needs identified in periodic evaluations (both internal and external).

- 5.5 The TLI ensures the sustainability of the teaching staff in accordance with academic programmes.
- 5.6 The TLI has an established policy and procedures for the of academic staff's professional development.
- 5.7 The TLI has the necessary administrative and supporting staff to achieve the strategic goals.

VI. Research and Development

Criterion

The TLI ensures the implementation of research activities and their link with teaching and learning.

- 6.1 The TLI has a clear strategy that reflects its research interests and ambitions.
- 6.2 The TLI has a long-term strategy as well as mid- and short-term programmes that address its research interests and ambitions.
- 6.3 The TLI ensures the implementation of research and development through clearly formulated policy and procedures.
- 6.4 The TLI emphasizes internationalization of its research.
- 6.5 The TLI has well established mechanisms for the link between research, teaching and learning.

VII. Infrastructure and Resources

Criterion

The TLI has necessary resources to create learning environment and effectively support the implementation of its stated mission and goals.

- 7.1 The TLI has an appropriate learning environment for the implementation of academic programmes.

- 7.2 The TLI allocates appropriate financial resources with necessary equipment and facilities to achieve its mission and goals.
- 7.3 The TLI has a financial distribution policy to ensure and guarantee the implementation and continuity of its academic programmes.
- 7.4 The TLI's resource base supports the implementation of its academic programmes and strategic plan, which promotes continuous quality enhancement and sustainability.
- 7.5 The TLI has a clear policy and procedure for the management of information and documentation.
- 7.6 The TLI creates safe and secure environment through health and safety mechanisms that consider special needs of students.
- 7.7 The TLI has established mechanisms for the evaluation of the effectiveness, applicability and availability of resources provided to the teaching staff and students.

VIII. Societal Responsibility

Criterion

The TLI is accountable to the government and society for the education it offers, the research it conducts and the resources it uses.

- 8.1 The TLI has established policy on institutional accountability.
- 8.2 The TLI ensures transparency of its procedures and processes and makes them publicly available.
- 8.3 The TLI has stable feedback mechanisms that contribute to the establishment of relations with society.
- 8.4 The TLI has established mechanisms to ensure the transfer of knowledge (values) to the society.

IX. External Relations and Internationalization

Criterion

Through external relations, the TLI promotes exchange of practice and enhancement, thus promoting internationalization.

- 9.1** The TLI has a policy and procedures to foster the formation of external relations, aiming to create an environment conducive to the exchange of practice, enhancement and internationalization.
- 9.2** The TLI's external relations infrastructure ensures regulated process.
- 9.3** The TLI promotes fruitful collaboration with local and international counterparts.
- 9.4** The TLI ensures internal stakeholders' appropriate level of a foreign language to increase the productivity of internationalization.

X. Internal Quality Assurance System

Criterion

The TLI has an internal quality assurance system that promotes continuous enhancement of all its processes and the formation of quality culture.

- 10.1** The TLI has a policy and procedures for quality assurance.
- 10.2** The TLI allocates sufficient material, human and financial resources for the management of internal quality assurance processes.
- 10.3** The stakeholders are involved in quality assurance processes.
- 10.4** The internal quality assurance system undergoes periodic review.
- 10.5** The internal quality assurance system provides sufficient basis for the external quality assurance processes.

10.6 The internal quality assurance system ensures the transparency of the TLI's processes, providing information on the quality of the processes to the stakeholders.

Programme Accreditation Criteria

The academic programme should be continuously enhanced and intended to:

1. establish a learning culture that fosters the development of transferable knowledge and skills, preparing graduates to meet the demands of an ever-changing environment;
2. increase the effectiveness of academic programmes and strengthen societal accountability;
3. foster the comparability, competitiveness and recognition of qualifications both nationally and internationally.

Academic programme criteria and standards are:

I. Academic Programme

Criterion

The academic programme is in concord with the Armenian National Qualifications Framework (ANQF), qualification profile, state academic standards and the TLI's mission.

- 1.1 The goals and objectives of the academic programme are aligned with the institution's mission and purpose.
- 1.2 The academic programme forms part of institutional planning and resource allocation.
- 1.3 The academic programme is thoroughly described according to intended learning outcomes of the qualifications awarded.

- 1.4 The academic programme is in line with the ANQF, qualifications profile, and state academic standards.
- 1.5 The academic programme is clearly designed in terms of content, consistent with other relevant programmes, and promotes mobility for students and teaching staff as well as internationalization.
- 1.6 The academic programme's intended learning outcomes meet the needs of the students and other stakeholders.
- 1.7 There are established mechanisms and procedures to ensure the design, approval, monitoring, evaluation and enhancement of the academic programme.

II. Teaching Staff

Criterion

The academic programme is provided with teaching staff owning necessary professional qualifications to realize the goals of the academic programmes.

- 2.1 The teaching staff's professional qualifications for the academic programme are comprehensively stated and there are policies and procedures promoting recruitment of a highly qualified teaching staff.
- 2.2 Within the scope of academic programme, there is a clear policy and procedures for periodic evaluation of the teaching staff, fostering to the identification and development of their professional needs.
- 2.3 The academic programme fosters the development and professional progress of teaching staff.
- 2.4 The permanent teaching staff ensures the sustainable implementation of the academic programme.

III. Teaching and Learning Practices

Criterion

The teaching and learning practices used within the academic programme ensure the achievement of intended learning outcomes.

- 3.1** The teaching and learning approaches and methods necessary to achieve the intended learning outcomes are clearly defined within the framework academic programme.
- 3.2** The academic programme ensures the implementation of good teaching practice and approaches accepted at international level.
- 3.3** There are mechanisms for evaluation and improvement of teaching and learning processes.

IV. Student Assessment

Criterion

The academic programme provides assessment system that promotes academic integrity, allowing to ensure students' progress as well as the formation and achievement of intended learning outcomes.

- 4.1** Clear and reliable assessment system for the evaluation of intended learning outcomes, with criteria available to teachers and students are applied within the framework of academic programme.
- 4.2** Clear mechanisms that ensure the achievement of intended learning outcomes aimed at awarding a qualification are formulated within the framework of the academic programme.
- 4.3** The academic programme has mechanisms for the improvement of assessment system.

4.4 The academic programme sets a fair and equal approach to students through clear policies and procedures, considering the students' responsibilities and complaints.

4.5 The academic programme promotes academic integrity and combat plagiarism.

V. Research and development

Criterion

The link between learning and research and creative activities is ensured within the framework of academic programme.

5.1 The academic programme has a long-term strategy, mid- and short-term plans that reflect the TLI's interests and aspirations in the research field within the framework of the academic programme.

5.2 The academic programme promotes research development and innovations through clear policies and procedures.

5.3 The academic programme attaches importance to internationalization of the research activities.

5.4 The academic programme has clear mechanisms for linking research and creative activities with education process and improving it.

VI. Learning environment

Criterion

The academic programme contributes to the implementation of quality education, creating an environment conducive to learning.

6.1 The academic programme is provided with necessary resources to support the effective implementation of its stated mission and goals and create an environment conducive to learning.

- 6.2 The academic programme ensures that all students receive useful and accessible information and recommendations that promote learning.
- 6.3 The academic programme has necessary methodological resources in line with its content.

VII. Quality Assurance

Criterion

The academic programme has internal quality assurance system that ensures the stability and continuous enhancement of its quality.

- 7.1 The quality assurance is designed and implemented to follow the social needs and students' requirements, while also evaluating its activities.
- 7.2 Within the scope of academic programme, there is an effective policy and procedures for internal quality assurance.
- 7.3 Reliable information is collected about the implemented processes through feedback mechanisms, which is evaluated for the improvement programme's goals and processes.
- 7.4 The academic programmes' stakeholders are involved in the internal quality assurance processes.
- 7.5 The academic programme ensures dissemination of good practice.

2.3. Recognition of the External Quality Assurance Agency

To ensure international recognition of educational services, the quality of academic programmes and qualifications awarded by the RA's TLIs, an external quality assurance agency should conduct its activities in accordance with the ESG (Part 3: Standards and guidelines for quality assurance agencies) requirements.

To fulfil its mission, goals and objectives, the agency should regularly conduct external quality assurance activities and operate as an officially recognised, autonomous and independent body. The agency should implement internal quality assurance procedures to ensure the transparency and enhancement of its activities, while also providing accountability to its stakeholders. The external quality assurance agency should undergo regular external reviews to demonstrate its alignment with the ESG.

2.4 Information Provision

According to the ESG, the external quality assurance agency should periodically disseminate information on the results and analyses of its activities, along with updates on the developments of the education system.

In Armenia, the information on tertiary education should be publicly available to promote the transparency of educational services.

ANQA regularly evaluates the effectiveness of the TLIs' quality assurance processes on a cyclic basis. The results of these evaluations are made publicly available, contributing to the transparency and public trust. ANQA expects the participation of all stakeholders in this process.

2.4.1 State Accreditation Register

Highlighting the importance of transparency and accountability, the [State Accreditation Register](#) provides public access to accreditation decisions, certificates and other relevant documents in both Armenian and English.

ANQA maintains the State Accreditation Register pursuant to the Regulation on the Maintenance of the State Accreditation Register (Decision No. 6-L of ANQA's Board of Trustees, April 8, 2024). According to the Regulation, an education institution's institutional capacities or an academic programme are considered

accredited upon registration in the State Accreditation Register. The Register consists of two sections:

- 1) accredited education institutions (institutional accreditation);
- 2) accredited academic programmes (programme accreditation).

Institutional Accreditation section includes subsections for higher education institutions, primary vocational (handicraft) and secondary vocational education institutions, while Programme Accreditation section includes subsections for academic programmes offered by higher education institutions, primary vocational (handicraft) and secondary vocational education institutions. The Institutional Accreditation section contains information on the accredited education institutions, including the institution's name, legal and operating addresses, the name and country of the accreditation agency, the number and date of the Accreditation Committee's decision, the series, number and issue date of the accreditation certificate, its validity period, and the number of the ESCS Minister's order approving the certificate.

The Programme Accreditation section provides information on the accredited academic programmes, including the programme title and classifier, the education institution's details, the accreditation agency's name and country, the number of the Accreditation Committee's decision, the series, number and issue date of the accreditation certificate supplement, its validity period, and the number of the ESCS Minister's order approving the certificate.

The information entered into the Register is synchronised with the [Database of External Quality Assurance Results \(DEQAR\)](#), ensuring international public access to ANQA's expert panel reports and Accreditation Committee decisions.

ANQA also makes the Accreditation Committee's decisions on institutional and programme accreditation publicly available through its official website.

In addition, ANQA conducts analyses of the education system and other sectoral analyses every three years. The findings are presented at conferences dedicated to education quality and are published on ANQA's official website.

III. ANQA's Activities

The National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation was established on November 27, 2008, by the Government Decree No. 1486-N. ANQA's main goal is to support the TLIs in the formation, dissemination and strengthening of an education quality culture in compliance with the requirements and approaches of the RA Legislation.

ANQA's mission is to foster continuous quality enhancement in the tertiary education system, supporting the autonomy and accountability of education institutions.

ANQA's activities are guided by the following core **values**:

- **trust;**
- **innovation;**
- **equity;**
- **accountability;**
- **cooperation.**

It is the TLIs' responsibility to ensure the quality of educational services and the credibility of the awarded qualifications. Accordingly, the TLIs are required to develop internal quality assurance mechanisms that ensure the alignment of education quality with the RA accreditation criteria. Those criteria incorporate national requirements and guarantees established in a number of international documents:

- EU Council Recommendation of September 24, 1998 on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education (98/561/EC);
- European Higher Education Area: joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education convened in Bologna on June 19, 1999 (the “Bologna Declaration”);
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015).

All TLIs, regardless of their subordination and organisational-legal form, are required to adhere to the Accreditation Criteria for Tertiary Education of RA (approved by the RA Government Decree No. 959-N of June 30, 2011) and undergo accreditation processes.

1. ANQA’s Principles of Quality assurance

ANQA strives to ensure public trust in the tertiary education system and is guided by the following principles:

- ANQA’s services should be clear, transparent, and well-organised.
- ANQA is publicly accountable for its activities.
- ANQA's criteria should align with the quality assurance objectives and be clear and understandable to the public.
- ANQA’s services should be valid and reliable, while decisions should be based on the established criteria.
- ANQA is responsible for the credibility of quality evaluation processes in tertiary education. The TLIs are responsible for the education quality.
- ANQA’s services should be accessible to all TLIs.

ANQA aims to ensure the credible award of qualifications and consider enhancement opportunities with the education institutions. ANQA applies an open

and transparent approach to discussions and suggestions for the enhancement of policies and procedures, while ensuring the stakeholder engagement in the evaluation and enhancement processes.

2. Cooperation with Stakeholders

ANQA’s policies support two levels of cooperation with stakeholders: regular study of stakeholder needs and activities designed to meet those needs. To address stakeholder needs more effectively, ANQA has set up stakeholder groups and defined the levels of cooperation with each group.

Stakeholders	Cooperation
Government	ANQA cooperates with the Government of the Republic of Armenia on the development of the quality assurance framework.
The RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (hereafter “ ESCS Ministry ”)	ANQA actively cooperates with the authorised body responsible for education, science, culture and sports to support the continuous enhancement of tertiary education. This involves participation in the development and revision of policies, laws and by-laws.
Rectors and directors of TLIs	ANQA regularly organises conferences and workshops with the participation of the TLIs’ rectors and directors. The aim is to facilitate joint discussions on quality assurance system and foster the establishment

	and development of a quality culture.
TLLs	ANQA collaborates with the TLLs and their QA departments to promote the development of their institutional capacities.
Professional associations	ANQA continues to promote the active engagement of employers' unions and private entrepreneurs in the quality assurance process. ANQA continues to take measures to increase the professional associations' active participation in the education quality assurance process.
Students	ANQA collaborates with students at different levels (student unions, student networks, individual students). A key mechanism for this collaboration is the "Students' Voice" project, which explores students' perspectives on teaching and learning issues. ANQA also provides training for students. Upon successful completion, participants are engaged as student experts in the accreditation processes.
Academic staff	ANQA collaborates with academic staff as part of regular meetings, conferences, workshops, webinars and trainings.

Administrative staff	ANQA collaborates with the TLIs' administrative staff as part of regular meetings and workshops.

ANQA strives to enhance the quality assurance procedures through consultations and discussions with all stakeholders.

3. ANQA Recognition

To ensure the international relevance and recognition of ANQA's quality assurance services, ANQA periodically undergoes external reviews conducted by international agencies in accordance with the ESG. The external review and recognition are cyclical processes that require agencies to undergo regular evaluations.

Since 2009, ANQA has been an affiliate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). Following an external review in 2016, ANQA was granted ENQA membership in 2017. Its membership was renewed in 2022.

In 2017 and 2022, ANQA was also registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (hereafter "EQAR").

ANQA is a member of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA).

ANQA is also a member of the European Training Foundation (ETF) Forum for Quality Assurance in VET. At ANQA's initiative, Armenia became one of the first countries to pilot the ETF diagnostic tool for VET. The tool is based on the EQAVET (European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training) framework.

IV. Accreditation Process

1. Institutional and Programme Accreditation

The primary purpose of institutional accreditation is to assure the TLIs, students, their parents, employers, and interested public that the tertiary education quality is recognised by the state. Accreditation is the state recognition of the quality of the TLIs, academic programmes and specialist preparation, thereby contributing to the stakeholder and public trust in the quality of educational services. Accreditation is granted for a specified period, confirming that the institution or academic programme has the necessary capacity to conduct educational activities of assured quality during that timeframe. It entails that the institution meets the required criteria, enabling its graduates to acquire the qualifications for professional development or further studies at other educational institutions.

In this respect, the independence of the accreditation decision-making agencies is a key principle. ANQA's task is to safeguard accreditation decision-making from undue influence by individual participants. Furthermore, transparency, comparability and legislative framework are essential factors for building public trust in tertiary education.

2. Application for State Accreditation

To undergo the accreditation process, education institutions may apply to ANQA or other quality assurance agencies that are either listed in EQAR or hold full membership in ENQA. Education institutions implementing academic programmes in

cooperation with partners from countries outside the EHEA or branches of foreign TLIIs of those countries operating in the Republic of Armenia, may apply to other recognised accreditation agencies included in the list approved by the RA ESCS Minister. In cases where an institution applies to other accreditation agencies, it should notify ANQA of the launch of the accreditation process within five calendar days.

ANQA accepts applications for accreditation throughout the year. The applications should be submitted in accordance with the relevant templates developed by ANQA and approved by the Board of Trustees.

The education institution appoints a contact person to handle the organisational and technical issues of the accreditation process and cooperate with ANQA. The application should include the contact person's full name and contact details.

It is mandatory for education institutions applying for institutional accreditation to indicate in the application those two academic programmes to be included in the self-evaluation report.

The procedure for the acceptance or rejection of application is set by the Accreditation Statute.

Pursuant to Clauses 7 and 14 of the Accreditation Statute, ANQA makes the decision to accept or reject the application.

The application may be rejected if the institution:

1. lacks a license to conduct educational activities;
2. fails to complete ANQA's online questionnaire;
3. applies for programme accreditation without prior institutional accreditation.

Provided that the submitted application satisfies the requirements, ANQA accepts the application.

Within one week of the application's acceptance, the schedule and cost estimate for the process are prepared and agreed upon with the institution in accordance with the fees approved by ANQA's Board of Trustees. A paid service contract is signed between the institution and ANQA.

The contract includes the following:

- 1) the start and completion dates of the process;
- 2) the three academic programmes subject to review: two programmes selected by the institution, and one selected by ANQA;
- 3) the rights and responsibilities of the parties;
- 4) the schedule of the institutional accreditation;
- 5) the service price, including value-added tax (VAT) and the payment schedule stipulated in the contract.

2.1 Application Withdrawal Process: Accreditation Termination

The education institution has the right to withdraw from the accreditation process in accordance with the paid service contract concluded between the institution and ANQA. The head of the institution should notify ANQA's director in writing of the TLI's decision to withdraw from the accreditation process. ANQA's director issues an order for accreditation termination and notifies the Accreditation Committee thereof. Upon the TLI's request, the institution may be provided with certain completed results produced by the expert panel that are available at the time of withdrawal from the accreditation process.

In the case of withdrawal from the accreditation process, financial issues are regulated by the paid service contract signed between the TLI and ANQA.

3. Expert Panel Formation

To conduct external review of the education institution's institutional capacities or academic programmes, ANQA sets up an independent expert panel.

ANQA regularly organises expert capacity-building training for specialists included in the initial pool of experts. The courses conclude with an evaluation of the participants' competencies. Positively evaluated participants are included in ANQA's list of expert candidates.

ANQA forms an expert panel of 3-7 members selected from the expert pool (<http://forms.anqa.am>) in accordance with the requirements of the Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel approved by ANQA's Board of Trustees. The panel may include academic staff members, representatives of the education management sector, employers, TLI students and international experts.

One of the members of the expert panel is appointed as chair. The chair is responsible for the proper conduct of the entire external review process and the work of the expert panel, including chairing all the meetings, planning relevant activities and ensuring compliance with the guidelines set forth in this Manual. The criteria, guidelines and requirements for the expert selection, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the chair and members of the expert panel, are defined in ANQA's Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel. Further details are presented in Section V of this Manual.

One of the important steps in the expert panel formation is agreement on the composition of the expert panel.

ANQA selects 7–10 experts from a pool of local and international experts and submits their candidacies to the Accreditation Committee for approval. Following the

approval, a preliminary expert panel is formed from the agreed list and sent to the education institution for approval.

The education institution submits its agreement or objections in writing within two weeks. In the event of objections to one or more candidates, the institution is required to submit a well-grounded written objection, specifying the reasons for the objection, including any potential conflicts of interest.

ANQA examines the grounds for the candidate rejection. In case the objection is accepted, ANQA makes respective changes in the composition of the expert panel, selecting another candidate from the list agreed upon with the Accreditation Committee. In the absence of justifications, the composition of the expert panel remains unchanged. The new candidate's details are submitted to the institution for approval. The final composition of the expert panel is approved by the order of ANQA's director. ANQA signs a paid service contract with experts.

The process of agreeing on the composition of the expert panel may take two weeks. If no agreement is reached between ANQA and TLI by the end of the process, the contract is extended for one month until the agreement on the composition of the expert panel is reached. In the case of a disagreement on the new composition of the expert panel after a one-month period, the contract between ANQA and TLI is terminated. To restart the accreditation process, a new application should be submitted to ANQA and a new contract should be signed.

Within one week of the receipt of the results of the internal evaluation of an education institution accredited with conditions, ANQA selects panel of 3-6 members from the expert pool, where possible involving a member from the expert panel of the education institution accredited with conditions. The proposed composition is

submitted to the Accreditation Committee for approval. Following approval, a three-member expert panel is formed.

The agreed composition is submitted to the education institution, which provides its agreement or objections within two working days.

To organise the activities of the expert panel and coordinate the external review, one or two accreditation coordinators are appointed from among ANQA's employees by the order of ANQA's director. The coordinator is responsible for the compliance with the procedures established by the Accreditation Statute and in this Manual (the acceptance of self-evaluation, the preparation of the expert panel's final report etc.). The scope of the coordinator's responsibilities is defined in Section V of this Manual.

4. Accreditation Stages

Accreditation is carried out through three consecutive stages:

- **First stage:** internal evaluation of institutional capacities or academic programmes by education institutions(self-evaluation).
- **Second stage:** external review conducted by an independent external expert panel.
- **Third stage:** decisions on granting or rejecting accreditation by ANQA's Accreditation Committee.

4.1 Self – evaluation

The TLLs are encouraged to conduct regular internal evaluation of institutional capacities and academic programmes. This process gives a chance to review the planned activities, evaluate the results, identify issues and enhancement areas, undertake appropriate measures and allocate resources for further enhancement based

on the evaluation findings. The evaluation will help the institution achieve its goals through coordinated and continuous approach to effective governance.

The accreditation process requires the institutions to evaluate the effectiveness of their missions, goals, strategies, various processes and achievements.

Within 12 weeks after the launch of the state accreditation process, the TLI should provide the self-evaluation report on its activities for the previous five years.

As part of the institutional and programme accreditation process, the TLI should conduct a self-evaluation of its institutional capacities and the academic programme subject to accreditation in accordance with the Accreditation Criteria for Tertiary Education approved by the RA Government Decree No. 959-N of 30 June 2011.

The self-evaluation should identify issues that require external opinion and recommendations. The analytical nature of the self-evaluation and the justification of the institution's decisions enhance the effectiveness of the external review. In turn, this enables the expert panel to conduct effective evaluations and prepare recommendations, developing a clear understanding of the institution's best practices, challenges and sustainability in relation to the credible award of qualifications, risk management, enhancement, development opportunities and long-term development.

To facilitate the self-evaluation process, ANQA has developed a set of guidelines, including:

- self-evaluation templates for institutional and academic programme accreditation, which form an integral part of the Accreditation Statute;
- self-evaluation guide.

The institution's self-evaluation report is expected to provide clear answers to four key questions concerning the presented issues or processes:

- What is the TLI's plan to resolve the issues?
- What processes are implemented in practice?
- How does the institution ensure the proper operation of its mechanisms?
(How are the results intended to be verified and evaluated? What data are collected? What analyses are performed? How are the findings of the analyses applied?)
- What enhancement-driven changes can be observed?

It is particularly important to demonstrate the extent to which the implemented measures support student learning and ensure the credible award of qualifications.

The institution should strictly follow the self-evaluation template, maintaining its structure, the sequence of separate sections and content without any omissions. It is also important to ensure that the content, references, graphs, and tables of the self-evaluation are coherent and legible in both paper and electronic versions. In the electronic version, the references should be provided as hyperlinks. The self-evaluation report and supporting documents should be approved by the institution's relevant body.

The self-evaluation may contain references to documents that are not attached as appendices but have been submitted by the institution through ANQA's online questionnaire.

Where international expert(s) are involved, the self-evaluation report should be submitted in both Armenian and English. Along with the English version of the self-evaluation, the institution should provide the English translations of the key documents required by the international expert(s). These documents include the list of self-evaluation appendices, the institution's charter, organisational structure, mission-related documents, strategic plan, academic programmes and awarded qualifications,

the academic programmes selected for review within the accreditation process, procedures for student assessment, documentation describing the quality assurance system, and any other documents deemed necessary by the institution.

Excluding appendices, the institutional self-evaluation report should not exceed 130 pages, while it should contain no more than 15 appendices. The self-evaluation report on an academic programme should not exceed 70 pages, with no more than 10 appendices. The self-evaluation may contain references to the files uploaded through ANQA's online questionnaire to avoid duplication of information both in the self-evaluation report and appendices.

The Armenian text should be formatted in GHEA Grapalat font, size 11, with 1.15 line spacing. The English text should be formatted in Times New Roman using the same font size and line spacing.

ANQA makes a decision on the acceptance or rejection of the self-evaluation in the manner prescribed by the Accreditation Statute.

ANQA may decide to return the self-evaluation in the cases defined by the Accreditation Statute if:

1. it does not comply with ANQA's standardised self-evaluation template, which is an integral part of the Accreditation Statute;
2. it contains substantive, technical, structural, or other deficiencies;
3. the data included in the report is unreliable.

In such cases, the institution is given one month to eliminate the deficiencies.

4.2 External Review

The aim of the external review is to evaluate the institutions applying for accreditation, their infrastructure, processes and individual academic programmes, and

to prepare a report for the submission to ANQA's Accreditation Committee. The expert panel members serve as **constructive peer reviewers**.

The expert panel carries out its activities based on the principles of legality, objectivity, independence and impartiality, guided by the following regulatory documents:

- RA Government Decree No. 978-N on the Approval of the Statute on State Accreditation of Tertiary-Level Institutions and their Academic Programmes in the Republic of Armenia, dated June 30, 2011;
- RA Government Decree No. 959-N on the Approval of the RA Accreditation Criteria for Tertiary Education, dated June 30, 2011;
- ANQA's Accreditation Committee Decision No. 35-L on the Approval of the Decision-Making Policy on the Award of Institutional Accreditation by the Accreditation Committee of the "National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance" Foundation, dated December 24, 2020;
- Procedure on the Formation and Operation of the Accreditation Committee of the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (new edition), approved by Decision No. 5-L of ANQA's Board of Trustees, dated April 8, 2024;
- Code of Ethics and Conduct of the "National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance" foundation.

The external review involves three main steps:

- **Desk review.** The expert panel gets acquainted with the TLI's self-evaluation report, the package of the attached documents and conducts a desk review, following ANQA's template. During the process, the panel identifies key observations concerning the institution's activities, missing or incomplete

information, issues requiring clarification during the site visit, and additional documents for further examination.

- **Site visit.** The site visit may be conducted in one of three formats: onsite, online, or hybrid (a combination of onsite and online formats), ensuring the continuity and effectiveness of the evaluation process. Online and hybrid formats may be applied particularly in cases of force majeure. The site visit format is agreed upon with the TLI. In the case of a fully or partially online site visit, the institution is required to provide additional documentation through ANQA's electronic questionnaire and upon request of the expert panel. The expert panel's studies, group discussions and meetings (offline or online) during the site visit aim to provide a clearer understanding of the activities of the institution under review or the AP implementation. The peculiarities of online and hybrid external review are defined by the Procedure on the Organisation and Conduct of Accreditation in a State of Emergency of the "National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance" foundation, approved by the Board of Trustees Decision No. 7-L of October 29, 2021.
- **Report production.** The expert panel prepares a report containing a situational analysis, verification of achievements and recommendations for further enhancement.

4.2.1 Desk Review

The desk review aims to evaluate the alignment of the self-evaluation report and supporting documents with the accreditation criteria in terms of effectiveness and applicability.

Upon the receipt of the self-evaluation report and supporting documents from ANQA's coordinator, the expert panel examines the documents and carries out the desk review.

Thus, during the desk review, experts are obliged to:

- bring out reliable facts for each criterion, as well as aspects requiring further verification during the site visit;
- identify documents requiring additional study;
- point out areas for additional study and assessment.

The issues for further examination should be summarised and formulated in accordance with the accreditation criteria. The coordinator should ensure that these issues are relevant to the institution and aligned with the evaluation framework set by the state accreditation criteria, with a view to identifying the institution's best practices and existing challenges.

To support the expert panel with tools in the effective evaluation of TLI's activities and academic programme, ANQA provides a package of documents that includes:

- necessary normative legal documents;
- guidelines and relevant templates for the desk review and preparation of the expert panel's final report;
- approved schedule for the accreditation process and site visits;
- other required documents.

As part of the desk review meetings, the expert panel introduces and discusses its considerations on each criterion based on ANQA's template.

The expert panel studies the professional student assignments within the selected three academic programmes and prepares for meetings with the AP managers, teachers, and students.

To ensure effective cooperation with international expert(s) (where involved), their considerations are translated and shared with all members of the expert panel. In addition, online meetings and discussions are organised as needed.

By the end of this phase, the expert panel should have clarified the issues subject to further study, finalised the list of meetings, identified the necessary additional information and its sources, as well as determined the list of documents for further observation.

4.3 Site Visit to TLI

4.3.1 Preparatory Visit

Prior to the site visit, ANQA's coordinator, in consultation with the chair of the expert panel and the head of the Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division, develops a site visit schedule. The schedule should enable the expert panel to comprehensively study all identified issues and obtain the information required for the evaluation. Prior to the site visit, ANQA's coordinator shares the preliminary schedule with the institution's contact person via email. During the two weeks preceding the site visit, ANQA's coordinator, together with the chair of the expert panel and the head of the Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division or his/her representative, conducts a preparatory visit to the institution or an online meeting to discuss the site visit schedule.

The preparatory visit has five aims:

- to agree on the site visit schedule with the TLI, ensuring that all activities included in the schedule can be completed within the specified timeframe;
- to agree on the timing of class observations, internships, final examinations and resource observations, taking into consideration institutional resource allocation, as well as the location and schedule of internships;
- to discuss any additional information required by the expert panel and ensure that the institution is able to provide the necessary documents and supplementary information during the site visit;
- to identify any peculiarities that the expert panel should be aware of;
- to check TLI's preparedness for the site visit (including the suggested offices, meeting rooms, technical equipment etc.).

During the preparatory visit, the head of ANQA's Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division (or his/her representative), the coordinator and the chair of the expert panel have a meeting with the TLI's head, contact person and/or quality assurance team.

ANQA's coordinator provides the institution with all necessary information about the external review process, including the site visit schedule. The institution is also provided with a list of documents for further study. The panel may deem it necessary to study some documents before the visit, therefore the contact person is obliged to ensure their timely transfer to the experts within the agreed timeframe.

The education institution, in turn, presents a comprehensive list of participants offered for each meeting. The lists should contain more candidates than required to enable the expert panel to make the necessary selections. The institution is responsible for the attendance of selected participants. Thus, the institution should check each candidate's availability in advance and prepare a realistic participant list. This is particularly important for the meetings with representatives of governing bodies

(board of trustees, academic councils) and external stakeholders (alumni, employers, etc.).

According to the site visit schedule, additional meetings may be arranged at the request of the expert panel, as well as upon the institution's proposal, subject to the approval of the expert panel.

Prior to the site visit, the education institution should inform all staff members in advance that, during the visit, the experts may pose questions to any staff member or student regarding the evaluation process and accreditation criteria, while ensuring the confidentiality of all responses. The heads of the TLI units should be informed that, as part of the external review, they are expected to provide the expert panel with all required information, documents and copies thereof. To this end, during the preparatory weeks, the designated contact person holds preparatory meetings with the TLI's staff, students and other stakeholders.

If the education institution operates in different locations and observations during the site visit are time-consuming, mutually agreed visits to those locations may be conducted at this phase. Such visits are carried out by a group of expert panel members. The group should include ANQA's coordinator, and/or the expert panel's chair, as well as one or two other panel members. During the preparatory phase, the expert panel may conduct class observations, visit internship locations and participate in examinations, either online or offline.

At the end of the preparatory visit, ANQA's coordinator provides the expert panel with the final schedule approved by ANQA's director and the head of the TLI, along with the list of meeting participants submitted by the TLI. Within one week, the experts select the meeting participants, ensuring the representation of different

groups. The coordinator sends the final list of participants to the designated contact person during the week prior to the site visit.

4.3.2 Site Visit

A site visit is an important part of the external review, during which the expert panel conducts its activities at the TLI. The site visit aims to ensure a comprehensive review of the information presented in the self-evaluation report. The expert panel collects additional information through meetings, surveys, and discussions, studying educational processes and relevant documents. The visit also provides an opportunity to gain a more comprehensive and realistic picture of the TLI's activities and the actual state of the academic programmes.

The site visit lasts from three to seven days, depending on the type of accreditation, the size and specific characteristics of the institution under review, the presence of campuses, branches and other related factors. The site visit may also be conducted online or in a hybrid format in cases of emergency. The peculiarities of the online and hybrid site visits are defined in the Procedure on the Organisation and Conduct of Accreditation in a State of Emergency of the “National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance” foundation, approved by the Board of Trustees Decision No. 7-L of October 29, 2021.

The site visit is preceded by a closed meeting of the expert panel, which aims to:

- discuss the results of the activities conducted with the participation of international expert(s);
- discuss additional information acquired through the desk review;
- plan in detail the content of each meeting and the questions for focus group discussions;
- address organisational aspects of the visit.

To ensure the effectiveness of the site visit, the expert panel should clarify the key information gathered and discuss the issues to be studied. The effective organisation of the process is the responsibility of the chair and members of the expert panel, as well as ANQA's coordinator. The chair is responsible for holding all the meetings, while the coordinator is responsible for preparing the minutes.

4.3.3. Types of Meetings during the Site Visit

1. Scheduled Meetings with the TLI Representatives

Scheduled meetings with the TLI's representatives are held in a separate meeting room or on an online platform managed by the coordinator at the designated time. The contact person designated for the process ensures the participants' attendance.

The meetings are led by the expert panel members, following the agenda of issues identified in advance.

The expert panel's coordinator is responsible for preparing minutes, taking notes, and ensuring adherence to the schedule. During the meetings, all panel members take notes to support the preparation of the expert panel report.

During the visit, the expert panel members should work as a team. However, where necessary, the teams may be divided into smaller groups to study areas more relevant to their expertise. In such cases, the expert panel's chair and ANQA's coordinator may lead separate groups.

If it is not possible to visit the institution's branches or infrastructures in person, videos presenting the relevant resources may be prepared in advance and provided for the expert panel's observation.

2. Professional Talks

The aim of professional talks is to discuss issues identified through the observation of three academic programmes and student assignments during the meetings with AP managers, teachers and students.

For these talks, the expert panel is divided into groups based on the members' professional fields. They hold discussions to identify the key issues on the student progress and the development of professional thinking, examine the peculiarities of the assessment system and study the achievement and verification of the AP outcomes.

The talks are conducted in parallel, according to the site visit schedule agreed in advance with the institution.

3. Closed Meetings

Closed meetings are only intended for the expert panel members and the coordinator. These meetings aim to summarise key outcomes of the external review, reach a common understanding, reach agreement on each issue and start the preparation of the report. Representatives of ANQA's relevant divisions may also be present at closed meetings to monitor the accreditation process.

The closed meetings take place in three different forms:

- a) **Daily closed meetings** are usually held at the end of each site visit day. These meetings aim to sum up the daily outcomes based on the accreditation criteria and standards, study the areas already evaluated and discuss and/or review the issues that require further exploration. They also provide an opportunity to sum up the outcomes of separate group meetings.

- b) **Ad-hoc closed meetings** are convened as necessary to address specific issues arising during the site visit. Such meetings may be initiated by either the expert panel or the coordinator.
- c) **Final closed meeting** is held at the end of the site visit. This meeting aims to enable the expert panel to summarise the site visit's outcomes and achievements, as well as outline the content and structure of the expert panel report. A key element of this meeting is to reach a consensus on the evaluation findings against the accreditation criteria and on the supporting justifications to be included in the expert panel report. It is the responsibility of the expert panel's chair to record the institution's achievements, pinpoint areas for further enhancement and maintain the main directions of the report.

4. Open Meetings

Open meetings are included in the site visit schedule to provide stakeholders with the opportunity to meet the expert panel, discuss specific issues, or share observations on the accreditation process.

The education institution informs stakeholders about the open meetings included in the agreed site visit schedule during the two weeks preceding the site visit. The announcement of the approved site visit schedule and open meetings should be made available to all stakeholders.

ANQA's coordinator conducts participant registration for the open meetings. Each participant is given the opportunity to meet with the experts for up to 15 minutes. Meeting participants may submit written applications, highlighting the issues they wish to bring to the experts' attention.

The expert panel should study and analyse the basis of any information obtained through the open meetings and take it into consideration during further discussions.

5. Closing meeting

This is the official final stage of the site visit, intended to communicate the visit's preliminary outcomes to the management staff of the education institution.

The expert panel's members meet with the head of the education institution reviewed and other employees invited by the head of the institution. The expert panel's chair provides a brief recap of the site visit, which is documented by the expert panel's coordinator.

It is important to note that the closing meeting does not involve any evaluation or discussion.

4.4 Report Production

4.4.1 Expert Panel Report

The expert panel and ANQA's coordinator are responsible for the preparation of the expert panel report. The report includes findings on the current state of the TLI, drawn by local and international experts through the study of the self-evaluation report, the supporting documents and the site visit. The findings provide the basis for the evaluation and considerations against accreditation criteria. The expert panel report includes **strengths** and **weaknesses** of the education institution or academic programme and enhancement-led **recommendations**.

The **considerations** prepared for each criterion reflect the expert panel's interpretation of the findings presented under the respective criterion. These considerations should identify the key elements supporting the evaluation against the criteria and the related recommendations. Therefore, the considerations should be comprehensive and substantive.

The **summary** sets out the evaluation against the criterion in a clear and concise manner. It should be clear and substantial, emphasising the key points.

Following an in-depth and comprehensive evaluation against each criterion, the expert panel presents its **conclusion**. The conclusions are formulated using one of the following evaluation statements: “meets the requirements of the criterion” or “does not meet the requirements of the criterion”.

If the expert panel’s observations indicate an urgent need for enhancement in any area of the TLI and demonstrate that the continuation of the institution in its current form jeopardises the credible award of qualifications or risk management, enhancement and development as well as long-term development processes, the expert panel’s conclusion shall be “does not meet the requirements of the criterion”.

If the expert panel has not identified any threats to the above-mentioned processes and the recommendations are enhancement-driven, the expert panel’s conclusion shall be “meets the requirements of the criterion”.

The expert panel report also contains recommendations for the enhancement of each evaluated area. Recommendations clearly indicate the key issues that need to be addressed. The recommendations are intended to guide changes in various areas rather than prescribe specific actions. The potential changes and expected outcomes should be clearly communicated to the TLIs. The recommendations may be targeted at:

- the strengthening of best practices;
- the further enhancement;
- addressing identified shortcomings.

Findings, considerations, recommendations and conclusions for each criterion should form a coherent logical chain, with conclusions clearly derived from and

supported by the findings and the findings providing sufficient evidence to justify the conclusions. Reviewing the report from conclusions to findings will help filter out unnecessary information and focus on the key aspects of the TLI.

The preliminary version of the expert panel report is prepared by the expert panel with the support of ANQA's coordinator, drawing on the outcomes of the desk review, the site visit and the observations of all expert panel members.

The report includes, as a separate section, the peer review and recommendations of the international expert(s) (if involved). Aligned with the ESG, these recommendations support the strengthening of the TLI's competitiveness and integration into the EHEA.

The preliminary version of the expert panel report is sent to the TLI upon agreement by all members of the expert panel.

If the TLI has any comments or objections to the expert panel report, it should support them through:

- detailed explanation of the problematic points;
- clear facts;
- references to the relevant sections of the expert panel report;
- proposed revisions to the relevant sections.

The institution may submit objections and remarks related only to the findings and the factual information concerning the TLI. Comments on other parts of the report and evaluation shall not be considered.

ANQA's coordinator forwards the TLI's written response to the expert panel members for the study and discussion of the comments and suggestions. The coordinator also organises a joint discussion with the expert panel and the TLI's

representatives. Where necessary, appropriate changes may be made to the preliminary version of the expert panel report.

Changes are made, clearly indicating the sections to be added or rewritten.

Following this process, the expert panel report is finalised and submitted to ANQA's Secretariat. Within the timeframe stipulated in the Procedure on the Formation and Operation of the Accreditation Committee, the Secretariat sends the report to the education institution.

Prior to the decision of the Accreditation Committee and the approval of the accreditation certificate by the RA ESCS Minister, the expert panel final report is considered confidential and is not subject to publication.

4.5 Decision-making of the Expert Panel

During the closed meetings, the expert panel reaches decisions on the compliance of the TLI's institutional capacities or academic programme with the accreditation criteria. ANQA's coordinator and the expert panel's chair should ensure a professional working environment that enables all panel members to freely express their considerations and engage in impartial and evidence-based discussions.

The expert panel's decisions should be reached by consensus rather than by a simple vote. Voting is not conducive to cooperation and compromise, as it may reduce the involvement of individual members and their responsibility for the outcomes. Consensus, on the other hand, enables each participant to communicate their considerations and analyses openly and fosters a shared understanding among the members of the expert panel.

The consensus, when applied effectively, can lead to a more acceptable solution for the expert panel.

The expert panel's chair is responsible for the discussion and consensus-building process. The chair raises issues for discussion and facilitates an exchange of ideas among the panel members to clarify their positions and introduce proposals. All members should clearly express their agreement with the chair's proposal. Silence should not be considered agreement. Where consensus is not reached, experts who are not in favour of the proposal, should state their position, presenting risks and doubts. As a result, the proposal is clarified, reformulated, or supplemented. Afterwards, a new round of consensus-building begins and continues until a decision acceptable to all members is reached.

4.6 Follow-up Plan and Schedule

According to the ESG, the integrity of the accreditation process requires the TLIs to plan and implement further enhancement actions. The follow-up plan represents the logical continuation of the process, outlining activities until the next accreditation and providing a basis for the subsequent accreditation process. The TLIs' follow-up plan and implementation schedule required by the Accreditation Statute, serve this purpose. The follow-up plan also serves as the basis for the TLI's interim reports, subsequent self-evaluation, and future accreditation.

The education institution begins preparing the follow-up plan immediately upon receipt of the expert panel's final report. The follow-up plan should aim to address the issues identified in the expert panel report and implement the provided recommendations. The actions should be undertaken in line with the institution's mission and overall strategy, without affecting its normal operation.

The preliminary version of the follow-up plan, accompanied by the self-evaluation report, the expert panel report and other required documents, is submitted to the Accreditation Committee for the decision-making process within the timeframe prescribed by the Accreditation Statute.

The follow-up plan is compiled through the summary and integration of the issues identified and the recommendations provided by the expert panel. It demonstrates how the institution:

- 1) perceives the nature of the issues raised within the criterion;
- 2) intends to apply approaches/strategies or methods to address those issues;
- 3) defines the specific outcomes expected from the proposed solutions.

The follow-up plan should cover several key principles:

- expert panel's recommendations / major issue raised;
- expected outcomes;
- planned interim results (quantitative and /or qualitative);
- allocated budget;
- timeline for the evaluation of interim results
- responsible division for the evaluation, responsible division for the outcome achievement
- the format of the evaluation report;
- where information on the evaluation will be made available.

The expert panel evaluates the **realism** of the follow-up plan, considering the following questions:

- whether the issues were perceived correctly by the institution;
- the extent to which the follow-up plan is realistic in terms of the implementation.

The expert panel's conclusion on the follow-up plan is provided to the Accreditation Committee.

Within two months after the accreditation decision, the institution submits the final, revised follow-up plan and implementation schedule to ANQA, taking into

consideration the observations and recommendations from the Accreditation Committee.

5. Decision-Making on Accreditation

The decision-making process of the Accreditation Committee is regulated by the Procedure on the Formation and Operation of the Accreditation Committee and its Policy on Awarding Institutional Accreditation.

5.1 ANQA's Accreditation Committee

The Accreditation Committee is an independent, permanent, and collegial body that exercises the powers prescribed by the Statute on State Accreditation of Tertiary Level Institutions and their Academic Programmes in the Republic of Armenia and the Procedure on the Formation and Operation of the Accreditation Committee established by ANQA. Individuals meeting at least three of the following criteria may become the Committee members:

- experience in the development and implementation of quality assurance policy in higher education or vocational education and training;
- experience in external review of education quality;
- experience in education management and administration, excluding individuals currently serving as education managers;
- at least ten years of teaching experience;
- experience in the development, implementation and evaluation of academic programmes in higher education or vocational education and training;
- international experience in the field of education.

The TLIs' management staff (rector, vice-rector, director, deputy director) cannot be included in the Committee.

Candidates are nominated by the TLIs, employers, professional associations and ANQA.

The Accreditation Committee is formed through a clear selection procedure, thereby guaranteeing legitimacy of its functions.

The Accreditation Committee is responsible for:

- establishing principles and approaches for accreditation decision-making;
- taking decisions on institutional and programme accreditation based on the results of the TLI's self-evaluation and expert panel's evaluation;
- providing timely responses and recommendations to ensure the quality of ANQA's accreditation processes and methodology.

The Accreditation Committee operates in accordance with the principles of legitimacy and independence, guided by the RA Government Decree No. 978-N on the Approval of the Statute on State Accreditation of Tertiary-Level Institutions and their Academic Programmes in the Republic of Armenia, the RA Government Decree No. 959-N on the Approval of the RA Accreditation Criteria for Tertiary Education, ANQA's Charter, Procedure on the Formation and Operation of the Accreditation Committee of the "National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance" foundation (with new edits), Policy on Awarding Institutional Accreditation by the Accreditation Committee of the "National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance" foundation and other internal legal acts of ANQA.

The Accreditation Committee exercises its powers through sessions, convened upon necessity at least four times a year. The Accreditation Committee makes decisions through open voting.

5.2 Decisions on Accreditation

When making accreditation decisions, the Accreditation Committee studies the package of documents submitted by the educational institution as part of the accreditation process, including:

- the institution's self-evaluation;
- the expert panel report, outlining the TLI's strengths and enhancement areas;
- the institution's response to the expert panel report, including comments, recommendations and agreement with the report's findings;
- the follow-up plan and schedule;
- the expert panel's conclusion on the follow-up plan;
- the scrutiny report prepared by the members of the Scrutiny Group, who examine the documents thoroughly and meet with the coordinator, the expert panel and the institution's representatives.

The Accreditation Committee's session is valid if attended by at least two-thirds of its members.

The Committee adopts decisions by open voting and a simple majority of the votes of the participants. In the event of a tie, the chair's vote is decisive. ANQA's director, with the right to an advisory vote, and the secretary, the head of the Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division and the process coordinator, without voting rights, also participate in the Accreditation Committee's sessions.

Taking into consideration the accreditation decision-making approaches and principles set in the Policy on Awarding Institutional Accreditation by the Accreditation Committee of the "National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance" foundation, along with the education institution's package of documents and justifications provided by the Committee members, the Committee reaches one of the following decisions:

- **to grant an institutional or programme accreditation;**
- **to grant institutional or programme accreditation with conditions;**
- **to reject institutional or programme accreditation.**

At the end of the Accreditation Committee's meeting, the chair of the Accreditation Committee announces the decision on accreditation.

5.3 Publication of the Accreditation Decision

In the case of institutional accreditation, the TLI receives an accreditation certificate, whereas in the case of programme accreditation, a supplement to accreditation certificate is issued.

Depending on the type of accreditation, ANQA submits the Accreditation Committee's decision, along with the accreditation certificate or supplement form, to the ESCS Ministry for the Minister's approval. In the case of a procedural infringement(s) of the accreditation process, the documents are returned to ANQA for reconsideration.

In the absence of procedural infringement(s), the accreditation certificate or its supplement is approved by the Minister and submitted to ANQA for entry into the State Accreditation Register.

The expert panel's final report, the Accreditation Committee's decision on institutional or programme accreditation and the accreditation certificate are made publicly available through the State Accreditation Register and on ANQA's official website.

5.4 Inclusion in the State Accreditation Register

The TLIs' institutional capacities or academic programmes are considered accredited upon registration in the State Accreditation Register. The Register is maintained to provide the public and international organisations with information on accredited institutions and academic programmes.

Within one working day upon receipt of the approved accreditation certificate or supplement, ANQA makes a relevant entry into the State Accreditation Register and duly hands over the certificate/supplement to the education institution. ANQA publishes the accreditation decision on its website.

Institutional or programme accreditation results are not entered into the State Accreditation Register if the education institution applies to a foreign accreditation agency without prior notification to ANQA or submits incomplete foreign accreditation documents.

5.5 Reports on the Implementation of Follow-up Plan

According to the Accreditation Statute, the TLIs are obliged to carry out institutional internal evaluation once every two years. This serves as an interim evaluation of the implementation of the follow-up plan against the accreditation criteria. The evaluation may be conducted both by the institution itself and the invited external experts. The results are submitted to ANQA.

The Accreditation Committee's decision highlights the priority and urgent areas for enhancement, which should form the basis for the preparation of the self-evaluation report as part of the next accreditation process.

Upon the receipt of the institutional accreditation with conditions, the education institutions submit written reports to ANQA on enhancement-led measures once every six months. The reports should ensure compliance with the follow-up plan and include an analysis of the effectiveness of the implemented actions.

5.6 Submission of Complaints Concerning the Accreditation Process

The TLIs may submit complaints concerning accreditation processes in accordance with ANQA's Procedure on the Submission of Complaints Concerning the Accreditation Process (ANQA Board of Trustees' Decision No. 4-L of May 5, 2025) regarding all stages of accreditation, except for the appeals against the Accreditation Committee's decisions, which are regulated by the Procedure on the Formation and Operation of the Accreditation Committee.

The complaints process is intended to facilitate the exercise of the education institutions' right to file complaints, ensuring the continuity and continuous enhancement of external quality assurance processes.

For the examination and resolution of complaints, Complaints Panel is established by the order of ANQA's director. The group consists of ANQA's lawyer, heads of the Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division, the Secretariat and other specialists upon necessity. The Complaints Panel thoroughly examines the issues raised in the complaint, the data substantiating violations or disagreements, hears the complainant and the respondent, and adopts an independent decision. The hearings are non-public, and the parties are obliged to maintain the principle of confidentiality.

The submission, acceptance, rejection and review of complaints are defined in ANQA's Procedure on the Submission of Complaints Concerning the Accreditation Process.

5.7 Monitoring of Accredited Education Institutions

The accredited education institutions are subject to monitoring in accordance with ANQA's annual plan-schedule and the Accreditation Committee's decision.

ANQA conducts monitoring to ensure the ongoing observation of institutional activities and to evaluate progress in the implementation of the follow-up plan.

The peculiarities of the monitoring process are defined by the Policy and Procedure on Monitoring of Tertiary Level Institutions and their Academic Programmes of the “National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance” foundation (approved by the Board of Trustees' Decision No. 6-L of October 29, 2021).

5.8 Consequences of Accreditation Rejection for TLIs

The accreditation rejection entails several consequences for the education institutions, as defined in the Accreditation Statute.

In the case of an institutional accreditation rejection, state-allocated full tuition reimbursement in the form of student benefits for the respective education institution **across all academic degrees**, as well as the **thematic funding of scientific and technical activities are terminated** from the subsequent academic year until the institutional accreditation is obtained.

In the case of programme accreditation rejection, state-allocated full tuition reimbursement in the form of student benefits **for the respective academic programme is terminated** from the subsequent academic year until the programme accreditation is obtained.

In case the programme accreditation result is negative for a bachelor's programme, the state-allocated full tuition reimbursement in the form of student benefits **is terminated for the respective academic programme at all academic degree levels** from the subsequent academic year until the programme accreditation is obtained.

5.9 Appeal of an Accreditation Decision

Pursuant to the Accreditation Statute, the education institutions are entitled to appeal the Accreditation Committee's decisions on institutional and programme accreditation. The institution may file a written appeal in accordance with the appeal template developed by ANQA within one month of the publication of the accreditation decision.

The appeal may be submitted to ANQA's Secretariat via email or in hard copy.

Within two working days of receipt of the appeal, ANQA's Secretariat submits it to its Board of Trustees or returns it in the following cases:

- the appeal does not bear the signature of the appellant or their representative;
- the body to which the appeal is addressed is not specified;
- the appeal does not indicate the date;
- the appeal is signed by an unauthorised person, or the authorised person has not attached the letter of authorisation to the appeal;
- the deadlines for the appeal submission have been violated.

ANQA's Board of Trustees, upon the recommendation of ANQA's director, forms an Appeal Commission (hereinafter referred to as the "Commission") consisting of three members to examine the appeal and issue a conclusion. ANQA's Secretariat submits the appeal accepted by the Board of Trustees to the Appeal Commission,

which examines the appeal against the Accreditation Committee's decision and issues its conclusion within one month.

Considering the appeal, the self-evaluation, the preliminary version of the expert panel report, the institution's consent or comments and objections (if any) to the preliminary version of the report, the expert panel final report, the Accreditation Committee's decision, as well as additional arguments, statements, including newly identified circumstances, the Commission gives one of the following conclusions by consensus:

- to uphold the Committee's decision, rejecting the applicant's appeal;
- to return the case, with a proposal for a new decision by the Committee.

The remuneration of the Appeal Commission's members is covered by the appealing party.

ANQA's Secretariat performs the functions of the Appeal Commission's secretary. The examination process is recorded and documented. The minutes are signed by the Appeal Commission's members and the secretary.

The Appeal Commission's conclusion is submitted to the Board of Trustees.

If the appeal is upheld, the Commission's conclusion is sent to the Accreditation Committee with a proposal to adopt a new decision.

The Appeal Commission's conclusion cannot be appealed to ANQA again.

5.10 State Accreditation Declared Invalid

The Accreditation Statute defines the cases where state accreditation is declared invalid. State accreditation is declared invalid in the following cases:

- 1) the accreditation certificate's validity period has expired;

- 2) the education institution's operation has been terminated in the manner prescribed by the RA legislation;
- 3) the education institution's license for the provision of educational services has been revoked.

In the above-mentioned cases, a corresponding entry is made into the State Accreditation Register.

V. Requirements, Selection Criteria and Guidelines for Experts

ANQA uses expert services for the accreditation process. The selection of experts is one of the most important aspects of the accreditation process. The recognition of accreditation decisions by the TLI stakeholders largely depends on both adherence to the expert selection criteria and the implementation of the established procedures.

In 2005, the European Consortium for Accreditation (hereafter "ECA") set the following principles for the selection of experts:

- Any decision on the composition of the expert panel should be based on the rules, procedures and relevant legislative acts established by an accreditation agency. The process of expert selection should be transparent.
- The institutions subject to accreditation may raise objections to the selection of experts.
- The accreditation decisions should be made by the accreditation agency rather than the expert panel.
- The experts should act independently and render impartial judgments.
- The experts should work together to carry out external review in line with the accreditation purpose.

ANQA's expert selection criteria and relevant processes are consistent with the ECA standards.

The expert panel is composed of highly qualified, experienced, and locally and internationally recognised specialists with the skills and competencies required to implement quality assurance processes. Experts are selected based on their ability to propose innovative solutions for the enhancement of institutional governance and APs, formulate outcome-oriented questions, prepare expert panel reports and demonstrate effective communication and teamwork skills.

ANQA provides training for the expert panel members to ensure the effective application of these skills and competencies in the accreditation process.

The Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel is published on ANQA's official website.

In 2017, ANQA completely reviewed and upgraded the electronic expert pool. Individuals interested in becoming ANQA experts are encouraged to register in the preliminary expert pool. The registration guide is available on ANQA's website. The expert pool contains data on experts, who have participated in and registered for ANQA's accreditation processes. Registration in the expert pool facilitates ANQA's expert recruitment process.

ANQA guarantees that external review processes are useful and effective for education institutions subject to accreditation by:

- ensuring that expert panel members receive relevant training to conduct the review professionally and skilfully;
- ensuring consistency in the use of the study and review methods for all institutions;

- providing institutions with clear and comprehensible review results.

1. Requirements for the Expert Panel

The expert panel should have:

1. the capacity to conduct institutional or programme evaluations;
2. the capacity to develop and implement governance and administration processes, policies and strategic plans;
3. at least three years of experience in teaching and research activities (excluding student experts);
4. the capacity to evaluate internal quality assurance processes and perform data analysis.

Local experts involved in the accreditation of HEIs should hold a scientific degree, while those participating in the accreditation of VET institutions should have at least a master's degree or a specialist diploma qualification.

Expert panels **include** students in the second or higher years of bachelor's degree programmes, master's and postgraduate students or students in the second or higher years of VET institutions with experience in public activities.

Local experts should demonstrate excellent proficiency in literary Armenian, both written and spoken.

At least one of the local experts should have English proficiency.

2. Powers, Rights and Responsibilities of the Expert Panel

The expert panel has the following functions:

- to study and evaluate the education institution's self-evaluation report and the package of documents attached, including the electronic questionnaire;
- to conduct class observations, observation of internships and resources;

- to conduct the site visit, participate in all expert panel meetings, closed discussions and decision-making process;
- to prepare a preliminary version of the expert panel report drawing on the institution's electronic questionnaire responses, self-evaluation report, desk review findings, study of the supporting documentation and the results of the site visit;
- to participate in the discussion of the institution's comments and suggestions regarding the preliminary version of the report;
- to prepare an expert panel final report;
- to provide a conclusion on the institution's follow-up plan, or its preliminary version, as presented in the expert panel report;
- to meet with the Scrutiny Group of up to three members formed by the Accreditation Committee's chair.

The expert panel members have the right to:

- request, through the coordinator, any additional information from the institution deemed necessary during the desk review and site visit;
- suggest changes to the site visit schedule;
- provide ANQA with feedback on the overall review process.

The expert panel members are obliged to:

- notify ANQA in writing, prior to the inclusion in the expert panel, of any issues that may lead to a conflict of interest with the given institution;
- upon inclusion in the expert panel, sign a confidentiality commitment and conflict of interest declaration;
- strictly adhere to ANQA's Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct throughout the external review process.

The expert panel's chair is responsible for the proper conduct of the entire external review process and the work of the expert panel.

The expert panel's chair is obliged to:

- conduct a preparatory visit to the institution (or participate in an online meeting) with the head of ANQA's Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division and the coordinator to agree upon the site visit plan;
- preside over all meetings and lead closed discussions and decision-making processes as part of the site visit;
- ensure compliance of the site visit schedule, maintain the work order (through time management, presentation and clarification of all planned questions by experts);
- prepare a response to the observations on the preliminary version of the expert panel report.

The experts should refrain from expressing personal impressions, making comparisons, or disclosing preliminary evaluations during the site visit meetings. Furthermore, the use of evaluative terms like “satisfactory”, “unsatisfactory”, “good” and “bad” should also be avoided.

3. Rights and Responsibilities of the Coordinator

To organise the expert panel's work and coordinate the external review, one or two coordinators are appointed by the order of ANQA's director.

The coordinator ensures communication between the expert panel and the education institution and oversees compliance with the procedures specified in the Accreditation Statute and this Manual.

The coordinator is responsible for the adherence to the external review procedure and evaluation principles.

The coordinator does not have the right to give evaluations or make judgments on the institution's activities or the academic programme.

The coordinator is obliged to:

- ensure the smooth conduct and effective implementation of processes (facilitating discussions, resolving misunderstandings);
- coordinate the entire process and protect the rights of the expert panel members;
- carry out situational analysis, make decisions and provide solutions in ad-hoc situations;
- prepare the site visit schedule together with the expert panel's chair and coordinate its implementation with the education institution;
- organise a preparatory visit to the institution and verify its readiness for the site visit (office, staff, required equipment, etc.);
- support the expert panel in the preparation of the expert panel report;
- organise discussions with the panel members, as well as between the institution and the expert panel regarding the institution's comments and objections to the preliminary version of the expert panel report;
- support in the preparation of the expert panel's final report;
- provide the institution with guidance on the template for the preparation of the follow-up plan mentioned in the expert panel report and coordinate the expert panel's evaluation of this plan;
- organise and participate in meetings between the Scrutiny Group of up to three members, the expert panel and institution representatives;
- ensure the expert panel's work and implemented processes comply with this procedure and the requirements of this Manual.

4. Recruitment, Selection and Training of Experts

1. Steps required for the inclusion in ANQA's expert pool:
 - registration in the pool (<http://forms.anqa.am>);
 - completion of the expert data questionnaire;
 - participation in courses and trainings organised for experts.
2. Expert candidates may be recruited from the following groups:
 - TLI's staff members from the groups responsible for the preparation of self-evaluation;
 - sector specialists recommended by experts involved in the accreditation processes;
 - specialists invited upon the recommendation of the TLIs' quality assurance managers;
 - participants selected through round table discussions (thematic, sector-specific) organised by ANQA;
 - teachers who conduct research on their teaching practice and publish related articles.
 - distinguished sector specialists from science, economy, industry or individuals with experience in education management;
 - employers actively cooperating with institutions.
3. ANQA regularly organises capacity building courses for the specialists included in the expert pool.
4. The courses end with the assessment of the participants' competencies based on an established rubric.
5. The rubric covers the following competencies:
 - the ability to propose innovative solutions for improving institutional governance and academic programmes;
 - ability to formulate outcome-oriented questions;
 - skills in preparing expert panel reports;

- communication and teamwork skills.
6. Positively assessed participants are included in ANQA's list of expert candidates.
 7. The expert panel comprises three to seven experts.
 8. The expert panel includes:
 - academic staff representatives;
 - representatives of education management sector;
 - representatives/employers of a given professional or economic sector, (mandatory in the case of programme accreditation);
 - students of VET institutions and HEIs;
 - international experts (mandatory in the case of HEIs).
 9. The international expert is selected from education quality assurance agencies or international specialised organisations.

To expand the expert pool, ANQA regularly publishes calls for experts on its website and social media platforms. The information is also disseminated to various units of education institutions. Furthermore, ANQA promotes and shares information about the expert pool at various conferences and forums.

ANQA organises three to five expert training courses each year.

ANQA considers the continuous participation of experts in regular training courses mandatory for the ongoing development of their capacities.

5. Monitoring and Assessment of Expert Activities

ANQA attaches importance to the proper assessment of experts' performance. To ensure the effective implementation of accreditation processes, experts' performance is subject to regular monitoring and assessment by ANQA.

5.1 Methods for Continuous Assessment and Monitoring

ANQA monitors the ongoing performance of its experts using the following methods:

- **Monitoring of expert performance.** During the site visit, ANQA's internal quality assurance manager or the person responsible for monitoring the accreditation process examines experts' performance, providing comments and recommendations for improvement.
- **Collection of feedback from TLIs.** Collecting oral or written feedback from the institutions is one of the main tools to assess the expert performance. After all the meetings set in the site visit schedule, the TLI's representatives involved in the accreditation process complete a survey to assess the expert panel's performance. The analysis of the survey results forms the basis for the assessment and further enhancement of the effectiveness of experts' performance.
- **Incidental observation.** ANQA conducts this type of observation during external reviews or other activities (e.g., group meetings and training sessions), allowing it to observe experts' evaluation skills.

6. Conflict of Interests, Confidentiality and Integrity

In 2015, ANQA's Board of Trustees approved the Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct of the "National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance" foundation, outlining the ethical requirements and rules of conduct for experts during the accreditation process.

Prior to the study or evaluation of the education institution's materials, experts should notify ANQA in writing of any potential conflict of interest with the institution and sign a conflict of interest declaration. ANQA has a well-defined conflict-of-interest policy for experts involved in the accreditation processes. A conflict of interest arises when experts:

- have family, financial, or other ties to an education institution subject to review or its management staff that may compromise their ability to exercise independent and impartial judgment;
- perform some functions or hold any position in the education institution subject to accreditation;
- participate in joint programmes or projects implemented in cooperation with the institution subject to accreditation.

Confidentiality. Experts sign a confidentiality commitment, ensuring that any information concerning the institution subject to review remains confidential and is disclosed solely through the expert panel report.

Independence and integrity. ANQA takes measures to ensure that experts are not subject to undue influence or pressures that may affect their integrity.

Impartiality. Experts should act objectively and remain free from any commercial, financial or other pressures which may compromise impartiality.

Recommendations. ANQA does not permit experts to provide recommendations to the institution unless they are formally set out in the expert panel report.

VI. External Review Expenses

According to the Accreditation Statute, the TLI bears the costs of the entire accreditation process under a paid service contract signed between the TLI and ANQA.

ANQA defines the external review (accreditation) fee based on the nature and duration of the external review, the number of expert panel members and other relevant factors. The costs are calculated separately for each process. The fee rates are approved by ANQA's Board of Trustees.

In 2015, ANQA's Board of Trustees approved the institutional accreditation fees applicable to higher education institutions, followed by the approval of those for primary and secondary vocational education institutions in 2019.

In 2024, the Board of Trustees revised the institutional accreditation fees for primary and secondary vocational education institutions, including the fees for programme accreditation and accreditation with conditions.

In the same year, the institutional accreditation fees for the HEIs that received accreditation with conditions were also adopted.

List of Abbreviations

ANQA	National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation
ANQF	Armenian National Qualifications Framework
AP	Academic programme
CEENQA	Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
DEQAR	Database of External Quality Assurance Results
ECA	European Consortium for Accreditation
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EQA	External Quality Assurance
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESCS Ministry	Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport

ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
ETF	European Training Foundation
ILO	Intended Learning Outcome
INQAAHE	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
IQA	Internal quality assurance
NQF	National qualifications framework
TLI	Tertiary Level Institution
VET institutions	Vocational education and training institutions
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
HEI	Higher Education Institution
PDCA	Plan–Do–Check–Act
QA	Quality Assurance
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework
RA	Republic of Armenia
VET	Vocational Education and Training