



ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE

DECREE N 26

12 April 2018

On Awarding Institutional Accreditation to "GORIS STATE UNIVERSITY" NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

General Information on the Institution

Full name of the Institution:	"Goris State University" Non-Profit Organization
Acronym:	GSU
Official address:	Avangard 2 str., Syunik region, Goris, Republic of Armenia
Decree and date of previous accreditation:	Not available

Guided by the regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs” approved by the RA Government on 30 June, 2011 N 978-Ն Decree; by RA Government Decree N 959-Ն (30 June 2011) on “Approval of RA Standards for Professional Education Accreditation”; by the procedure on the Formation and Functioning of Accreditation Committee of “National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance” foundation (ANQA) as well as by ANQA regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel, in the open session held on 12 April 2018, the Accreditation Committee of “National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance” foundation (hereinafter referred to as the Committee) discussed the issue of state institutional accreditation of **Goris State University** (hereinafter: GSU or the University) with the presence of Chair of the expert panel, ANQA coordinator of the accreditation procedure and GSU.

Having examined GSU's self-analysis, the University's comments and suggestions on the draft report of the expert panel, the expert panel report, GSU action plan on the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel report as well as ANQA conclusion, the Committee stated the following:

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

Submission of the Application	31 March 2017
Submission of self-assessment report	18 July 2017

Site-visit	1-3 November 2017
Submission of the Expert panel report	16 January 2018
Submission of the Follow-up plan	9 February 2018

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

While carrying out the expertise the expert panel took into consideration that Goris State University is among leading higher education institutions in Syunik region of the Republic of Armenia which aims "to prepare specialists holding BA and MA degrees in the spheres of education, economy, industry and information technologies for the region who are highly professional, competitive and responsive to current challenges, as well as to create student-centered environment which promotes flexible professional academic programs (PAPs), academic courses and relatively modern teaching and learning methods in line with educational and technological needs of the society and economy".

GSU's activity is mainly in compliance with its mission. However, the anticipated outcomes and key performance indicators (KPIs) are not measurable and they do not reflect the achievement of strategic goals and achievements. The absence of generic approach to efficiency evaluation and improvement of fulfilled strategic goals as well as lack of clearly set and reliable mechanisms puts at risk the processes relating the identification of GSU's achievements and shortcomings as well as further proper and efficient planning.

The mechanisms of stakeholders' involvement are not sufficient for ensuring their proactive participation in GSU's activities. The inefficiency of mechanisms identifying the needs of GSU's external stakeholders, their passive involvement in the development of strategic plan as well as the absence of market research put at risk the full implementation of the goals set by GSU's mission taking into consideration the University's commitment to prepare specialists in line with the regional needs and market demands.

GSU is currently undergoing changes in terms of its legal status which significantly hinders the regular processes of strategic management. The new status should enlarge GSU's activity fields and have a positive impact on the University's financial capacity and diversification of its entrepreneurial activity. This transitional period is viewed as the main obstacle impeding the development of the new strategy.

GSU's organizational structure needs to be more clarified taking into account the importance of implementation of its prioritized directions and strategic goals. The whole administration of GSU management system is not based on the principle of quality management. Although there are planning

and implementation processes at different levels, the processes of evaluation and improvement are missing.

It is commendable that GSU involves its students and teaching staff in almost all governing bodies and gives them an opportunity to freely express their viewpoints and participate in making decisions regarding their activities.

Currently surveys are considered to be the main mechanism of identifying factors having an impact on GSU's general and educational activities, however, the targeted direction, regularity and methodology of their implementation as well as the frame of respondents' representativeness do not enable surveys to be viewed as an efficient way of identifying internal and external stakeholders' opinions.

GSU implements 20 BA and 11 MA PAPs in full-time and part-time studies. GSU PAPs are in line with its mission and state educational standards, and the University makes some attempts to also ensure their consistency with market demands. There are anticipated learning outcomes defined in PAPs and they are mostly compatible with the RA NQF and are often generally articulated. The applied teaching and learning methods are mostly teacher-centered, however, some attempts have been made in recent years to make a transition to student-centered approach. GSU has an assessment policy and criteria for evaluation of final papers and master theses, however, assessment methods used in the University are not always in line with the anticipated results which does not allow to measure the factually achieved results. Although the University has taken some steps to maintain academic honesty, the activities taken in the direction of ensuring academic honesty and preventing plagiarism are not coordinated. It is praiseworthy that GSU has developed a regulation on development, approval, evaluation and monitoring of GSU's PAPs and curricula but it hasn't been fully put into process.

The process of selection and admission of GSU students is carried out by clearly set mechanisms which has a positive impact on efficient and transparent implementation of the process. The University gives importance to students' participation in decision-making processes. There are a number of mechanisms of identifying students' needs, however, further processes directed to the satisfaction of their needs are not regulated.

The majority of GSU students are involved in part-time study. At the same time the mechanisms of identification of students' needs and protection of their rights and other suchlike mechanisms are predominantly being applied in full-time study which may have an impact on the quality of part-time study, its continuous improvement and preparation of competitive specialists.

GSU gives importance to the necessity to ensure teaching staff with high professional qualities. For this purpose GSU has developed a temporary regulation on selection of teaching staff which promotes the regular selection of teachers, however, from the perspective of efficiency, the selection mechanisms haven't been evaluated. The procedure on competition-based selection of support staff is missing which may negatively impact the objectiveness and targeted implementation of processes relating the

selection of support staff. The heads of faculties and those of some chairs are employed as acting heads in GSU for many years which definitely has a negative impact on the efficiency of management.

GSU has defined mechanisms for carrying out regular evaluation of teaching staff but the analysis of developed mechanisms is missing which does not allow to make any judgments about their efficiency. Besides, the University mostly doesn't take steps to eliminate the identified shortcomings which hinders the improvement of teaching quality. The low level of efficiency of foreign language courses and the absence of activities taken towards enhancement of professional qualities impede the continuous development of teaching staff and processes directed to the mobility and internationalization of PAPs. The activities taken for freshman teachers are not coordinated at the University, and the mentoring institute is missing which may impede the development of freshman teachers and influence teaching quality.

GSU has registered the increase of quality of GSU teachers' activity in recent 5 years; such indicators are encouraging and they definitely lead to the enhancement of teaching quality. Nevertheless, the recruitment with teaching staff is not fully ensured. It is a positive point that for the implementation of PAPs some employers having an experience in industry are also invited to teach at GSU on double-jobbing basis as far as they contribute to the investment of practical component into PAPs. The practice of conducting several courses by one and the same teacher is worrisome as far as it may impact on the quality of teaching and hinder the regular academic process.

In the GSU Concept there are general provisions reflecting the University's ambitions in the field of research. However, the fact that the provisions are overambitious and the research directions are redundant, especially taking into account the absence of a structural unit responsible for the coordination of scientific-research activities of the University, puts at risk the implementation of the above mentioned provisions. The absence of precisely defined priorities in the field of research doesn't create a favorable environment for GSU from the perspective of the University's special role in the region.

GSU doesn't carry out financial planning in scientific-research field, neither it allocates sufficient financial means from its budget for the development of scientific-research activities. Research activities aren't viewed as a source of income by the University. Research activities are mainly carried out based on personal initiative of GSU staff members in accordance with their preferences which are not linked with GSU's strategy which in its turn may have a negative impact on coordination of research activities, control of their organization, evaluation of efficiency, quality of teaching as well as interlink between the content of provided courses and educational process. GSU gives importance to the internationalization of research activities. However, the steps directed to the involvement of students and teachers in international research initiatives are not tangible yet.

It is positive that an Educational-Scientific Center has been established in GSU and a number of national and international conferences have been held at GSU. Research activities carried out in the University, which are actually rare cases, are published without taking into account the impact factor and are mostly published in local journals which hinders the internationalization of research outcomes. The link between scientific-research activity and learning is ensured by teachers' initiative without any defined mechanisms which may have a negative impact on the coordination of processes interlinking research and educational process.

GSU makes efforts to allocate respective resources for the implementation of its mission and strategic goals. Although the University tries to allocate financial means and enhance fundraising for equipment, improvement, modernization and enlargement of classrooms, laboratories, library fund and other infrastructures, GSU financial means are limited and the enrichment of resource base is mainly being made within the framework of international grants. GSU budget is mainly formed by students' tuition fees which from the perspective of sustainability may cause problems. The analyses on efficiency of distribution and use of financial resources are missing which doesn't allow to evaluate and analyze the indicators of financial sustainability and development opportunities of the University.

GSU resource base is mainly sufficient for the implementation of PAPs. It is positive that there is a procedure for management of information and documentation processes which GSU plans to improve. GSU has taken its first step to create necessary conditions for people with limited abilities. Another positive point is that the University regularly conducts surveys on satisfaction with GSU resources and provided services, however, GSU doesn't take steps towards elimination of identified shortcomings based on evaluation results.

It is positive that there is a clearly set accountability system in GSU which requires regular reports which are summed up in rector's annual reports and are published. However, the content of reports needs to be improved as far as they mainly comprise facts and statistic data about the University's activities; the direct link with the strategy/Concept, the analytical approach and suggestions on improvement activities based on identified shortcomings are missing.

It is also positive that the University takes steps in the direction of making its processes available and transparent to the society. However, GSU official site which is one of the most important tools in terms of ensuring accountability, urgently needs to be improved as far as it can have a crucial role for shaping a positive image of the University. It's commendable that some feedback domains promoting the establishment of links with the society have been formed, but there are a number of problems in terms of ensuring sustainability and efficiency of feedback.

GSU takes some steps towards internationalization and external cooperation at national level. In this regard, GSU has defined strategic goals which, however, are too ambitious and respective human and financial resources haven't been provided for their proper fulfillment. In addition, the policies and

procedures regulating the mentioned field are absent which puts at risk the implementation of the coordinated activities. Another crucial point is that the level of GSU internal stakeholders' participation in activities directed to the development of foreign language proficiency is at low level, and no steps are taken to improve this process. Although the University carries out some activities towards internationalization, GSU doesn't have an environment fostering practice exchange, development and internationalization yet.

The expert panel positively evaluates the existence of QA Division in the University and the developed manual on "GSU Quality Assurance System". However, the steps GSU takes towards investment of internal QA system are not coordinated yet. The absence of analyses on efficiency of mechanisms and toolset regulating different processes doesn't allow GSU to evaluate the impact of QA processes on improvement of its PAPs and overall activity. The non-regular implementation of QA processes based on PDCA cycle as well as passive participation of external stakeholders in the mentioned processes may hinder the continuous improvement of GSU activity.

Taking into consideration the fact that:

- a) GSU is among leading higher education institutions in Syunik region of the Republic of Armenia the activity of which is aimed at solving the crucial problem - to prepare specialists for the regional labour market;
- b) having lack of financial means, GSU has managed to create sufficient educational environment with necessary material resources for proper implementation of professional academic programs by ensuring teaching staff with respective professional qualifications;
- c) some shortcomings have been identified in GSU's institutional capacities, in particular:
 - 1) the problems which exist in the sphere of "**Governance and Administration**" have a direct impact on clarification and increase of efficiency of GSU's management system, on planned implementation of processes as well as on decision making based on data analysis and in concordance with ethical norms;
 - 2) the shortcomings which exist in the sphere of "**Research and Development**" weaken the position of GSU from the perspective of scientific research which is one of the main directions of the University's activity, the interlink between research and learning processes as well as may hinder the formation of analytical skills of GSU's alumni;
 - 3) the shortcomings which exist in the sphere of "**External Relations and Internationalization**" haven't let the University achieve the ambitious goals in terms of GSU's internationalization, invest the practice of international projects in educational process and in PAPs, and they do not foster the formation of sufficient capabilities;
 - 4) the shortcomings which exist in the sphere of "**Internal Quality Assurance System**" do not allow the University to evaluate the efficiency of in-use processes, to clarify current shortcomings and risks and to find solutions together with GSU stakeholders.

d) in case the shortcomings identified in the above mentioned spheres aren't urgently eliminated and put at risk the implementation of the University's strategic goals and reliability of GSU alumni's qualifications;

e) the analysis of the University's strengths, current problems and opportunities shows that the implementation of the consultancy directed to the improvement of the situation is realistic though it needs strict external monitoring;

As a result of voting, the Accreditation Committee:

DECIDED

1. **To award conditional institutional accreditation to "Goris State University" non-profit organization for 2 /two/ years.**
2. After the publication of the decision on accreditation award, to submit the reviewed action plan on the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel report and respective time schedule to ANQA within two months taking into account:
 - a) the urgent need to give solutions primarily to the problems existing in the fields of **"Governance and Administration"**, **"Research and Development"**, **"External Relations and Internationalization"** and **"Internal Quality Assurance System"**;
 - b) the requirement to ensure Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the evaluation of progress and efficiency of the University's ongoing processes;
 - c) the international expert's peer-review results and provided recommendations regarding GSU's ambitions to be integrated into the European Higher Education Area.
3. To pay special attention to the reinforcement of the link between learning and research, improvement of management system, modernization of necessary material-technical base, training of teaching staff, mobility of students and teaching staff as well as internal quality assurance.
4. In accordance with the Clause 12 of the Regulation on "State Accreditation of RA Education Institutions and their Educational Programs", every 6 /six/ months to submit a written report to ANQA on the results of the carried out activities by ensuring the evaluation of improvement of the University's activity, innovations and achievements.
5. To assign ANQA to carry out mandatory monitoring of efficiency of the University's activity in accordance with KPIs.

Chairman of the Accreditation Committee
12 April 2018, Yerevan

S. Avetisyan