NATIONAL CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE FOUNDATION

EXPERT PANEL REPORT

ON INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION CARRIED OUT AT ARTSAKH STATE UNIVERSITY

Yerevan– 2021

Contents

INTRODUCTION

Institutional Accreditation of Artsakh State University (hereinafter referred to as ArSU or University) was carried out based on the application presented by the University. The process of institutional accreditation was organized and coordinated by the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (ANQA) guided by the regulation on "State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs" set by the RA Government on 30 June, 2011 in N978 decree as well as by N959-Ն (30 June, 2011) decree on approving RA Standards for Professional Education Accreditation.

The expertise was carried out by the expert panel formed according to the requirements of ANQA Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel. The expert panel consisted of 4 local experts and 1 international expert.

Institutional accreditation aims not only at the external evaluation of quality assurance but also to the continuous improvement of the institution's management and quality of educational programs. Hence, there were two important issues for the expert panel members:

1. To carry out an expertise of institutional capacities in line with the RA standards for state accreditation
2. To carry out an evaluation for the improvement of university's quality and for its integration to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The current report includes the results of the evaluation of ArSU's institutional capacities according to the state criteria and standards for accreditation as well as the results of peer review by the international expert from the perspective of being integrated into EHEA.

PEER-REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES ACCORDING TO STATE ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

The expertise of ArSU was carried out by the expert panel formed according to the requirements of ANQA Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel. The evaluation was carried out according to the 10 criteria set by the RA Government on 30 June 2011 N 959–Ն decree.

While carrying out the evaluation the expert panel took into consideration that ArSu activities are directed to the preparation of specialists with knowledge, skills and competencies in the spheres of pedagogy, Armenian studies, nature sciences, social-economics, humanities, techniques, sport and culture, carrying out basic and applied research in the mentioned areas, providing services to the public, transfer of knowledge and value, in particular, the preservation and development of national identity.

The expert panel also took into consideration the fact that ArSU is currently in the transition period and many activities either have just finished or are in the phase of implementation. The University has greatly eliminated its gap and there is a strong approach of the University management and academic staff to the continuity of this policy.

It is worth mentioning that the SWOT analysis presented in the SER indeed mentions weak points of ArSU and the most important is that there are also ways mentioned on how to overcome those weak points.

During the last 2 years reforms of academic programs have been launched at ArSu. Several institutional formats have been developed that make those reforms regulated. The improvements of some of the academic programs (Armenian Language and Literature) are considered as best practices and this best practice is shared among other academic programs at ArSU.

The next phase of improvement should be viewed from the perspective of the improvement of the content of the academic programs, paying special attention to the comprehensive analysis of the needs of labor market and reinforcement of practical and research components of academic programs. The academic programs will be more competitive and distinguished in the labor market if they are clarified according to different directions. This aim can be reached through the introduction of the modular system. All these will foster the enhancement of the employability of students and assurance of their competitiveness. The expert panel finds planning and continuous implementation of the activities directed to the modernization of the academic programs important in this context. Academic programs are conducted by the teaching staff having high qualifications, being highly motivated and continuously improving their professional skills. ArSU succeeds also to involve employers in the teaching process who ensure the practical component of the academic programs. At the same time the expert panel gives much importance to the implementation of continuous activities by ArSU directed to the professional development of the teaching staff. The expert panel also finds it necessary for the University to pay more attention to the closer cooperation with employers that will bring to the investment of practical experience, enhancement of the proficiency of foreign language (English) which in its turn, will foster study and adaptation of international practice and as a result opportunities of involvement of the teaching staff in exchange programs and research activities will be enlarged. Currently, there are relevant resources for the implementation of the academic programs. ArSU has relevant buildings where there are academic laboratories and library accordingly. However, the construction of the new building, replenishment of laboratories and library will foster more effective

implementation of the education process. The expert panel finds it necessary to diversify the financial resources as the most part of the financial resources is formed from the tuition fees and in the case of decrease in the number of students the financial stability of the University can be at a risk.

Successful launch of the academic programs, ArSU's continuous efforts to ensure practically oriented academic programs, policy on the continuous professional development of the academic staff and the opportunities for the upgrading of the educational resources give an opportunity to conclude that awarded qualifications are trustworthy and the existing problems will be solved by ArSu after they are clearly planned.

ArSU gives importance to the strategic management in all levels. The first strategic plan of the University was developed taking into account to the implementation of clear planning in all levels (faculties, structural units, chairs) and the launch of the new quality phase of reforms.

For more effective implementation of strategic management importance is given to the analysis of current context and assurance of the feasibility of the strategic plan. From this perspective the military-political and economic peculiarities of Artsakh are of great importance taking also into consideration risks and dangers, development of risk plan that will give an opportunity to accomplish the set goals viewing all the scenarios derived from various risks. Management through strategic planning has significantly improved the functioning of the management system of ArSU by entering it into the new quality phase of reforms. Structural-organization changes have been made in line with mission and strategic goals of the University. Function of the University concerning internationalization and quality assurance have been defined in the management system, this makes opportunities to direct the development of the University in a particular way. The University started to make more precise steps in demonstrating its social commitment and social responsibility. The examples of the mentioned are establishment of the Legal Clinic and Psychological Center and their successful functioning.

The expert panel finds the collection of data by the University positive, however first of all the mechanisms of collection and verification of those data are imperfect, secondly decision making is not fully based on the analysis of gathered data, and decisions are usually made based on logic and experience.

According to the observations of the expert panel, ArSU gives much importance to the outcome-based management and creation and development of quality culture. The management of the University sees further development of the University in the continuous improvement of quality assurance system that can promote stable development of the University for the upcoming years.

ArSU provides relevant support to students from the perspective of assurance of progress and effective education environment. Students have the opportunity to be involved in different councils, to speak about their needs through the participation in various surveys and meetings. There are several cases concerning meeting the needs of students. ArSU management, administrative and teaching staffs are nearly always available for students and support them. The expert panel finds it positive that the Career Center is active in creating database of alumni, that will foster reinforcement of the link with alumni and improvement of mechanisms for the evaluation of education services. The expert panel also finds it positive that there are cases when students are involved in research activities however the expert panel highlights the importance of activating the activities directed to the development of analytical skills among the students, the necessity of involving students in research initiatives as well as close cooperation with employers in this context.

The expert panel pays much attention and positively assesses the efforts of ArSU in the activities concerning the transfer of knowledge. ArSU Legal Clinic, Psychological Center, trainings organized for schoolteachers, visits to the military units foster the raise of awareness of the society about ArSU activities as well as the transfer of ArSU values to wider society.

The expert panel is positive about the fact that ArSU makes efforts for the development of scientific-research activities. However, though research is officially a priority in the strategic plan, it is one of the least developed spheres in ArSU. Research strategy and clear definition of research priorities will promote the balanced development of the sphere as well as will envisage development of the University for the coming years and the elaboration of clear mechanisms and their application for conduction of research will foster creation of a high-quality research outcome. This weak progress of ArSU in the sphere of research is linked with non-sufficient involvement of research in teaching process. There are no structures that will promote conduction of scientific research and transfer of technologies to the spheres of business or industry. Having progress in research in the current phase of development requires support provided to more valuable research initiatives and researchers. The support can be viewed in the form of an individual promotion and financial support by the University.

The expert panel is positive about the fact that ArSU continuously is improving its external relations through enlargement of cooperation circle with Armenian universities, local organizations and schools. It's good that ArSU realizes the importance of internationalization and takes steps towards it. External relations and internationalization are defined as priority in the strategic plan of ArSU, several regulating documents for the development of the mentioned spheres are elaborated. The efforts of ArSU management concerning overcoming isolation and going to international arena deserve special attention. Firstly, the University is improving its cooperation with Armenian universities and with universities of non-recognized countries. For ArSU internationalization is more than just exchange of students and teaching staff as component of internationalization are more than the mobility programs, they include application of international standards in management system, research, and development, teaching and learning, curricula. In such a complicated situation there is a need for ArSU to reformulate the current points in the strategic plan and direct them to the more intensive development of activities towards internationalization internally at the University. Here the most important is the improvement of a foreign language proficiency especially English among the students and teaching staff. It is important imagine how should curricula and courses be aligned with international, intercultural, and global values and competences that are useful in the labor market as well as during the cooperation with foreign organizations and institutions. In order to be attractive to the foreign universities the quality of research should be improved. It is highly necessary to invite noted alumni of Diaspora as visiting lecturers, experts, sponsors or donors. And last but not least, activities towards the enhancement of internationalization of the university should be implemented within the adopted policy that will approve ArSU's strong commitment towards internationalization.

Taking into consideration the activities implemented by the University, it can be concluded that there is an aspiration to ensure long-term development of the University through services to society, adoption and implementation of a policy promoting students' progress. ArSU realized the importance of research and internationalization for the University however currently there are some problems concerning coordination and effective management of those activities. Linking research development and internationalization to the academic programs will foster the enhancement of the visibility of ArSU both on national and international levels.

Strengths of the Institution:
1) Development and implementation of prerequisites for ArSU strategic planning.
2) Establishment and introduction of basis for QA system as well as application of some QA mechanisms.
3) Implementation of policy on continuous improvement of management system and considering ArSU as a studying organization.
4) Launch of institutional reforms of academic programs and existence of best practices in this context.
5) Introduction and application of PDCA cycle in management and administration.
6) High qualifications of teaching and administrative staffs and implementation of the culture of continuous development of their capacities.
7) Efficient implementation of mechanisms on students' needs assessment and satisfaction of students with the education got and provided services.
8) Implementation of the policy on replenishment of infrastructure and resources.
9) The importance given to the research activities by ArSU and involvement of these activities in the Strategic Plan.
10) Existence of strong external links with employers and organization in the Republic of Artsakh.
11) Implementation and promotion of activities directed to the improvement of foreign language proficiency.
12) Administrative, teaching and support staffs that are tolerant to changes and are highly motivated.

Weaknesses of the Institution:
1) Imperfection of mechanisms for gathering the data, analyzing and summarizing the results.
2) Lack of involvement of students and teaching staff in research activities.
3) Absence of policy on the development of research activities.
4) Weakness of students' analytical and practical skills.
5) Unclear planning of activities of internationalization and not targeted usage of current opportunities.
6) Lack of proficiency of a foreign language (English) among the students and teaching staff.
7) Poor mechanisms for the analysis and dissemination of best practice.
8) Absence of policy on assuring financial stability.
9) Lack of research component and practical orientation of the academic programs.

Main Recommendations

Mission and Purposes
1) To interlink ArSU strategic planning with the peculiarities of the University, with State priorities, as well as with risks concerning military-political and economic state of Artsakh.

Governance and Administration
2) To improve data collection system and while making decisions take analysis of the gathered data as basis, strengthen components of interviews and focus groups in the system of data collection and analysis.

3) To carry out mid-term and short-term planning of administrative and scientific-educational units with the logic of the strategic plan- by defining measurable indicators for the evaluation of results (key performance indications/KPIs/).

4) To introduce mechanisms for the identification and dissemination of best practice at the University.

Academic Programmes

5) To review the current academic programs and more closely interlink them with the labor market demands as well as introduce a modular system.

6) To develop mechanisms for the evaluation of effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment methods.

7) To continue with the diversification of individual research work forms and increase the balance of its component in the final assessment.

Students

8) To evaluate and analyse the effectiveness of student recruitment mechanisms, develop and introduce new approached to recruitment in order to endure increase in the number of applicants.

9) To develop and introduce mechanisms for involvement of students in research activities as well as to activate the works of Student Scientific Union.

Faculty and Staff

10) To introduce criteria assuming outcome-based scientific-pedagogical skills in the selection and assessment system of the teaching staff. Especially pay attention to the skill assuring research component in teaching process.

11) In the qualification upgrade program to strengthen the components on the acquisition of research skills, active, research-base and innovative teaching skills of the teaching staff.

12) To review academic workload and its distribution, to increase the research component at the expense of class hours (especially in the cases of humanities and social-economic blocks).

13) To develop and introduce a policy on mentoring the beginner lecturers.

14) To take the advantages of online education and motivate the lecturers to participate in international courses.

Research and Development

15) To review issues and actions concerning scientific-research activities of ArSU mentioned in 2019-2023 Strategic plan of the University and make them more realistic.

16) Develop and implement policy on coordinated institutional development of scientific-research activity/sphere, to make the list of scientific directions that will reflect issues of stable development of Artsakh.

17) To create favorable environment and relevant mechanisms of scientific-research sphere for young researchers that will give them opportunity to promote the interest of carrying out scientific-research and particularly interdisciplinary activities.

18) To improve ArSU material-technical base for the development of natural sciences.

19) To make the cooperation with RA and foreign universities active in scientific-research sphere.

Infrastructure and Resources

20) To develop long-term development plan with sources of funding for upgrading the infrastructure.
21) To develop at least a 5-year budget taking into consideration different scenarios of ArSU development.

Societal Responsibility

22) To develop the system of accountability making it more analytical.
23) To develop ArSU website ensuring availability of the main information about the University and its academic programs.
24) To put and regularly update information in foreign languages (Russian and English) in the ArSU website, enlarge the information presented in the web-pages of structural units.

External Relations and Internationalization

25) To review the strategy on external relations and internationalization involving standards of development of the University for the coming years as well as clarify the budget for the development of this area.
26) To develop and implement the policy on "internationalization internally", which assumes study of international practice in different spheres (management, academic programs, etc.) and its localization.
27) To provide necessary human and material resources for the creation of favorable conditions for internationalization (e.g. enhancement of the proficiency of a foreing language among students and teaching staff, competitive educational and scientific-research programs, etc.)
28) To develop and implement joint academic programs with the universities of RA and/or of the non-recognized countries.
29) To introduce system promoting the level of proficiency of a foreign language among the staff and to launch foreign language improvement courses for University staff.

Internal Quality Assurance System

30) To clarify the functions of the QA Center and involve the activities directed to the quality assurance and evaluation of the effectiveness of all the processes at ArSU.
31) To diversify the data collection mechanisms as well as mechanisms for the elaboration of the gathered data and its verification.
32) To review QA policy involving the procedure on the evaluation of the effectiveness of internal quality assurance system.
33) To improve the planning of QA processes paying attention to the involvement of activities towards the improvement of the identified problems in the plans.

PEER-REVIEW FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EDUCATION INSTITUTION'S INTEGRATION INTO EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

General remarks. ArSU is a small university operating in difficult conditions caused by the political isolation and international boycott of the Republic of Artsakh. Recently armed conflict and COVID-19 has disrupted the functioning of the university. Despite such exceptional difficulties, ArSU is decidedly set on the development of cooperation with international universities and on initiating solutions in line with EHEA. In 2008-2009, the University started providing programmes covering all three cycles of higher education in accordance with the Bologna system. Since 2012 intended learning outcomes have been defined for ArSU's study programmes, thus creating conditions to ensure the compliance of those programmes with NQF. The University has also introduced ECTS enabling transfer of student achievements between higher education institutions. It is also committed to the development of student-centred learning (SCL) and education. ArSU's priority is to enhance its international reputation and recognition. It is for this purpose that the first institutional accreditation conducted by ANQA is intended. All of those processes are to undergo continuous improvement to achieve their main objective - the development of quality culture.

According to ArSU's vision and mission, university is the leading higher education institution in the Artsakh Republic offering innovative education in a number of academic programs, developing basic and applied research and providing services to the society. The content of the Vision in its current version describes the current activities of the university, not its long-term ambitions and future place in the educational market. Therefore, it needs to be revised. The Mission, in turn, should emphasize more clearly the distinctive features of the University. It is commendable the adoption of the first - in the history of the University - Strategic Plan for 2019-2023. This document was supplemented with the so-called Strategic Development Program Timeline in which strategic goals were quantified, KPIs, deadlines and responsibilities were assigned to them.

In the context of recent events (War, COVID-19) and human and financial resources constraints, it can be doubted whether all strategic goals are achievable/feasible in the adopted period, therefore medium-term priorities should be redefined. For subsequent changes to the strategic plan, it is worth preparing several development scenarios and supplementing it with an assessment of the risks of its implementation. The monitoring and evaluation of the degree to which planning is effective is mainly limited to annual plans of faculties and the university. The results of such assessment are published in the Rector's annual reports. However, not all actions are subject to such an assessment, so strategic planning requires a closer link with the quality assurance system (IQA). On the basis of the interviews conducted during the visits, it is possible to state that the stakeholders, including students, know the Mission and strategic goals quite well.

ArSU is a small university, but the organizational structure is overly extensive with many managerial positions (5 faculties, 5 rectors, one of which supervises the work of only 2 departments, many collegial bodies, standing committees) and could be simplified. A distinctive feature of the governing system is the participation of several ministers and other public sector CEOs in the highest university authority, the University Council. The participation of government representatives in governing bodies in HEIs is not always seen unequivocally in European universities, as it may result in the politicization of universities and limit university autonomy.

The functionality of the university governing is under discussion and undergoing changes. New units are being set up, such as Quality Assurance Centre (QAC). Recently, there has been a clear shift in European universities from siloed to a cross-disciplinary projects. It is worth considering how to modify the organizational structure to facilitate the opening of interdisciplinary studies and to conduct inter-disciplinary scientific research. Governance arrangements are not always well stipulated. The assignment of the task could be split slightly differently between administrative units, in particular some of the tasks currently performed by QAC could be transferred to the Caree Center service. During the meeting with the review team, the rector admitted that there is over-employment among the administration staff. ArSU has developed extensive internal regulations, including those regarding academic integrity (a.o. the code of ethics was adopted). According to the interviewees of the review team, unethical behaviour is very rare. However, the scale of such phenomena as academic fraud, corruption, mobbing, discrimination, intolerance, sexual harassment, etc. has not been studied so far. A comprehensive prevention policy for this area should be developed.

It is commendable that stakeholders, including students, participate in university management at various levels. Information about the needs of stakeholders is collected, although not always systematically and not for all groups. Three actions could improve the quality of the decision-making process: first, critical analysis of the reliability of collected information and improvement of its collecting channels; second, integration of information flow into one digitalised quality database, and third, determination of KPIs for all organizational units of the university.

Quick restoring operations after ceasefire at the border with Azerbaijan and implementations of blended education during pandemic confirms good managerial skills of the university leaders. Nevertheless, it would be useful to provide trainings for the university managers as well as members of collegial bodies, including advisory committees.

The teaching/learning process is organised in a similar way as at EHEA universities. It is highly commendable that ArSU operates a well-functioning system of evaluating learning outcomes demonstrated in theses and final examinations which are held with the participation of external stakeholders. According to the information in the Strategic Plan, ArSU graduates continue their studies at many of the most prestigious European and American universities. However, the absence of a procedure for recognising learning outcomes achieved in other HEIs and outside of the higher education system, as well as a complicated procedure of credit transfer may hinder ArSU's objectives linked to student mobility. In accordance with standard 1.6 ESG'15, the needs of various student groups, also of those underachieving, should be better reflected in the teaching/learning practices.

As stated above, the University's academic staff is rather small. ArSU has developed a system of recruiting, evaluating and developing its teaching staff similar to those of other European higher education institutions. The employment of teachers who are practitioners involved in political, social and economic life is a big advantage. However, employing mainly its own graduates seems problematic as it makes it difficult to become familiar with other teaching methods which could be applied by graduates of other HEIs. There is a big number of teachers employed on short-term (annual) contracts and as part-time workers. This does not stimulate their involvement in research. Nota bene teachers pointed to an excessive teaching loading and, as a consequence, lack of time for research. The process of academic teacher evaluation and promotion could be clearer and more transparent. For example, the degree to which the quality of education and research are taken into account remains unknown. When evaluating academic teacher achievements, too much emphasis is put on quantity indicators (a

professor is expected to publish at least one item per year and a "teaching manual" every three years), and not enough on quality indicators. The system of collecting data on stakeholders' needs does not include ArSU's administrative and technical staff supporting the teaching/learning process and research.

In addition, the lecturers are quite overloaded with teaching hours and have little time for research. The process of evaluating and promoting the teaching staff could have been clearer and more transparent. For example, it is not clear to what extent the quality of teaching and research is taken into account. When evaluating lecturers' achievements, too much attention is paid to quantitative indicators (the professor should publish at least 1 article each year and 1 manual every three years) instead of evaluating the qualitative indicators. The system of collecting stakeholder needs does not include the administrative and technical staffs of the ArSU, who support the teaching / learning process and research.

Rector stresses internationalization as the one of principal goal for ArSU, as it enables University to build a reputation to compete globally. The efforts of ArSU's authorities focussing on overcoming the academic isolation in the international arena deserve special attention.

Internationalization is more than just the exchange of teachers and students, because critical components of internationalization go beyond mobility programs (student and staff exchange) and include the implementation of international standards of management, leadership, R&D and teaching and learning, curriculum. In such a difficult situation, it seems reasonable to redefine the current strategy in this area towards a more intensive development of internationalization at home. A radical improvement in the command (and use) of foreign languages, especially English, among staff and students seem to be of key importance for this undertaking.

Lately there has been good progress in the development of the University's internal quality assurance system (IQA) and more professionalism in approaching quality assurance is visible. ArSU has redefined Quality Assurance Policy (QAP) and formalised a number of procedures. There are quality assurance committees at the university, faculties and departments levels. Newly created Quality Assurance Centre employees 4 persons and is directly subordinated to the Rector. A Self-evaluation Committee has been established with 10 working groups. The all processes are coordinated by the University Scientific Council. The University has published its Quality Manual and ArSU's Quality Assurance Toolset is just being prepared. Every year all units of the University submit reports to be later included in an extensive document - the Rector's Report (the latest report contains about 150 pages). However, the actual distribution of tasks and functions between these bodies is not transparent. Consequently, it is difficult to see to what extent the quality improvement cycle is driven by bottom-up initiatives or by top-down decisions. As evidenced by the conducted interviews, QAC is overloaded with many tasks that could be delegated to other units.

In a small university, an important role is played by an informal quality assurance system based on a community of academic values and direct contacts. This was evident from our discussion with students and teachers pointing to numerous examples of how it works. They confirmed their committent to the declared academic values and identity of the university. The important question that needs to be addressed is whether the part-time workers are also fully engaged in quality improvements cycle.

However, QA policy still fails to be successfully linked to strategic governance and does not cover all areas of ArSU's activity (such as scientific research or university governing). Quite several

procedures and mechanisms require clarification (the description of IQA published in the Quality Manual is just one page long). The current Internal Quality Assurance System is not satisfactorily linked to ENQA's standards and recommendations provided in Chapter 1 of ESG'15. During the interviews, the team observed that these standards were not always known to teaching staff and managers. The University's quality-related activities based on the PDCA cycle lack reflection and analysis of the source of ArSU's performance, or at least an answer to the question to what degree the changes implemented have improved the quality of basic processes and the effectiveness of strategic plans. That kind of analysis should demonstrate to what extent ArSU's success is due to the structure, IQA operation, informal academic culture, student and staff performance and external pressure (competition, governmental regulations). There are no analyses of the degree to which individual processes, mechanisms, procedures and tools are effective. The review team heard little on how best to streamline the input of such a considerable number of QA committees into its more unifying framework. That is why the quality loop is not closed and the cycle of continuous improvement cannot be sufficiently stimulated. SAR promises "transition from external control to self-control", therefore, it would be advisable to undertake regular internal audits of ArSU's processes, procedures and structures.

The interviews held during the site visit prove that the problems of quality assurance are not sufficiently understood rooted in the academic community. Probably due to the short period of IQA functioning, the interlocutors were not able to identify many of the benefits it brings. Raising internal stakeholders' awareness seems the biggest challenge in terms of the development of effective quality culture. Therefore, there is a need to initiate a university-wide discussion on current quality assurance policy, IQA and its outcomes. A common understanding of the quality culture embedded in the tradition and existing institutional arrangements of the ArSU is needed. The Self-Assessment Report, and incoming ANQA review team report are useful tools for identifying critical priorities in Quality Assurance Policy and giving new impetus to the quality enhancement process. In promotion of quality assurance mechanisms among students, student organizations could be involved. In the view of the review team, the quality assurance system does not provide all the information needed for further improvement and enhancement of education.Therefore, it is desirable to review the method of collecting information on the quality of processes, assess their reliability and relevance and then put it into an integrated database.

Areas for improvement:
- Revise the ArSU's Vision, Mission and Strategic Plan to make long-term and medium-term goals more realistic, feasible and transparent for stakeholders.
- Introduce a monitoring and an assessment system of the strategic medium-term goals based on the defined KPIs and follow-up procedure.
- When preparing the next version of the University mid-term strategic plan, consider introducing different scenarios along with assessing the existing risks.
- Review the organizational structure of the University in order to simplify it and optimize the allocation of functions and tasks and between organizational units.
- Consider introducing organizational provisions that foster the development of interdisciplinary studies and interdisciplinary scientific research, and cooperation with industry and business.
- Elaborate policies for all key areas of the University's activities.
- Develop and implement a zero-tolerance policy preventing unethical behaviors.
- Introduce a reliable system of information collecting and processing for making decisions.

- Promote interdisciplinary studies and interdisciplinary scientific research.
- Make a more professional diagnosis of employers' needs in order to better match the educational offer to the demand of labor market and social needs.
- Introduce systematic surveys of the opinions of students, teachers, graduates and employers and introduce an effective feedback mechanism as the basis for continuous improvement of the teaching and learning process.
- In curricula increase the number of hours dedicated to learning English and practical oriented courses.
- Supplement some classes (e.g., in foreign languages, accounting, and finance) with the requirements of professional organizations, so that after completion students can receive certificates confirming their professional qualifications.
- Provide analyzes of the student's progress across the entire learning cycle and increase the importance of individual work in the student's assessment system.
- Prepare a manual presenting the ArSU approach to Student-Centered Learning, explaining the connection of teaching techniques and learning processes with the intended learning outcomes and their assessment methods.
- Develop a procedure for recognizing learning outcomes acquired at other universities.
- Appoint a student ombudsman.
- Elaborate a framework and mechanism for wider involvement of students in scientific research.
- Define core teaching staff and their qualifications for each study program.
- Increase the importance of quality of teaching and research in teachers' evaluation policy
- Elaborate a system to support young teachers in their academic and professional development.
- Take into account the needs of administration and service personnel in human resources development policy.
- Establish a Research Committee with the participation of representatives of the business sector and partner foreign universities.
- Develop a long-term university research strategy and policy.
- Introduce a mechanism for assessing the quality of conducted scientific research.
- Implement the mechanism fostering the staff interest in high quality scientific research and publications in peer review journals.
- Introduce incentive system promoting interdisciplinary research.
- Establish a platform fostering university-business cooperation in research.
- In order to overcome political constraints, develop measures to increase the level of internationalization at home.
- Introduce a system promoting employees with good command of foreign languages and launch English language training courses for the university staff.
- Elaborate a procedure for internal evaluation of the effectiveness of the QA policy and the Internal Quality Assurance system.
- Update the Quality Manual with a comprehensive presentation of IQA, including identification of all processes, procedures, organizational structure and interdependencies between them, organizational chart and quality performance indicators.

- Raise awareness and commitment of the academic community to quality assurance and quality culture by offering training, improving feedback mechanisms and facilitating dialogue between stakeholders and collaboration between various university organisational units.
- Develop a mechanism for identifying and disseminating good practices.

June 21, 2021

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Menua Soghomonyan, Head of the Expert Panel

DESCRIPTION OF EXPERTISE
Composition of the expert panel

1. **Menua Soghomonyan –** Associate Professor at the Chair of Political Institutes and Processes, YSU, Candidate of Historical Sciences
2. **Mischeslav Socha-** Professor at the State School of Management at Warsaw University, Doctor of Economics, member of European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) Financial Committee
3. **Lilit Badalyan**- Head of the Chair of Linguistics and Theory of Communication at BRusov State University, Candidate of Philological Sciences
4. **Vahagn Vardanyan-**Lecturer at the Institute of Mathematics and Informatics of Armenian-Russian University, Candidate of Technical Sciences.
5. **Ashkhen Arzumanyan-** 3rd year student of YSU faculty of Chemistry

The composition of the expert panel was agreed upon with the University.

The works of the expert panel were coordinated by VArduhi Gyulazyan – Head of ANQA Department of Institutional and Program Accreditation.

The oral translation was provided by Varduhi Baghdasaryan- Lecturer at the Chair of Translation at Brusov State University.

The composition of the expert panel was agreed upon with the University and was appointed by the order of ANQA director.

All the members of the expert panel, including the Coordinator and the translator have signed independence and confidentiality agreements.

Application for state accreditation

The University applied for institutional accreditation by submitting the application form, the copies of the license and respective appendices to ANQA.

The ANQA Secretariat checked the correspondence of the application package with ANQA requirements, the data presented in the application form and attached documents and ANQA electronic survey completed by the University.

According to the decision on accepting the application an agreement was signed between ANQA and ArSU. The timetable of activities was prepared and approved, however it later on underwent some changes conditioned by the pandecmic of COVID 19 and by the emergency situation and later on by martial law in Armenia.

Self-evaluation

According to the time-schedule, the University presented its self-evaluation report in Armenian and English and the supporting documentation according to ANQA format. ArSU self-evaluation was carried out by a group formed especially for that purpose upon the order of ArSU Rector. ANQA coordinator conducted a technical review of the report against the ANQA requirements. Afterwards ANQA coordinator sent the report to the expert panel the composition of wich was agreed upon with ArSU beforehand.

Preparatory phase

Having examined the self-evaluation report of the University and the supporting documentation base, the expert panel conducted preliminary evaluation according to the format making also the list of additional required documents and the questions for clarification was formed mentioning the respective structural units and target groups.

In the scheduled period the expert panel summarized the results of the initial evaluation and formed the time-schedule of site-visit[1]. Guided by the Accreditation Manual meetings of all the groups with the expert panel, close and open meetings, observation of documents, visits to different structural units of the University, etc. were involved in the time-schedule.

Preliminary visit

The preparatory online meeting took place on March 1, 2021 with ArSU management and QA representatives. During the online meeting time-schedule of the site-visit was agreed upon with the University, the list of additional documents for observations was presented, organizational, technical, informative issues as well as ethical norms and behaviour of the participants of the meetings were discussed and reciprocally agreed decisions were made. The rooms for focus groups and for the expert panel work were observed on the eve of the site-visit, on March 8, issues concerning their equipment with necessary technical means were clarified.

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[1] Appendix 2. Time-schedule of Site-visit

Site-visit

The site-visit tool place from March 9 to March12, 2021. According to the time-schedule, the works of the Expert panel launched with close meeting the aim of which was to discuss and agree with the international expert upon the evaluation framework, issues to be discussed during the site-visit, ArSU weak and strong points per criteria, procedure of focus groups and to clarify further steps. All the members of the Expert panel, ANQA coordinator and the translator took part in the site-visit.

The international expert participated in the site-visit and in discussions online. ZOOM platform was used. The site-visit launched and ended with the meeting with ArSU rector. All the meetings envisaged by the time-schedule were conducted except the open meeting. Class observations were also conducted during the site-visit. During the site visit the Expert Panel observed documents[2] and resources[3] and had focus groups with different structural units of the University. At the end of each day of the site-visit and during the close meetings intermediate evaluation by the Expert panel was withdrawn and at the end of the site-visit during the close meeting the main results of the site-visit were summed up. The expertise was carried out based on State Accreditation Criteria and Standards as well as based on ANQA procedures which assums two level scale for the evaluation: satisfactory and unsatisfactory.

Expert panel report

The members of the Expert Panel and ANQA coordinator prepared expert panel draft report. The international expert prepared his conclusion and separate opinion on peer-review which is included in the text. The draft report was presented to the University May 10, 2021.

ArSU sent its response on the preliminary version of the report to ANQA on 24.05.2021. The University presented its observations in Armenian, which was provided to local experts as well as was discussed with an international expert. In June 11, 2021 ANQA organized a meeting of the University and the expert panel during which the University's response was discussed. Taking into account the observations of the University, the expert panel compiled the final version of the expert report, which was approved by the panel on 21.06.2021.

June 21, 2021

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Varduhi Gyulazyan, Coordinator of the Expert Panel

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[2] Appendix 3. List of Observed Documents

[3] Appendix 4. Resources Observed by the Expert Panel

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA
BRIEF INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

History. ArSU has been playing a special role not only in the sphere of higher education and science in Artsakh but also in the cultural and social life, always having the name "Mother University". The University was established in 1969 as a pedagogical university in Stepanakert-the center of Nagorno Kharabakh autonomous region, becoming a strong impuls for maintenance and development of national factor in Armenian land. During 50 years of its operation the University had 23000 alumni.

Education. In 2008-2009 the University made a transition from the system of preparing dimploma specialists to the tree level system of bachelor, master and PhD education according to the Bologna Declaration. The computer- based testing system of students' knowledge assessment was introduced. Due to these innovations the University was introduced to the world as a quite developed and large center for the preparation of specialists that greatly contributes to the reinforcement of scientific-technical and economic potential of the Republic of Artsakh. Currently besides the administrative building ArSuhas also three educational buildings and one student dormitory. 5 faculties, 16 chairs, 174 full-time teachers and 106 teachers working on an hourly-paid basis as well as about 2600 students. High-ranking officials work in ArSU on an hourly-paid basis (President and Vice-President of the National Assembly, Minister of Culture, Youth and Tourism, Minister of Justice, Head of the Center of Information of the Staff of Artsakh, and others). Giving importace to the political and cultural peculiarities of Artsakh, regularly different nominent scientists, public, political, social and religious figures visit and give lectures at ArSU by transferring their knowledge and experience to the teaching staff and students of the University thus also having their contribution in the development of the Republic of Artsakh.

Research. According to the Strategic plan, the University plans to formulate necessary inclusive environment for the reinforcement of research in all the areas of ArSU. Particularly, the University aims to develop a group of researchers with critical interdisciplinary approaches that will contribute to the innovative reforms in the sphere of science and later on the development of scientific schools. Making a list of potential scientific-research topics according to the directions of stable development of Artsakh is a priority for ArSU. Due to the cooperation with universities of non-recognized countries, ArSU also aims to organize international studies enhancing the ranking of scientific activity of the University, to promote the presentation of research outcomes in international arena, to foster the participation of ArSU researchers in republican, RA and international scientific projects as well as in grant projects. Viewing the link between research and education as a priority, ArSU also aims to foster the participation of students in research activities by ensuring the formation of relevant skills and competences according to the current requirements of the field. In terms of internationalization of research, the University aims to involve RA and international research potential in the projects being implemented at ArSU.

Internationalization. There are a few educational and scientific centers at the University, professionalized laboratories, cabinets including cabinets for teaching Armenian, Russian, English, German and French. The University successfully cooperates not only with the Universities of the Republic of Artsakh and the Republic of Armenia but also with such scientific-research centers and internationally recognized structures as Education Academy of Russian Federation, Catholic University of Leuven, Catholic University of Pier Pazman in Hungary, Haykazyan University in Beyrut. ArSU also keeps in touch with several non-recognized countries: Basker Country, University of South Ausetia, University of Abkhazia, which the expert panel highly appreciates.

Quality Assurance: University's ambitions in the sphere of quality assurance are defined as goals in ArSU QA manual. The following is envisaged for the coming years:
- To implement ArSU academic programs and qualification award based on the defined educational standards.
- To ensure ArSU accountability of education quality assurance for all the stakeholders (students, staff, employers, founder, authorized body and other funding organization).
- To create necessary methodical and organizational grounds for external evaluation and accreditation of ArSU and its academic programs.
- To promote continuous education quality assurance and develop quality culture at ArSU.
- To ensure the implementation of ArSU mission in line with the University vision, strategic goals, and objectives, to enhance the quality of provided educational services.

Source: The source for the withdrawn facts in the mentioned areas are the documents provided by the University (e.g. self-evaluation report, strategic plan, time-schedule, plans of structural units, concept paper and other).

I. MISSION AND PURPOSES

CRITERION: **The policies and procedures of the institution are in accordance with the institution's mission which is in line with ANQF.**

FINDINGS

1.1 The institution has a clear, well-articulated mission that represents the institution's purposes and goals and is in accordance with National Qualifications Framework (hereafter NQF).

ArSU's mission and vision are defined in 2019-2023 strategic plan of the University according to which ArSu activities are directed to the preparation of specialists with knowledge, skills and competencies in the spheres of pedagogy, Armenian studies, nature sciences, social-economics, humanities, techniques, sport and culture, conduction of basic and applied research in the mentioned spheres, provision of services to society, transfer of knowledge and values, and particularly maintenance and development of national identity.

2019-2023 strategic plan is the first long-term plan of the University in the half-century history of the university. In this strategic plan the priority goals of the University are:

- To make academic programs relevant to the labor market requirements equipped with necessary resources and potential of respective teaching staff.
- To develop competitive and innovative human capital with the potential to offer research-based solutions to Artsakh's problems;
- To improve the system of professional orientation and recruitment of applicants.
- To improve the management system of the University, to foster the enhancement of its effectiveness and transparency.
- To support the progress of society promoting recognition of ArSU's activities and external assistance.
- To ensure comprehensive development of ArSU external relations, to promote internationalization of the activities of the University.

Objectives for the implementation of these goals mentioned are also involved in the strategic plan. Those objectives are presented with respective actions. Time-schedule for the implementation of the strategic plan was also developed where quantitative indicators for the evaluation of the strategic tasks are defined and for the actions leading to the solution of those problems quantitative-qualitative indicators, responsibilities and deadlines are also defined.

However, it should be mentioned that the carried-out activities are not presented in the annual reports of the University and are not analyzed according to those indicators to make the level and effectiveness of University performance to internal and external stakeholders. On the other hand, as there are still two years till the end of the current strategic plan, it is impossible to evaluate the performance of the envisaged objectives in line with the defined qualitative indicators (e.g. satisfaction of at least 80% of students with the provided educational services) if we assume that the outcomes of those objectives are envisaged to ensure till the end of the strategic plan.

The alignment of ArSU mission with NQF is proved with the fact that the University provides academic programs in line with the descriptors of 6th, 7th and 8th levels of NQF as well as with the presence of matrix of alignment of academic programs learning outcomes with NQF descriptors. After the examination of ArSU academic programs, the University's history and other documents as well as after the site-visit it became clear that especially in the current conditions of the limited labor market,

the most part of ArSU's mission content is the preparation of pedagogs for schools. Surely some of the academic programs of the University (e.g. financies, IT and others) are market-oriented, however the outcome of most of the academic programs is the preparation of pedagogs. Here the fact that the University had a pedagogical profile for decades plays a great role. ArSU is also the main forge of Artsakh State Service officials.

It should also be mentioned that there is some discrepancy between the ambitious goals mentioned in the strategic plan and the objectives and actions derived from them. For example, in parallel with the goal of the University's research mission ("Building competitive and innovative human capital with the potential to offer research-based solutions to Artsakh problems"), though there is an objective to ensure the University's participation in ocal and international grants, clear steps in this direction have not been implemented yet[4].

The observation of documents showed that ArSU annual plannings are not derived from the strategic plan instead they are traditionally formed annual operational plannings. During the site-visit it became clear that there is a problem of human resources in terms of professionally organizing and implementing strategic planning.

1.2. The TLI's mission, goals and objectives reflect the needs of the internal and external stakeholders.

Internal stekeholders of ArSU are students, teaching, support and administrative staff, external stakeholders are state governing and local government bodies, employers, parents or guardians of students, partner educational institutions, alumni, individuals, and others. According to the self-evaluation report both internal and external stakeholders had active participation in the definition and formation of ArSU mission, goals and objectives. During the site-visit interviews it became obvious that indeed students, teaching and administrative staffs were deeply aware of University objectives and they had revealed most of the needs of ArSU internal community that was reflected in the strategic plan. At the same time the expert panel didn't have the same impression about external stakeholders' involvement in the same issue. The fact that some representatives of state governing bodies and employers are teaching at ArSU, assumes reflection of the needs of some segments of external stakeholders in ArSU planning and organizational processes. However, there are some facts that speak of the insufficient and ineffective involvement of external stakeholders in strategic planning and definition of development directions of the University. Those facts are the following:

- The University doesn't ensure stable and regular feedback from graduates,
- Meetings with employers are segmented and spontaneous.
- Sessions of the Governing board as a rule are organized once a year.
- Mechanisms for the study of opinion and needs of parents are missing.

During the site-visit reasonable facts about the active participation of external stakeholders in the development of the strategic plan were not presented. Needs assessment of internal stakeholders takes place both as a regular work during the daily contacts and through the sessions of governing bodies (chair sessions, faculty council sessions, sessions of the Scientific Council, etc.). Nevertheless, mechanisms for deeply revealing the needs of internal stakeholders (surveys among teaching staff and other staff members, in-depth interviews, focus groups) are merely not used to take them as the basis for strategic planning. If self-evaluation report and strategic plan visually show how the needs of

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[4] The text was edited as a result of the observations made by the University.

internal stakeholders are reflected in the long-term strategic planning of the University, neither self-evaluation report, not strategic plan show what extent are state priorities reflected in the strategic plan of the University. In this respect it is mentioned in the self-evaluation report that the reason is the absence of documents concerning state priorities or development directions of the Republic of Artsakh. However, it is a fact that the University could have taken into account state priorities of the RA where the integration level of the Republic of Artsakh is high.

1.3. The institution has set mechanisms and procedures to evaluate the achievement of its mission and goals and further improve them.

There is a culture of bottom-up accountability at the University which is of great importance in terms of the evaluation of the level of performance of ArSU mission and goals. At the end of each academic year the chairs present report to the faculty councils, faculty councils and structural units of the University present their reports to the Scientific Council, and the Rector presents his annual report to the Governing Board. It is praiseworthy that in the agenda of the Governing Board sessions after the adoption of the strategic plan, the issue of the performance of the strategic plan is always raised. However, it should be mentioned that annual reports though contain complete information about the University activity for the academic year, their structure and content do not provide necessary grounds for the evaluation of the performance of the actions defined in the strategic plan. In the strategic plan there are objectives with actions leading to the solutions of the mentioned objectives, clear deadlines (often as continuous actions), responsible as well as indicators of outcome and their assessment are mentioned. But in the reports, there is no wording on to what extent the actions envisaged in the strategic plan have been implemented within the mentioned deadline, whether there are any outcomes for the defined indicators. Moreover, reports contain mainly qualitative data, are descriptive and do not have analytical component. It is not analyzed to what extent these or that objective has been solved, what were the obstacles, etc. Instead, the reports are presented solely per the responsible people (e.g. Vice-Rectors) and per structural units (faculties/chairs, departments). Taking into account the fact that it is the first time that ArSU has implemented its strategic plan, it should be noticed that the PDCA cycle is not closed yet.

Considerations:

The expert panel is positive about the fact that for the first time in its history the University has developed and is implemented a strategic plan where mission, vision, goals, objectives are defined as well as actions towards the implementation of the strategic goals are mentioned with responsible people, deadlines and indicators for the evaluation of the outcomes (key performance indicators/KPIs/). This fact ondoubtedly has a positive impact on leading the University to planned and comprehensive development. At the same time insufficient prevalence and appropriation of the mission, vision, goals and objectives of the University among its internal and external stakeholders, slows down the implementation of vision and goals defined in the strategic plan. Moreover, taking into account dangers and risks concerning military-political and economic peculiarities of the Republic of Artsakh, the University also needs to have a risk management plan that will assist in reaching the mentioned goals during different scenarios conditioned by different risks. It should also be mentioned that the fact that development opportunities and areas of the region are not coordinatedly revealed and analyzed does not give ArSU an opportunity to define some of the components of its mission with clear and visible targets that would also stress the characteristics of ArSU profile (e.g. in the academic programs it is

possible to develop the line that pedagogues who have graduated from those academic programs and who work at schools prepare school graduates who are already ready to enter the labor market). The expert panel is positive about the fact that more competent and motivated teachers, administrative staff members and students were involved in the first long-term strategic planning of the University. They took part in the definition of strategic goals, objectives, and actions within the scope of their opportunities, in cognitive environment.

However, the lack of mechanisms to identify the full range of in-depth needs of the University's internal stakeholders, as well as the lack of effective and regular mechanisms for identifying the needs of external stakeholders, threatens to define more realistic and objective goals to meet those needs and to realize them.

Considering the existence of bottom-up accountability at the University and comparability of separate sections of reports with strategic goals (educational process, research) as positive facts, the expert panel still finds that the non-analytical nature of the reports, lack of presenting the reports according to strategic goals, outcomes and indicators of assessment, absence of the self-criticism do not allow the University to fully reveal the extent to which its problems have been solved, the existing obstacles in order to be able to take measures for improvement. In other words, one of the important parts of the quality management (PDCA) cycle for strategic planning and implementation processes, the assessment, is not fully implemented due to the above-mentioned significant reporting deficiencies.

Summary: Taking into account that the strategic management has recently been introduced in ArSU, the first strategic plan in the history of the University has been developed, where the vision and mission, goal and objectives of the University are presented, time-schedule for the implementation of the strategic plan was also developed and is being implemented with respective deadlines, responsibles and outcome assessment indicators, in recent years, some elements of strategic management have been introduced at the levels of faculties and chairs (development programs), the strategic plan was discussed with external and more with internal stakeholders, based on the current situation the University plans to make necessary improvements in the strategic plan, goals and objectives are mainly in line with the policy pursued by the University, the expert panel finds that ArSU meets the requirements of the first criterion.

Conclusion: *The compliance of the institution's institutional capacities with the requirements of criterion 1 is satisfactory.*

Recommendations
- To clarify the mechanisms of the needs assessment of internal and external stakeholders and their participation in definition and implementation of ArSU staretgic goals,
- To improve the accountability and indicators about the level of implementation of staretgci goals, making them more analytical, tangible, and realistic.

II. GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

CRITERION: The institution's system of governance, administrative structures and their activities are efficient and are aimed at the accomplishment of mission and goals of the institution preserving ethical norms of governance.

FINDINGS:

2.1 The Institution's system of governance ensures structured decision-making process, in accordance with defined ethical rules and has efficient provision of human, material and financial resources to accomplish its educational and other purposes.

Management of ArSU is carried out with a combination of collegial and sole modes of management. Higher collegial bodies of the University are ArSU Board and Scientific Council. Executive body is the Rector. Functions of management bodies are defined according to the legislation of Artsakh, to ArSU Charter, and their activities are regulated with the respective regulations. Collegial governing bodies in the middle circles are faculty councils, and sole governing is carried out through Deans and Heads of Chairs as well as through the Heads of different structural units.

According to ArSU 2019-2023 strategic plan improvement of the managment system of the University, enhancement of its effectiveness and transparency was defined as priority strategic goal for the fulfillment of which the University has defined an objective to improve University organizational structure, and to align the management of ArSU academic, human and financial recourses with the accomplishment of strategic goals.

The University has defined and adopted regulations of Scientific Council and Rectorate, the Regulation on the operation of a Chair, Charter of a Faculty, Code of Ethics, Procedures on the election of a Rector, Dean of the Faculty and Head of the Chair through which ArSU ensures institutional-normative base of the management system.

Since 2019 when 2019-2023 strategic plan of the University was launched there were some structural reforms at ArSU: Center for QA of the University as well as Department of Education Process Control, the Department of Science, PhD Studies and Internatnal Cooperation, Department of Students' Affairs and Career as well as Legal Clinic and Psychological Center among others were established.

During the site-visit it turned out that the mentioned structural-organizational changes through were approved by the University management and Governing Board, ArSU does not yet have analysis on the effectiveness of the changes made and their relevance to the strategic goals.

At the same time it should be mentioned that the University realizes this factor and considers the imperfection of the evaluation system of management bodies' activities as a weakness.

Based on the results of the study of the SER, presented documents and especially the site-visit the Expert panel revealed a few points, particularly:

- Recently, ArSU has given much importance to the quality of educational programs by reserving these functions to a separate unit (Quality Assurance Center), whose staff has undergone some training at the RA National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance. At the same time QA functions are mostly related to educational activities and do not reveal many problems related to administrative processes and the activities of the administrative staff.

- In the activities of some administrative officials of ArSU and in some administrative subdivisions there are functional work disbalances and problems. There is only one administrative subdivision, the Department of Science, Postgraduate Studies, and International Cooperation under the coordination of the Vice-Rector for Science and International Cooperation. The functions of the latter are mostly administrative-bureaucratic, and the Department mainly deals with registration and documentation of the processes of functional sphere and does not yet target activities aimed at development (engaging in grants, networking, running programs, developing, etc.).
- On the one hand, acknowledging that ArSU has an objective problem in attracting the best human resources (especially after the last war, the issue of limited human resources has become more acute, as communication with Armenia has become more difficult), on the other hand, it is obvious that the University HR department deals only with documentation processes. The department has not yet developed a comprehensive and systematic policy of attracting, retaining, promoting and motivating human resources, has not taken care of training the employees providing the mentioned functions or attracting new staff.

Having examined the provided documents and communicating with the Management of the University, Governing Board, internal and external stakeholders, the Expert panel states that there are some problems concerning ArSU system of governance, in particular:

- The administrative staff of the ArSU, the teaching staff and the students are satisfied with the contacts with the University administration, the approaches of the University administration in solving the problems, the existing working-interpersonal relations at the University. The management bodies of the University, especially the rector, is open and cooperative in relations with internal and external stakeholders, due to which the existing problems are easily identified.
- The crisis situations created because of the war and coronavirus have been properly managed. In particular, in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, ArSU was able to accelerate the organization of distance learning by introducing the "Google Classroom" platform, and shortly after the cessation of hostilities ArSU was able to solve the problems concerning the accommodation for many students left homeless (mainly from Hadrut and Shushi regions that were already under the control of the enemy) and resume the normal educational process.
- There are successful examples of implementing educational programs, research and other processes at ArSU. In particular, the research direction of Armenian studies (Artsakh folklore, dialectology, history of settlements, etc.) and the corresponding educational programs is in a state of progressive development. At the same time there is a weakness in horizontal links and lack of clarity in the mechanisms for exchanging best practice.
- ArSU gathers data about different directions of its activities. At the same time it is not visible whether the decision making is based on those data or not.
- In spite of the fact that the development of research in the strategic plan of ArSU is declared as a separate strategic goal and priority and there is a position of Vice Rector for Science and International Cooperation, the management and coordination of research is not visible in terms of either results or processes.
- Most of the external members of ArSU Board have separate relations with the University, some of them teach at the University, others due to employment relations deal with the senior and

middle management of the University. At the same time ArSU Board does not conduct regular meetings and discussions, the sessions of the Board are mostly of a formal-procedural nature, being held mainly once a year to carry out formal actions within the authority of the Board (approval of the annual performance of the strategic plan, approval of the budget and the performance of the previous year, approval of the structure and staff list, etc.).

2.2 The Institution's system of governance gives an opportunity to students and the teaching staff to take part in decision making procedures.

According to the legislation of Artsakh, the charter of the Artsakh State University and other normative acts, the lecturers and students of the University are given the opportunity to participate in the decision-making related to them. Along with the legal acts regulating the field of higher education, the charter of ArSU, the regulations of the Academic Council and Rectorate, the exemplary charter of the faculty, the internal disciplinary rules are the legal basis ensuring the participation of the internal stakeholders in decision making processes at the University.

According to the regulation on the formation of the Board of the Higher Education Institution and the charter of ArSU, out of the 28 members of the Governing Board of the University ¼ are the representatives of the University teaching staff, and ¼ are the representatives of the students.

The teaching staff of the University is represented also in other collegial body of the University- the Scientific Council, which is ex officio composed of the presidents of the Students' Council and the Students' Scientific Union. The students are represented in the commissions attached to the Scientific Council of the University. The lecturers and the students are represented in the collegial governing bodies of the faculty, in the big councils and in other councils. All these ensure the participation of the internal stakeholders of ArSU in making all the decisions that concern them, as almost all the decisions made in the upper and middle circles of the collegial management of the University are directly related to both the lecturers and the students. It should be noted that the University Governing Board is the body where the participation of the teaching staff and students in decision-making is highly formal, and as it became clear from the expert visit, the latter usually meets once a year. As long as ArSUBoard does not set top-down strategic, guideline issues for the University, it does not become an effective, participatory decision-making platform.

The main form of the participation of the lecturers of ArSU in the decision-making related to them is the sessions of the chair, where they have the opportunity to express an opinion on the projects circulating in the University, to give speeches, to make observations and suggestions. Lecturers have the opportunity directly or indirectly to raise their concerns in faculty councils. The functions of the big faculty councils are more limited; as a rule, they refer to the election of the Dean, the annual report and the reports of the chairs. The study of the documents and the expert visit showed that the participation of the lecturers in the meetings of the big faculty councils is again of a formal nature, as there are no active discussions during the agenda issues discussed in the big councils. Instead, lecturers are active in faculty councils, where mostly academic issues are on the agenda and the participation of the lecturers in decision-making is mainly about issues related to teaching and learning.

Though Artsakh State University emphasizes the participation of lecturers in the decision-making process, which is reflected as an action in the relevant strategict plan of the university (task 4.4, action 6: to encourage the participation of the teaching staff in the university management and decision-making processes), it does not yet have a mechanism to assess the participation of the lecturers in decision-making and relevant analyzes are missing. Surveys conducted among the teaching staff and

students are forms and expression of needs assessment and in some way they can also be consideres as a participation in decision making. However, in this regard, it is problematic that the survey results are summarized but not analyzed or verified by other means of feedback, such as focus groups and in-depth interviews.

2.3 The Institution formulates and carries out short-term, mid-term and long term planning consistent with its mission and goals as well as has appropriate mechanisms for the implementation and monitoring of those plans.

Long-term planning at ArSU is carried out by the five-year strategic plan of the University (in this case, ArSU 2019-2023 strategic plan), which, it should be noted, is the first in the history of the University. As an example of a long-term planning is the strategic development plan the Faculty of Philology of ArSU, where the requirements arising from the provisions strategic plan of the University are successfully localized, as well as the strategic plan of the Armenian language.

Short-term and mid-term planning in Artsakh State University, as a component of strategic management, are not emphasized in the strategic plan of the University. The strategic plan does not have a commitment to mid- and short-term planning in the list of targets and actions to increase the efficiency of management. Meanwhile, a long-term planning commitment is registered in the strategic plan of the University, which is connected with the planning of the activities of the educational subdivisions in line with the university strategic plan.

The activities of Artsakh State University, as well as the activities of all separate departments are subject to annual short-term planning. However, it is noteworthy that such planning is not a strategic, but rather an operational management process. The annual work plans of ArSU and its subdivisions are not correlated with the long-term strategic plan of the University, and mid-term planning, both in general and at the level of subdivisions is not implemented as such. Short-term planning is not the presentation of the actions of the University's strategic plan on a university wide basis. The actions presented in the annual plans of the subdivisions are not so much based on the provisions of the strategic plan, but on the operational plan, they are actions reminiscent of the process organization schedule. No needs research has been carried out in connection with the mentioned problem, the steps for solving the problem have not been outlined.

In order to clarify the solution to the problems of the strategic plan, to clarify the implementation of the actions and to make them tangible, ArSU has developed a time-schedule for the strategic plan, where final outcomes and their evaluation indicators have been defined in order to make the solution of each problem measurable. Indicators for evaluating the results of the actions arising from the problems are also defined in the time-schedule.

The mechanisms for monitoring long-term planning at Artsakh State University are the reports of chairs, faculty councils, large councils, administrative subdivisions, and the Rector, which, however, are not analytical in nature, are not derived from the provisions defined in the strategic plan or from the analysis of the indicators mentioned in the time-schedule.

2.4 The Institution carried out examination of facts affecting its activities and draws on reliable findings during the decision-making process.

According to the self-analysis, in planning process Artsakh State University emphasizes the study of the factors influencing it activity. This is first of all reflected in the number of potential

applicants for the planned admission, the certification of the amount of funding to be provided by the state to the University or, in general, to education institutions. The fact that its 2019-2023 strategic plan the university aims to align the content of its academic programs with the requirements of the labor market, testifies to the University's planning of actions aimed at receiving signals from the external environment. During the site-visit it became clear that such signals the University gets through a number of ways:

1. The University is staffed by a large number of external lecturers-practitioners of the fileds mainly from the public sector (public administration, territorial administration bodies, courts, etc.), the economy (mainly information technology and financial and banking sectors), who are related to changes or tendencies in the given sector in their daily activities and somehow they reflect all these in their lectures or speak about it in the sessions of the chairs, which has an impact on the improvement of the contents of the educational programs.

2. Sometimes meetings with employers are organized at the University during which the employers present tendencies of the labor market which is later on reflected in the academic programs or in the planning of other activities.

3. The management of the University is in daily contact with the state institutions in Artsakh which gives an opportunity to get information about current activites or expected ones somehow related to the University.

4. University also gets some signals from the observation of students' learning outcomes.

At the same time, it should be mentioned that such observations of the external factors influencing the activity of the University are of unsystematic nature, as a rule, they are not documented or analyzed. There is no analysis or information on whether the University has studied the state priorities (which, for example, are stipulated in government programs, governmental or departmental concepts, etc.), which are to some extent in line with its mission and goals, educational profile. To obtain reliable information about its activities, a marketing and information science function is not defined in ArSU in order to provide the basis for making the right decisions. Taking into account the fact that labor market for most of the ArSU graduates is secondary schools and the development of the school is static there is not any opportunity to get signals from these spheres, thus many academic programs of ArSU are developed and elaborated without having qualitative data about the changes in the schooling system. But for example, the academic programs that are related to finance and banking or the sphere of information technologies are in a beneficial state in this respect as it is easy to reveal the changes happening in the mentioned spheres which has its positive impact on the dymanics of the programs. ArSU rarely conducts in depth interviews, focus groups or research to reveal the tendency of the labor market.

2.5 The management of the policies and the processes is based on the quality management principle (plan-do-check-act /PDCA/).

The concept on implementing administration of policies and procedures through PDCA cycle of quality management is in the initial stage at ArSU. The University has developed a QA manual which is of crucial importance from the perspective of University top and mid-level managemet staff in terms of applying PDCA if necessary. In order to measure the implementation of objectives and actions mentioned in the time-schedule of the strategic plan, key performance indicators are defined that are a good basis for the evaluation of planned activities and implementation of actions. The fact that for the first time a strategic plan has been developed at the University, that a QA infrastructure is just

being established shows that the application of the principle of PDCA cycle of quality management is being invested at Artsakh State University. The implementation of the third cycle of PDCA (checking) is considered as problematic in the SER, regarding the uncertainty of responsibilities of responsible people. The observation of the documents showed that non-analytical nature of the reports on the implementation of the planned actions made it difficult to evaluate the processes. From the observation of documents and the expert panel visit it became clear that the processes planned by the strategic plan are in the implementation stage (some of them have not started yet), the principles of PDCA are applied only in the implementation of academic programs but yet not fully.

Some important processes planned for 2020 at Artsakh State University have slowed down due to the Covid19 epidemic.

2.6 The Institution has evaluation mechanisms in place ensuring data collection, analyses and application of the data on the effectiveness of the academic programs and other processes

According to the self-analysis, document observation, information and impressions got during the site-visit the collection of information on the effectiveness of academic programs and other processes of ArSU is carried out through student and graduate surveys, discussions not only with them but also with the teaching staff, employers, meetings, seminars and workshops as well as using the feedback section of the University website which, by the way, started to be used after writing the self-analysis of ArSU.

The mechanisms for collecting information on the effectiveness of academic programs and other processes at ArSU are the surveys of students assessing the scientific and pedagogical activities of the teaching staff, as well as the surveys on the satisfaction of graduates with the education received at the University. It became clear from the sitevisit that the mentioned mechanisms have never been evaluated from the point of view of how effective they are, although the data got through the surveys were the basis for decision-making and process improvement. It also became clear that the analysis of the survey results, the reports on the improvements based on these results are missing, that the data collection analyzes are performed in a working manner and are not related to the goals adopted by the University.

During the site-visit, there was a general agreement at the University that the graduate surveys as a mechanism, as they have been conducted so far, are not able to ensure the expected efficiency in terms of reliable data transfer because the surveys are conducted not among the students who graduated from the university earlier, but among the students who graduated from the university that year . The latter assess still in the context of University realities, which reduces the objectiveness of the survey. Whereas the graduates of a few years ago, who would have answered outside the context of the university realities, would have understood more clearly the good and the bad sides of the education they received, would have provided a more objective picture.

Meetings and workshops with employers are organized in ArSU to discuss and further improve the content and structure of academic programs, their learning outcomes, effectiveness, etc. It should also be mentioned that the process is rare, such meetings are not organized in terms of all academic programs. Of course, the improvements in the academic programs of ArSU are noticeable in recent years, however, the fact that the problems identified during the mentioned meetings and workshops and the documents that bring together their analysis are missing, it is impossible to assess

to what extent the mentioned improvements are conditioned by the results of those meetings and workshops.

2.7 There are objective mechanisms in place evaluating the quality of quantitative and qualitative information on the academic programs and qualification awarded.

The information on the quality of academic programs and the qualifications awarded at Artsakh State University is mainly provided through the University website, Facebook page, as well as through transmission of information orally by graduates, employers and other stakeholders. The University is also represented on Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. The University website contains some brief information about ArSU academic programs (qualification awarded, specialty and list of courses). Some important information, such as training programs, career opportunities, teaching-learning methods, and approaches, etc., is missing on the website.

The information on the University Facebook page mainly refers to the events taking place at ArSU. There are no materials on the quality of academic programs, the quality of the qualifications awarded, the success stories of the graduates. There is no information about the career and promotion of the students who graduated from ArSU. The reports of the University contain quantitative information about the quality of the educational programs and the qualifications awarded, however, such information is not evaluated. The self-analysis does not contain data on objective mechanisms for evaluating the publication of information on the quality of educational programs and qualifications awarded.

Considerations:

The expert panel positively assesses the fact that the roles and functions of all the governing bodies of Artsakh State University (including the middle management), the formation and liquidation procedures are clearly defined providing the institutional-normative basis for the operation of the University management system, which enables the University team to have regular working relationships.

The strategic planning management has visibly improved the functioning of ArSU management system introducing a qualitatively new stage of reforms to the University. Structural-organizational transformations have been made in line with the University's mission and strategic goals as much as possible. The management system defines the functions of quality assurance and internationalization of the University, which creates an opportunity to put the development of the University on a certain path. The university has started to take more definite steps in terms of expressing its commitment and responsibility to the society, this is evidenced by the establishment and successful operation of a Legal Clinic and Psychological center.

The heads of the University staff, separate administrative-educational subdivisions are motivated and committed to reform the management system of the institution, to meet the needs of lecturers and students, to develop educational programs, to improve the indicators of the University in different directions. There is a morally and psychologically healthy atmosphere in the University, the relations between the management, the staff and the students are warm and cooperative. The issues are solved promptly due to the commitment of the University management, as well as the relatively small number of internal stakeholders. The low level of remuneration, the lack of a modern model of human

resource management, as well as some objective reasons (distance, more difficult communication) still do not allow to involve more qualified specialists in the teaching and research processes of the University.

At the same time, the existing functional-work imbalances, and problems in the activities of separate administrative subdivisions and officials, which have been mentioned above, slow down the implementation of the planned actions aimed at the development of the U niversity.

The role and function of ArSU Board in the development of the University has not been clearly defined so far. The formal nature of the work of the Board does not allow that body to participate in the development of the University to the best of its ability, to define the directions of that development, to put appropriate tasks in front of the University management and to control the performance of solving those problems.

The collection of some data on its activities by ArSU is a positive fact, however the expert panel believes that firstly the mechanisms of data collection and verification are imperfect, secondly the decision-making is not fully based on analysis of the collected data, decisions are often made within logic and experience.

One of the essential issues in the field of management is related to the coordination and management of research. The policy of encouraging research, except for one or two areas where there are traditions, is not clear, the funds allocated are small.

ArSU lecturers and students have the opportunity to participate in decision-making related to them in all levels of collegial management of the University. The participation of internal stakeholders in the Scientific Council of the University, in the Faculty Councils and in the chairs is effective, while in the ArSU Board and in the big faculty councils their participation is incomparably less due to the formal nature of their activities. Considering the surveys as a mechanism for revealing the needs of the university's internal stakeholders, the expert group finds that they do not reveal the needs in deepth.

In-depth professional interviews and focus groups with both internal and external stakeholders (graduates, employers, public sector, partner organizations) will provide an opportunity to increase the decision-making database, thereby increasing the effectiveness and targeting of decisions.

The expert panel positively assesses the fact that for the first time the University has applied long-term strategic planning, that certain educational subdivisions of the University have localized the strategic goals, tasks, and actions of the University in their own planning. However, the fact that there are no mid-term and short-term plans derived from the long-term planning (short-term plans are not strategic, but operational), and the performance of planned actions is not monitored by effective monitoring-analytical mechanisms, somewhat overshadows the proper implementation of planning processes.

Considering the fact that ArSU receives signals related to its activities from state bodies, labor market and schools, the expert panel finds that as long as these processes are not systematically implemented, analyzed, documented, organized with marketing tools, it does not provide a proper basis in terms of perceiving the external environment and making appropriate decisions.

The expert panel positively assesses the fact that a professional discourse has started to be formed at ArSU on the principles of PDCA cycle of quality management. The quality assurance manual of ArSU, the application of the PDCA cycle in the implementation of some educational programs can become a basis for improving the quality of management and the introduction of a quality culture in

the University. This can be facilitated by the fact that several university officials have been trained at ANQA.

However, the realization that the quality assurance functions of the University should relate not only to the educational programs, but also to the activities of administrative subdivisions or officials, to the identification of problems in them, is still unjustified. If the approach of carrying out the processes through the PDCA cycle is not possible, the achievement of the strategic goals set by ArSU and the clear realization of the mission may be endangered.

The expert panel positively assesses the fact that the collection of information on the effectiveness of educational programs and other processes at Artsakh State University is carried out regularly (surveys of students, graduates, meetings with employers), which gives the University an opportunity to evaluate the efficiency of educational programs and other processes

However, the lack of analysis of the effectiveness of these mechanisms (such as the fact to what exent it is effective to organize surveys among the graduate students in the given academic year), as well as the lack or inaccessibility of analysis of problems identified by these mechanisms can be questioned in terms of credibility of decision making based on the data collected.

Summary: Taking into account that ArSU is in changes and in the transition period, the mission of the University is carried out in a difficult situation, positive changes have been made in the organizational structure of the University, for example the establishment of a Psychological center, QA center, there are mechanisms of ethics, there are long-term and short-term planning, which is written according to the expected outcomes, hierarchical relations work effectively, interpersonal relations at the university contribute to the realization of the goals of the University, the University rector knows the problems at ArSU, he is a researcher (Armenology), which will contribute to the development of research direction, there is a sound moral-psychological environment, a number of process management innovations have been introduced, such as the Google Classroom platform, students and teaching staff are involved in various boards, students' voices are heard, students confirm that their voices are heard, data on academic programs is collected from internal and external stakeholders, the expert panel finds that the management system of the institution, the administrative structures, their activities are effective, are aimed at the realization of the mission and goals of the institution.

Conclusion: *The compliance of the institution's institutional capacities with the requirements of criterion 2 is satisfactory.*

Recommendations

- Clarify and strengthen the function of ArSUBoard in defining the development directions of ArSU, building a development chain, defining problems for the University and supervising their implementation.
- Clarify the scope of competencies and functions of the departments responsible for research, internationalization, human resource involvement, maintenance and promotion.
- Contact those military servants from nearby military units in Stepanakert who have had success while studying at universities to exchange views on their experience in the education-research-production (service) chain.

III. ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES

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

FINDINGS

3.1 The academic programs are in line with Institution's mission, they correspond to the state academic standards and are thoroughly described according to the intended learning outcomes of the qualification awarded.

In the strategic plan of ArSU for 2019-2023, as well as in the strategic plan for the development of the faculties and chairs, the regular elaboration and improvement of the academic program is prioritized. Currently, 75 academic programs are implemented in 5 faculties of the University, 25 of which are bachelor's (13 pedagogical and 12 social or university) 44 - master's (17 specialties and 27 specializations), 6 – postgraduate programs. It became clear from the site-visit that it is planned to optimize the academic programs in the near future.

There is a mapping of the academic program learning outcomes with the descriptors of NQF which shows the consistency of the academic programs with NQF.

The presented academic programs ("Armenian Language and Literature", "Finance / by Sector", "Information Technologies") are in line with the mission of ArSU in the sense that they are aimed at organization of education in the spheres of pedagogy, Armenology, natural sciences, social-economics, humanities and technology, sports, culture as well as conduction of basic scientific research in the mentioned fields.

In the last two years the academic programs have been improved at ArSU, program descriptors have been developed, where learning outcomes of the academic programs are defined, course descriptors have been developed where course outcomes as well as teaching, learning and assessment methods are defined and in case of some academic programs (Armenian Language and Literature) also the list of assignments is mentioned. There are institutional standards however not all programs have localized good experience.

The learning outcomes of the three observed academic programs are divided into professional knowledge and understanding, practical professional skills and general transferable skills. Course learning outcomes have also been aligned with the academic progam learning outcomes. Within the framework of the revision of the academic program of the Armenian Language and Literature, an attempt was made to expand the pedagogical block, in particular, through the scope of teaching and the diversification of forms. It should be noted, however, that in the learning outcomes of the academic program, as well as in the course learning outcomes, the emphasis is on philological skills, and the pedagogical skills and competencies are not clearly defined or are nor presented as generic and nor professional learning outcomes[5].

Theoretical and practical components are of great importance in different courses of the academic program of Finance (by sector). In this regard regular discussions are held with employers, it is planned to increase the practical component of the academic program. In the academic program of Finance (by sector) macro and micro economic directions are separated but there is no narrow specialization. Although the curricula have practical components, including internships, students, alumni and employers have pointed out the need to add up practical component in the curriculum.

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[5] The text was edited as a result of the observations made by the University.

3.2 The Institution has a policy that promotes alignment between teaching and learning approaches and the intended learning outcomes of academic programs, which ensures student-centred learning.

With the modernization of the academic programs, the teaching and learning methods have been improved. During the site-visit it became clear that in the descriptions developed for almost all courses there are teaching-learning methods according to the outcomes. The course descriptions specify the suggested methods for presenting and teaching each topic. The outcome-based approach as well as the choice of appropriate methods, makes it possible to make the learning process more manageable and controllable, as evidenced by the lecturers and students during the meetings organized with the expert panel. The lecturers point out that defining the expected learning outcomes has greatly improved the educational process by helping them to choose the material they are teaching, teaching, learning and assessment methods. The students mentioned that due to the course descriptions they are able to control the process of their learning, whether the mentioned methods are used by the lecturer, and at the end of the course they discuss with the lecturer whether they have succeeded in the acquisition of the intended learning outcomes.

During the site-visit, it became clear that within the three academic programs that were observed both traditional teaching methods and teamwork, "feed forward" method, practical games, professional discussions, etc. are used. It became clear that after the introduction of the "Google Classroom" platform, the dictation of lectures has significantly decreased.

Students do individual work in all subjects.

A series of class observations conducted at the Faculty of Philology revealed that although all the lecturers were trying to conduct an interactive lesson with the involvement of the students, the use of a blackboard or printed material, "handouts" was scarce, which would make the new material more accessible.

There was also a discrepancy between, for example, the level of English proficiency of a particular audience and the complexity of the material assigned.

In general, the observation revealed that not all the lecturers use modern teaching methods. Although the existence of student-centered learning is mentioned in the SER, there is no policy, there are no cases of a student having an opportunity to develop his / her individual way of learning. It was mentioned during the site-visit that the number of elective courses has increased, however, their number is still small, and in the case of the existing elective courses their purpose is not mentioned, for example, to prepare for internship or work in other fields. For example, the courses of Armenian Language and Literature academic program elective courses can be works by one writer, Armenian punctuation, etc. According to the lecturers, they are aimed at developing students' research skills.

3.3 The Institution has policy on students' assessment according to the learning outcomes and promotes academic integrity.

A general policy on assessment has been developed at ArSU, the components of the final assessment have been clarified. Assessment of students' knowledge is carried out by 4 assessment methods: traditional test, traditional exam, without final assessment test, final assessment exam.

In order to maintain impartiality, a computer test was introduced in accordance with the Regulation on the process of computer testing of students' knowledge. Improvement of the test evaluation process has been carried out. One-week trainings and a meeting with the director of the testing center were organized in all subdivisions of the University on the issue of preparing high quality test tasks. During the site-visit, it turned out that the opinions on the effectiveness of the computer test

were contradictory among the teaching staff and the students. According to some of them, in the case of some subjects, such as literature, computer test is not justified. However, the final examination is conducted by oral examination.

In the program and subject descriptions the assessment methods are defined that need to be reviewed, as in some cases there are many, sometimes up to 10 assessment methods[6] mentioned, but the assessment components show that the final assessment is accumulated through two tests 8 points each and an individual work with 2 points. The observation of the expert panel revealed that independent work promotes the development of students' analytical skills. In this case, the points for individual work (2) is quite small.

In the written tests of the academic program of Armenian Language and Literature assignments checking the practical skills are involved.

The criteria for the assessment of students' individual work, final paper and thesis paprer were clarified through a number of procedures: Regulation on the Preparation and Defense of Course Paper, Regulation on the Preparation and Defense of Final Paper, Regulation on the Preparation and Defense of Master thesis, Regulation on Academic Honesty and Dishonesty. However, in the assessment final paper and master's theses, a low score is given to the relevance and novelty of the work (2 points for each, while 8 points are given for the presentation and 4 points for the language). It should be noted that the research composition was weak in the observed works.

3.4 The programmes of the Institution are contextually coherent with other relevant programs and promote mobility of students and staff.

ArSU adopted first YSU, then ASPU academic programs as a benchmark for the development of its academic programs. During the development of the main academic programs, the program standards and requirements of other RA universities were also taken into account, which ensured the extra-university mobility of the students. The academic programs provided at ArSU have been amended with a outcome-based approach to the development of the academic programs, according to

the Regulation on the Structure and Content of ArSU BA Academic Programs (approved by the decree N6-L of ArSU Scientific Council as of June 28, 2019) and the methodological instructions for completing the form of the "Professional Education Program" (approved by the decree N5-L of ArSU Scientific Councilas of June 28, 2019).

For the elaboration of the academic programmes current models of educational opportunities of Taraz State University of Kazakstan, Moscow State Pedagogical University of Russian Federation, Volgograd State University of Russian Federation and Ural State University of Russian Federation have been observed. However, during the site-visit it was not clear what changes were made in the academic progams as a result of benchmarking.

Benchmarking was carried out for the revision of the "Armenian Language and Literature" academic program on the basis of the relevant programs of the Armenian State Pedagogical University, Vanadzor State University as well as a number of Russian universities. Deputy director of school N1 in Stepanakert after Kh. Abovyan and president of the Educational-Methodical Council of N11 High School after Jhangiryan in Stepanakert were involved in the revision processes of the academic programs as external stakeholders.

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[6] The text was edited as a result of the observations made by the University.

The revised program was sent for external peer-review to Vanadzor State University of RA after which the external opinion was discussed with the responsible chairs of the academic programs (Chair of Armenian Language and Literature after S. Abrahamyan and Chair of Journalism) and some observation have been taken into account while presenting the final program.

The basis of the academic program of Finance (by sector) is the corresponding educational program of ASUE as well as benchmarking was carried out with the academic program of Taraz State University. And the academic program of IT was benchmarked with the relevant academic program of Yerevan State University. It should be noted that there is no institutional approach to benchmarking.

According to the SER the professional educational programs in ArSU are comparable in content to the corresponding professional programs of other institutions, as there is data on inter-university transfers. It is also possible to realize a one-year ASPU-mediated student exchange opportunity within the framework of a cooperation agreement. In 2017-2018 academic year 2 students (2nd, 4th year, majoring in English Language and Literature), in 2018-2019 academic year 1 student (3rd year, majoring in Translation), mediated by ASPU, gtot the opportunity to study at Peter Pazman Catholic University in Hungary, then returned to continue their education at ArSU.

3.5 The Institution adopts policies in place ensuring academic programme monitoring, evaluation of effectiveness and enhancement.

In the strategic plan of ArSU for 2019-2023, as well as in the strategic plans for the development of faculties and chairs, the issue of regular revision and elaboration of the academic programs is addressed.

Within the framework of the development of the strategic plan and conduction of self-analysis of the institutional capacities of ArSU, the University has taken a number of steps to improve the academic programs, such as the appointment of those in charge of curricula, development of the regulation on the structure and content of BA programs, alignment of curricula with the requirement of strategic plan. Samples of course descriptions have been developed, including those for intenships. The descriptions of the intenships are quite clearly defined and in details.

The main mechanism for monitoring the academic programs is the student surveys, for which regulations have been developed: Regulation for the Survey of Graduates' Satisfaction with the Education received by ArSU., Regulation and Questionnaire on the Sociological Survey for Evaluating Scientific-Pedagogical and Moral Features of the Teaching Staff of ArSU.

Recently, the circle of external stakeholders to evaluate the effectiveness of academic programs has been expanded, they are included in the councils of various circles of the institution, in the final attestation commissions, they are invited to round-table discussions, where along with a number of issues revision and improvement of the academic programs is also discussed, particularly in terms of meeting labor market requirements. As a result of these discussions and surveys the lecturers and students mention that were was an extension of the internship period and the revision of its content.

Considerations:

The expert panel considers it positive that in the last two years the process of improving the academic programs has started, a number of institutional formats have been developed for the amendment of the academic programs. Examples of good practice are available in several academic programs. The localization of good experience in all academic programs will contribute to the

implementation of large-scale reforms at the level of the academic programs and to the improvement of the quality of graduates.

ArSU offers a wide variety of academic programs (75) according to three educational levels. Such a large variety of academic programs is partly due to the key role that the University has in meeting the needs of the Artsakh Republic. Academic programs are evaluated and reviewed every year. The review of academic programs and their learning outcomes from the perspective of strategic goals has yet to be finalized. Academic programs would be more competitive and different in the labor market if they were differentiated in clearer directions. This goal can be achieved through the introduction of a modular system. Although the curriculum has practical components, including internships, students, alumni, and employers have pointed out the need to add a practical component to the courses and curriculum. Increasing courses on entrepreneurship and business in the curriculum can increase the employment rate of graduates helping them to create their own business, especially in the private sector.

It is quite commendable that ArSU has an effective system for evaluating the learning outcomes presented to the theses papers and final exams, that evaluation is carried out with the participation of external stakeholders. According to the information presented in the strategic plan, ArSU graduates will be able to continue their studies in European-American universities. However, the absence of a process for recognizing the learning outcomes achieved in other universities and the complicated credit transfer system hinder the implementation of the strategic tasks of ArSU concerning the mobility of students.

The student assessment system has improved in recent years, but there is no separation of assessment of skills and knowledge. In this regard, improving the student assessment system will help to develop practical skills of students. It should be noted that the development of students' analytical skills should also be a sign of improvement for ArSU in the coming years.

The University states that it implements the idea of student-centered learning and takes many steps to modernize the education process. During the meetings with students and lecturers, they presented many examples of the transition from traditional teaching (even dictation of lesson content by the lecturer) to interactive teaching and learning methods. The expert panel gives importance to the description of the assignments in the academic programs, which will increase the effectiveness of the learning.

It will be effective to explore how online learning conducted during COVID-19 has increased student involvement in the educational process and what new solutions need to be provided in the post-epidemic period. From the results of various discussions on innovative teaching and teaching experiences, it is possible to outline a conceptual framework for ArSU, which will help to improve the role of student-centered learning in improving the educational process and its outcomes. Students have some influence on the management of the University, they express their opinion on the quality of teaching and facilities. The satisfaction of student and external stakeholder with education is relatively high. In any case, it should be noted that surveys are not regular; feedback and quality assurance systems do not work well in this regard. During the meetings the expert panel was informed that students, lecturers and even heads of chairs do not have direct access to the survey results. Probably that is why during the observation of the SER and the site-visit meetings the clear link between students surveys and quality improvements was not revealed.

In the analysis of the academic programs more attention should be paid to the dynamics of student progress, which is measured by the learning outcomes achieved. In order to reveal the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process, it is worthwhile to carry out a comparative analysis of the students' achievements in the first and last years of study. Unlike a number of European universities, ArSU students have little opportunity to personalize their studies, as there are few elective courses.

SUMMARY: Taking into account that changes have been made in the academic programs in recent years, in general, the organization of the academic programs is close to the European approach in terms of learning outcomes and credit system, academic programs are reviewed, there is a benchmarking system, thesis assessment system, there are practical courses, about seventy percent of the graduates work, have a lot of connections with employers, organize round tables, changes in academic programs have been made based on the opinion of employers, there are innovative lecturers, teaching methods are mostly innovative, students know where they can work, at all levels of the University problems of the academic programs are realized and solutions are being looked for, the expert panel finds that ArSU meets the requirements of the standard third.

CONCLUSION: *The compliance of the institution's institutional capacities with the requirements of criterion 3 is satisfactory.*

Recommendations:
1. To clarify the definition of the learning outcomes of both courses and the academic programs making them applicable to the lecturer.
2. To review the content and the purpose of the offered elective courses, to what extant they prepare for the internship or provide additional transferable skills and competences.
3. To develop a handbook on student-centered learning approaches at ArSU, presenting the relationship between teaching techniques, educational process, expected learning outcomes and their assessment methods.

IV. STUDENTS

CRITERION: The Institution provides support services to students ensuring productive learning environment.

FINDINGS

4.1 The Institution has set mechanisms for promoting students' recruitment, selection and admission procedures.

ArSU has regulations on student recruitment and selection, admission mechanisms and implementation procedures both for high school and college graduates in full-time and distance learning systems.

ArSU is the largest higher education institution in the country and is the leader in terms of the number of applicants. Conditioned by the number of high school graduates, the number of university entrants has also decreased.

According to the SER, there are several mechanisms for attracting potential applicants. In cooperation with high and secondary schools, the University organizes mutual visits, subject olympiads for the professional orientation of the applicants. During the site-visit, it became known that chairs organize preparatory courses for future applicants, which, according to the data provided by the

University, have contributed to the increase in the number of students in the departments of chemistry and foreign languages.

In order to raise the awareness of the applicants and to ensure the transparency of the admission process, the "Applicant" section is available in the University's official website. The necessary information on the admission procedure, specialties and exams is available there. Videos and booklets about the University are being prepared, which are published on social networks, on the official website of ArSU.

4.2 The Institution has policies and procedures for assessing student educational needs.

Being a small university ArSU provides an opportunity to reveal the needs of students not only through developed procedures, but also through direct contact with students.

The following mechanisms are in place to identify students' educational needs.

- Regular meetings of the Rector and Vice-Rector for Students Affairs with student representatives,
- Study of the needs of students by the student representatives- group monitors, group supervisors and Student Council,
- Surveys conducted among students and alumni,
- Implementation of various activities by the Psychological Center.

A schedule for meetings with the Rector is developed and posted on the official website. During the meetings organizational issues are mainly discussed, while suggestions and problems related to the educational process are resolved in the lower levels of management.

As a result of the cooperation of the Quality Assurance Center and the Department of Studeents Affairs and Career a questionnaire on the evaluation of the scientific-pedagogical activity and moral qualities of the lecturers was revised. Surveys are carried out electronically and based on the results received, relevant instructions are given in the chairs.

The Psychological Center is also active to identify the needs of students. In 2017-2018 academic year, it conducted a study on student motivation, but the changes made based on the results of this study are not presented. Conditioned by the situation, the Center organizes various meetings with students to ensure their stable psychological state and provide support. Specialists, such as representatives of the Russian peacekeeping forces of the Ministry of Emergency Situations are also invited to the mentioned meetings.

During the meetings it became clear that the conduction of the self-analysis contributed to the identification of several problems in ArSU, which enabled the University management to make appropriate changes in the actions derived from the strategic plan.

4.3 The Institution provides opportunities for extra-curricular activities and advising services aimed at supporting student effective learning.

According to the self-analysis, with the support of the Government of the Republic of Artsakh, a non-formal educational program has been implemented at the University since 2016, due to which additional classes are organized for students, which are conducted by specialists in the field, well-known figures. Similar courses are organized also by inviting specialists from partner universities: YSU, ASUE, ASPU, the American University in Armenia, and other universities, as well as sending ArSU students to professional courses at those universities. It became clear from the site-visit that the students are satisfied with the content of those courses, but the annual number of the courses is not much.

Starting from 2018, the University organizes an international summer camp-school, where well-known figures give lectures.

Academic consultations and additional classes are organized by the chairs. These are mainly consultations on pre-examination issues and and discussions research work. According to the self-evaluation data, about 82% of the students is satisfied with them, which we were convinced of during the visit as well. Especially after changing into distance learning, the counsultation schedule has become flexible and students can contact the lecturer at any time. [7]The students participate in the work of the Psychological Center and Legal Clinic providing cousultation services to the population under the guidance of experienced specialists.

4.4 There are precise regulation and schedule set for students to turn to the administrative staff for additional support and guidance.

The internal regulations of ArSU define the procedure for using the assistance provided by the University, including living in a dormitory, completing proposals, submitting applications and complaints. Students from different regions of Artsakh with housing problems apply to live in the dormitory. The students of the dormitory elect their representative in the Student Council, who presents their problems in the presidency. The rules for applying to the administrative staff and the necessary information is presented to the freshmen, as well as is summarized in the student guide and is published on the official website.

The students have the opportunity to meet with the Rector according to the schedule made and published at the beginning of the academic year. It became clear from the meetings that both the administrative and the teaching staff are always ready to support the students in solving various issues, such as choosing the topics of individual works, changing the time allocation of subjects, discussing incomprehensible questions on the topic of the lesson.

4.5 The Institution has student career support services.

The Department on Students' Affairs and Career was established in 2018 and started working on the steps mentioned in the strategic plan. There is currently alumni database for four years that is constantly being updated to strengthen alumni feedback. The Career Center, in collaboration with employers, regularly informs students about vacancies in the labor market through posts on social media groups. The university system of students' e-mail addresses has been introduced.

In collaboration with the American University in Armenia, the Career Center organized a course on writing an autobiography (CV). The results of the survey showed that the course helped students in finding job. Meetings, thematic discussions with employers and invited specialists are organized. Surveys among students are organized jointly with QA Center, but they are not centralized, and a full analysis of the results has not been done yet.

4.6 The Institution promotes student involvement in research activities.

Involvement of students in scientific-research activities is one of the priorities of ArSU 2018-2023 strategic plan. To ensure the latter, the research component was introduced in the academic programs through the form of individual work and the obligatory course on "Planning and Methods of Research Work" was added to the master's program.

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[7] The text was edited as a result of the observations made by the University.

According to the students, the subject research works contribute to the development of analytical skills. According to the lecturers, due to the research component the quality of the final papers has increased. However, the study revealed that the analytical component is weak. Mechanisms are not in place to enhance the practical significance of research work.

Due to the limited capacity of the building related to the construction of the new building, the resources available for interdisciplinary research are limited. The carried out research and large-scale published works are mainly in the field of history and dialectology. [8]The establishment of laboratories in the reconstructed building and the cooperation with other universities will contribute to the increase of students' motivation. The Students' Scientific Union operates at ArSU, which in cooperation with the Student Council, organizes educational and cultural events, annual conferences and seminars. It became clear from the expert visit that the activities of the Students' Scientific Union do not contribute to the involvement of students in scientific activities.

The individual scientific works carried out by the students are summarized, presented during the conferences organized by the students and published in scientific bulletins.

4.7 The Institution has a special body, which is responsible for the protection of students' rights.

The rights of ArSU students are defined by the legislation of the Republic of Artsakh and by internal legal acts of ArSU. The body for the protection of students' rights and for self-organization of students at the University is the Student Council, which has been operating at ArSU since 2015 in accordance with the adopted charter. A Committee of Ethics has been set up to oversee academic integrity and ensure the protection of students' rights.

The students turn to the course supervisors, the methodologist of the Department of Students' Affairs, the Student Council and the staff of the chair with different problems. They can apply to the Rector directly or through the Student Council.

The Student Council ensures the participation of students in the management of the university, identifies, raises and presents the problems of students for discussion in the governing bodies. In addition to the organization of various events, the Student Council also provides additional support to students in need, to solving the problems of students living in dormitories. From the financial means allocated to the Student Council, the presidency in previous years has allocated the reimbursement of dormitory expenses and tuition fees for students in need.

Awareness of the activities of the Student Council is high. The news is published on the official website of the University, on the pages of social networks, as wel as the students are informed through the group monitors. However, no active work is done with the students of the distance learning system.

4.8 The Institution has set mechanisms for the evaluating and ensuring the quality of educational, consultancy and other services provided to students.

The Quality Assurance Center has been operating at the University since 2018. In 2019 the "ArSU Quality Assurance Manual" educational-methodological guide was published. Quality assurance mechanisms have been developed, some of which are in the piloting phase.

QA Center cooperates with the chairs within the framework of conducting surveys for the evaluation of lecturers. The received data are sent to the chair, discussed during the session of the chair and respective instructions are given. Class observations are organized as well as the chair constantly

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[8] The text was edited as a result of the observations made by the University.

follows the professional growth of the lecturers. Based on the students' evaluation results and their opinion, the hours for internship has been increased, some courses have been transferred, the use of information technologies by the lecturers in the teaching process has been increased.

Together with the Career Center questionnaires were developed to assess the students' satisfaction with resources and education. A summary analysis of the results has not been carried out yet. Surveys are conducted among graduates and employers. The activities of Student Council and Student Scientific Council are presented in the form of self-analyzes. The monthly analysis of the Faculty Student Council is presented to the Dean, then discussed in the Department of Students' Affairs and Career. As a result of self-assessment, active students are encouraged with scholarships.

Considerations:

The expert panel positively assesses the fact that the University has mechanisms for admission and selection of students, including visits to schools, visits of schoolchildren to ArSU, preparatory classes for applicants. The work done contributes to increasing the visibility of ArSU. At the same time, the panel considers the need to study the effectiveness of different sources of student selection and recruitment, which will allow to identify existing problems, diversify recruitment mechanisms, which in its turn will increase the number of applicants.

The expert panel considers it positive that many sources of information are used to identify the needs of students: surveys, meetings with the Rector, deans, heads of chairs, course supervisors, curators. Student needs are also recorded by special structural units: Department of Students' Affairs and Career, Psychological Center, Student Organizations and suggestion box. As a result of actively using these mechanisms, students have the opportunity to constantly voice their needs and get a solution. Students also have the opportunity to contact the administrative staff to raise issues, which has a positive effect on student motivation. A student handbook has been developed at ArSU, which presents the responsibilities and rights of students. The panel notes that to facilitate student-centered learning, it would be effective to include brief descriptions of academic prgrams in the student handbook.

It is positive that schedules have been developed for the consultations provided to the students, additional lecturing is organized with the involvement of specialists. However, the counsulting system for distance learning students needs to be revised. Improving counsulting services will promote students' progress. The expert panel welcomes the fact that the Career Center is actively working to establish a graduate base, which will help strengthen the relationship with graduates and improve the evaluation mechanisms of educational services. The expert panel emphasizes the establishment of active cooperation links between the career center and employers, which will ensure the employment of graduates and will strengthen university-employer relationship.

A positive factor is the introduction of a research component in the academic programs and the activities of the scientific center, which contribute to the involvement of students in research activities. At the same time, the expert panel notes that students are not yet actively involved in research projects, and the individual work done is not analytical in nature, does not lead to the development of analytical skills. From this point of view, there is also work to be done by the Student Scientific Union, whose activity is not yet active in involving students in research work.

It is positive that the Student Council is active in protecting the rights of students, organizing various events and providing assistance to students in need.

SUMMARY:Taking into account that the University carries out recruitment of applicants, cooperates with schools in this regard, there are mechanisms to identify students' needs, such as surveys, various meetings with the Rector, vice-rectors, ArSU Career Center also helps to identify needs, there is financial support to people with social problems, career support services are available, students are involved in research to some extent, there is a Student Council, there is a Psychological Center that provides services to students, students are motivated, they realize their role in solving problems, the expert panel considers that it provides appropriate support to students to ensure the effectiveness of the educational environment.

CONCLUSION: *The compliance of the institution's institutional capacities with the requirements of criterion 4 is satisfactory.*

RECOMMENDATIONS:
- To improve career support services by establishing close university-employer partnerships.
- To ensure conduction of analysis and presentation of student survey result evaluating education, counsulting and other services provided to students, as well as to develop and implement a problem-based improvement plan.

V. FACULTY AND STAFF

CRITERION: The Institution has a highly qualified teaching and support staffs to achieve the set goals for academic programs and institution's mission.

FINDINGS:

5.1 The Institution has policies and procedures promoting recruitment of a highly qualified teaching and supporting staff for the provision of academic programs.

The formation and selection of the teaching staff in ArSU is carried out according to the relevant procedure.

According to the self-analysis, the main teaching staff at ArSU is dominated by middle-aged lecturers, which during the last 3 years has ranged from 50 to 51. In recent years, the number of female lecturers in the main teaching staff has exceeded the number of male lecturers, making up 75%.

The intentions of Artsakh State University towards this criterion are expressed in the strategic objective of bringing the human resources management in line with the strategic goals of the University (Objective No. 4.4 of the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan of ArSU). The policy of selection and evaluation of the teaching staff is implemented through the procedures on "Competitive Selection and Placement of Positions of ArSU Teaching Staff", "Selection of the Head of the Chair of ArSU" and "Selection of the Dean of the Faculty of ArSU".

Accordng to the procedure on "Competitive Selection and Replacement of Positions of ArSU Teaching Staff" the selection and evaluation of the University lecturers is carried out in accordance with the requirements of the scientific-pedagogical activity presented to the lecturers. It should be noted that these requirements take into account both quantitative (for example, ten years of scientific and pedagogical work experience for the position of Associate Professor, at least one published scientific or scientific-methodological work in the year preceding the competition) and qualitative (academic degree or title) data. The procedure defines certain forms of educational, research and organizational work (for example, for the position of associate professor, conducting lectures in BA and

MA programs, management of the master's program, conducting a scientific seminar, etc.) for the positions.

According to the procedure, at the end of each academic semester the vacancies are registered and an open competition is announced. The announcement is posted on the University website. The competition is carried out through the Mandate Commission considering the cases of candidates, Chair, Faculty Council and ArSU Scientific Council. It should be noted that the evaluation criteria of the lecturers participating in the competition presuppose input data (academic degree, scientific and educational-methodical works, training courses), but output data for evaluation at the time of selection are not applied (how is the individual work organized?, how is the material presented?, how is research encouraged?, etc.) while the procedure sets out the possibility of applying some output criteria (for example, self-assessment and peer-review if available), which, however, according to the site-visit turned out that it is not used. It is noteworthy that the mentioned criteria are not weighted in any way, for example, in the form of points. It is noteworthy that the basis for competitive selection is not the qualitative requirements for conducting the course, but the vacancy of the position of a lecturer. The site-visit showed that the selections conducted according to this procedure are very rarely competitive (the principle of one candidate for one position works).

The procedures on the selection of the teaching staff, head of the chair and the dean do not express the peculiarities of the institution clearly and in a certain way. The role of the dean of the faculty and head of the chair, their function of attracting, encouraging and promoting the best staff of the faculty is not emphasized, which would somehow express the commitment of ArSU to align the human resources with the strategic goals, which is mentioned in the strategic plan of the University.
At the same time, it should be noted that in terms of attracting the best staff, the University has objective difficulties, first of all, because it is far from the capital, thus not being able to respond to the staff offer.

The teaching component prevails in the educational-methodological workload of the teaching staff of ArSU, instead the research component is weakly expressed. The salaries of ArSU lecturers are comparable to the average salaries of RA universities, however, in the conditions of the current high educational workload (professor's workload is 700-750 hours, associate professor's workload is 750-800 hours, senior lecturer's workload is 800-850 hours, lecturer's workload is 850-900 hours, assistant's workload is 900-950 hours) they are obviously not enough to carry out scientific-pedagogical activities effectively. However, during the site-visit, the lecturers showed high motivation.

5.2 The requirements for qualifications of teaching staff per academic program are comprehensively stated.

Capacity building action on this criterion is planned in ArSU 2019-2023 strategic plan *to improve the criteria and processes for the placement of the lecturer defining the requirements for the professional qualities of the teaching staff, according to the learning outcomes of the academic program (objective 1.4, action 2).* According to the time-schedule of the strategic plan, this operation was planned to be carried out by the end of 2019.

As it was mentioned, the description of the positions of the teaching staff and the requirements for the candidates are given in the procedure of competitive selection and placement of positions of the ArSU teaching staff. It should be noted that these requirements are of a general nature. The study of descriptions of the academic programs showed that there are no specific requirements for the

professional qualities of the lecturers. In the "Resource assurance" section of the packages of academic programs it is very briefly presented that there is a teaching staff with the necessary scientific and methodological qualities for the implementation of the educational program.

The number of lecturers of the chairs providing the educational programs is mentioned as well as their distribution according to the scientific degree and title. Despite this circumstance, it became obvious that the requirements for the professional qualities of the newly hired lecturers are defined and checked in a working order. This applies both to the traditional ways of organizing the professional growth of PhD students and to the interviews with new lecturers. It became clear from the site-visit that introduction of the requirements for the professional qualities of the lecturers in the educational programs has been delayed until 2020 because of the epidemic, and then because of the difficulties caused by the war. It became clear that there is enough potential in the University to carry out this action, but there is also a need for methodological support and guidance.

The expert visit showed that there is a lack of a foreign language proficiency and digital skills among the lecturers. At the same time, the training for the lecturers for the use of Google Classroom toolkit during the months of distance learning because of the epidemic has shown that they are ready to easily master the required digital skills. The study of the norms of academic and methodological workload of the lecturers showed that the time for scientific-research works in the workload is not defined yet.

5.3 The Institution has well established policies and procedures for the periodic evaluation of the teaching staff.

The policy of regular evaluation of lecturers at Artsakh State University is implemented through a number of formal and informal mechanisms.

The first possible formal mechanism is the competitive selection of lecturers, which, in fact, evaluates the performance of lecturers in the field of their scientific and pedagogical activities on a periodic basis of one, three or five years. Evaluation by this mechanism is a multi-stage process: registration of vacancies, announcement of competitions, registration of candidates, study of applications and permission for competition, preliminary evaluation at the session of the chair, election at the faculty council and approval by the Scientific Council of the University. As mentioned above, this assessment mechanism focuses primarily on the input criteria of teachers' skills. It is noteworthy that ArSU has not yet analyzed the effectiveness of this mechanism.

The second possible formal mechanism is the survey carried out among student to assess the scientific-pedagogical activity and moral qualities of the lecturers. The effectiveness of this evaluation mechanism is conditioned by the fact that the survey results are used during the competitive selection of the teaching staff, the lecturers that do not meet the established threshold are not allowed to participate in the competition. However, a complete analysis of the effectiveness of this mechanism has not been performed. Focus groups are not regularly organized at the University to verify the results of student surveys. Instead, those in charge of the educational process pursue the approach of discussing the identified problems with the lecturers and students.

Though the SER states that the results of student surveys are used to facilitate self-analysis of the teaching staff, to promote the improvement of their teaching approaches and teaching methods, to foster work placement, promotion, distribution of workload, early termination or extension of employment contract. This proves that there are such assessment mechanisms in ArSU as lecturers' self-analysis and their assessment by the distribution of workload. However, there were no

documented versions of lecturers' self-analysis. During the site-visit, it was not clear what formal processes of self-analysis exist in the University.

Another formal mechanism for evaluating lecturers may be the regulation for additional payment of the lecturers at Artsakh State University, which was approved in 2018 but has not yet been implemented due to lack of financial resources.

Informal mechanisms of teacher evaluation are the class observations, which are carried out according to the pre-defined schedule, the results are discussed in the sessions of the chair. It should be noted that the results of the classe observations and the problems revealed during them are not documented at the University in order to clearly identify the problems.

There is no evaluation of courses at ArSU based on the criteria of determining the degree of achievement of course learning outcomes, revealing the degree of inefficiency of teaching, learning and other criteria.

There are no mechanisms for self-evaluation and peer-review of lecturers in ArSU. There is no clear policy at the University on the mentorship of young lecturers, which happens more by force of tradition.

5.4 The Institution promotes professional development for the teaching staff in accordance to the needs outlined during regular evaluations (both internal and external).

The improvement of lecturers is embedded in ArSU strategic plan. In this regard, the University plans to revise the program for the enhancement of qualification of lecturers, to organize trainings for lecturers aimed at mastering new educational technologies, interactive teaching methods, development and mastering of e-learning courses. The University continuously conducts trainings within the framework of the current program for the enhancement of qualification of lecturers. It should be noted, however, that according to the report on the implementation of the 2012-2017 program for the enhancement of qualifications of ArSU lecturers, courses on English language are mainly highlighted within the framework of the program.

As it was already mentioned, in 2020 the coronavirus epidemic led to the launch of the \Google Classroom platform, within the framework of which a large number of lecturers were trained.

It became clear from the site-visit that the University has started to organize trainings in the fields of development of learning-outcome based academic programs and methodology of outcome-based assessment. This process is coordinated by ArSU Quality Assurance Center. Here, however, the scope and effectiveness of training varies from faculty to faculty or from chair to chair, it matters who in the middle management is responsible for the process.

The site-visit showed that there is a need for computer skills, pedagogical skills, general research skills, current problems of different professions, innovative teaching approaches and trainings in other areas. The reasons for the severity of the problem are first of all objectives because of the great distance from the capital (in terms of the opportunity to participate in training programs of other universities), lack of funds, and secondly, the lack of a programmatic approach to the problem (study of the experience of other universities, development of programs, etc.). On the other hand, it is noteworthy that there is some advanced teaching experience in the University, but not enough efforts are made to transfer and disseminate it.

5.5 The Institution ensures that there is a permanent staff for the stable provision of the academic programs.

Artsakh State University is more than concerned with the stability of the teaching staff, as it is difficult to provide the best dynamic flow, first of all being at a great distance from the capital Yerevan (where most of the RA universities are concentrated).

The categories of professor, associate professor, senior lecturer, lecturer and assistant are defined in Artsakh State University, each of which assumes both a special amount of educational and methodological workload, as well as lists of permissible functions. The study of the documents showed that the annual rate of the category change is normal. The data of 2015-2018 academic years show that about half of the main lecturers working at ArSU have a scientific degree and title. The average age of the main teaching staff is 50, while that of new recruits is 44-45.

The main teaching staff, passing a competition, get the opportunity to hold office for up to five years. A one-year employment contract is signed with lecturers working on a non-permanent basis. The system of invited lecturers and lecturers on an hourly-paid basis ensures the provision of educational programs with narrow specialization and specialists with practical skills.

The staffing of the teaching staff with young lecturers takes place mainly by hiring the best graduates in their native university. The site-visit showed that ArSU, however, has some problems with the teaching staff reserve, which is conditioned both by the objective restrictions on staff flow and by low salaries. In the absence of lecturers, problems sometimes arise in replacing them, especially when it comes to lecturers who take special courses of a more practical nature.

5.6 There are set policies and procedures for the staff promotion.

From the observation of SER and the site-visit it became clear that though ArSU does not have a clearly developed policy and procedure of mentoring the young lecturers, it is implemented in an informal way. The heads of the chairs, professors and experienced associate professors direct the post-graduate students and applicants in both scientific and teaching-methodological activities in the following ways:

- involving PhD students and applicants in their courses and transferring the teaching methods;
- identifying the performance benefits of PhD students and applicants through class observations, encouraging them and discussing the problems and the ways to correct them;
- involving the PhD students and applicants in the sessions of the chairs, discussing with them the directions of the scientific-research and teaching-methodological activity of the chairs as well as the academic programs.

According to the SER, the factors contributing to the professional development of the University's teaching staff are the definition of research requirements for the categories, some resources for foreign business trips, as well as rewards of the well-performing teaching staff with additional payment, medals, certificates of honors and other forms of encouragement with the guarantee by the chair and the faculty. Although the University has developed and adopted a regulation on the additional payment of lecturers for their research and teaching-methodological activities, in fact, it is not yet in force due to lack of funds. ArSU means of encouraging lecturers to be published in impact factor journals and to participate in foreign conferences are also very limited.

The site-visit showed that ArSU encourages its best graduates to apply for tertiary education (PhD studies) and start a scientific-pedagogical work.

5.7 The Institution has necessary administrative and support staffs to achieve the strategic goals.

As of 2018-2019 academic year, the number of administrative staff of Artsakh State University was about 90, the number of support staff was about 45. In recent years, the quantitative changes in the structural, administrative and support staff of the University have been conditioned by the changes taking place in the academic programs and the logic of their improvement.

In addition to the central administrative units, the dean, the head of the chair (the latter, in addition to scientific-pedagogical functions, also performs administrative work), the methodologist of the faculty, the assistant of the head of the chair and the officer perform the functions of organizing and supporting educational activities at the faculty level. The head of the chair is responsible for the quality, content, control, benchmarking, labor market relations, organization of research programs within the framework of the academic programs and the efficiency of the activities of the head of the chair depends on the quality of the coordination function by the dean. Organization of trainings, execution of reports, approval of rules and regulations and other organizational functions are coordinated by the Dean. The functions of administrative and support staffs are defined by the relevant internal legal acts.

It became clear from the site-visit that there is a tendency to recruit young people with knowledge of foreign languages and computer skills as members of support staff. However, the lack of clear definition of the grounds for evaluating the activities of the officials of administrative and support staffs and almost absence of mechanisms (which, by the way, is realized by the University), the non-disclosure of their objective needs do not allow to develop the policy of professional development of those employees.

Considerations:

Artsakh State University has a documented policy of selecting lecturers, which does not provide the best competitive selection process, however can serve as a basis for organizing the teaching staff recruitment process according to criteria and improving it in the future by creating its normative basis, and in some cases applying it. Though criteria (number of published scientific and teaching-methodological works, work experience, etc.) are fixed for the selection and evaluation of the teaching staff, which ensures the objectivity of the processes, their purely input nature makes those processes more formal. The issue of educational workload and especially its distribution in ArSU (when the classroom component is predominant in the teachers' workload and the research component is weak) is somewhat problematic in the sense that in the current conditions of low salaries the conscientious lecturer is deprived of the opportunity to work on his professional development. In order to ensure the acquisition of the program learning outcomes, the lecturer has to do some individual work with the students, and with a large number of students, it is impossible to work effectively with a large weekly classroom load.

However, judging by the high motivation of the lecturers, the fact that they have the necessary qualifications for the courses they teach and other circumstances, the expert panel finds that the lecturers have the necessary skills and competences to ensure the acquisition of program learning outcomes.

The expert pane positively assesses the fact that professional requirements are presented to the lecturers in ArSU, which are fixed in the relevant procedure. However, the fact that professional skills derived from the program learning outcomes are not defined in the academic programs does not allow the process of selection and evaluation of lecturers to be taken out of formal forms and frameworks and

to be carried out based on the mentioned learning outcomes. From this point of view, the University would have benefited if the academic programs had included in particular requirements for the connection of research with education, the implementation of which would significantly ensure the full achievement of learning outcomes.

The expert panel considers positive the fact that ArSU has a system of student surveys for evaluating the lecturers, taking into account the practice that the results of surveys are used during the competitive selection of lecturers and the composition of employment contracts. On the other hand, the absence or severe scarcity of focus groups verifying the quantitative data of these surveys may endanger their credibility or prevent them from identifying issues more deeply. Conducting class observations is important in improving the quality and effectiveness of teaching. Considering the fact that the class observations are a tradition of decades at ArSU, nevertheless, the lack of documentation of their results and analyzes deprives the University of the opportunity to show a systematic approach to the issues raised in through those class observations. Even understanding the difficulties of introducing self-assessment and peer review systems, we believe that this investment will nevertheless complete the assessment of lecturers and will more clearly identify the existing problems.

The expert panel positively assesses the fact that an academic program for raising the qualification of lecturers on a credit basis has been introduced in ArSU. Training courses for teaching English, of course, will enable lecturers to continuously improve their research results, to be published in foreign journals, to assign more materials to students in a foreign language, and so on. However, the weakness of other components of the program - active and innovative teaching, computer skills, mastery of research methods in teaching, etc., slows down improvement. From this point of view, it is quite encouraging that the elements of the Google Classroom platform were mastered in a short period of time, which can also have a positive psychological impact, pushing teachers into new stages of innovative teaching.

Despite the objective difficulties, Artsakh State University is able to ensure the stability of the teaching staff. The positive moral and psychological atmosphere in the University, giving operative solutions to the raised issues and the motivation of the students are circumstances that contribute to that. Some issues related to the quality of the personnel reserve (which may be the result of both low salaries and being far from the Yerevan teaching community) may endanger the quality of education; and in this regard, and may set the demands to improve distance education at ArSU.

Considering the positive circumstances that ArSU encourages its best graduates to stay and work at the University, that ArSU takes financial and other types of incentives in case of quality performance, that promotes lecturers to obtain scientific degrees and title, the expert panel, however, finds that the lack of a clear policy for the professional development of lecturers does not put this process in a targetted direction, does not make it systematic, measurable and predictable. From this point of view, it would be beneficial to start the practice of mentoring new lecturers, to turn it into a stable tradition during those years.

Sufficient number of administrative and support staffs at ArSU mainly ensures the normal educational process and contributes to the implementation of academic programs. However, some issues related to performance appraisal, optimization and clarification of functions, managerial-organizational skills and accountability can pose risks in terms of ensuring the acquisition of program learning outcomes as a whole.

SUMMARY: Given that there is a good teaching staff who are motivated, who are constantly improving their skills, the University replenishes its teaching staff using its alumni base, narrow professional requirements are informally deinfed in the academic programs by the heads of the chairs, there is a course for the professional development of the teaching staff, foreign language improvement works are carried out regularly, lecturers are open to make changes, students are satisfied with the high quality of the teaching staff, practitioners of the field teach at ArSU, the expert panel finds that to achieve the mission of ArSU the institution is provided with teaching and support staffs with the necessary professional qualities.

CONCLUSION: *The compliance of the institution's institutional capacities with the requirements of criterion 5 is satisfactory.*

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To define mechanisms for self-assessment and peer-review of the lecturers.
- To review the content of the surveys for the evaluation of students' satisfaction with the teaching process by reformulating the questions in a way to reveal problems, to verify the results of surveys through focus groups and in-depth interviews.
- To define requirements for the professional knowledge (paying attention to the interdisciplinary professions), skills and competences of the lecturers.

VI. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

CRITERION: The Institution ensures the implementation of research activity and the link of the research with teaching and learning.

FINDINGS
6.1 The Institution has a clear strategy promoting its research interests and ambitions.

Research activity is defined as a priority direction in ArSU 2019-2023 strategic plan. It is presented in the framework of ArSU mission, as well as within the goals and objectives, with appropriate implementation steps. In particular, the creation of a possible list of research topics in the priority directions of sustainable development of Artsakh, ensuring the involvement of postgraduate and PhD students in research projects, increasing the efficiency of scientific publications, increasing the participation of ArSU researchers in national, RA and international scientific programs and grants projects are defined as ambitions in the strategic plan of ArSU.

The implementation plan of ArSU 2019-2023 strategic plan indicates the measures aimed at improving the research activity and expected results.

ArSU has taken some steps for the goals set out in the strategic plan, in particular, a database of students' research topics has been created and a Course on Research Planning and Methods has been introduced in the MA program.

However, during the site-visit it became clear that there is no research policy, no clear definition of research priorities, or mechanisms to support the creation of high-quality research products. As for the possible list of research topics in the priority directions of sustainable development of Artsakh, the presented list reflects the scope of research interests of individual researchers of the institution or specific departments.

In recent years, funding for science at ArSU has increased. If the 2018 expenditure estimate is 2,500,000 for scientific work, then the 2018-2019 estimate is 7,500,000. [9]

6.2 The Institution has a long-term strategy and med term and short-term programs that address its research interests and ambitions.

ArSU 2019-2023 strategic plan presents the long-term planning strategy of the research sphere, for the implementation of which a time-schedule has been developed. During the visit it became clear that most of the defined works are still in progress.

Short-term programs are implemented, which are presented in the annual research plans of the chairs. However, the annual plans of the chairs are not mainly based on the strategic plan of the University or the specific faculty but reflect the research interests of individual lecturers. However, it should be noted that in some chairs systematic researches are also carried out, for example, Chair of Armenian Langauge after S. Abrahamyan (Artsakh Ethnography, Dialectology), History and Political Science (History of Artsakh Villages), in which students are actively involved within the framework of their internship or individual work. In general, research on the problems of Artsakh is carried out in the field of humanities, and the natural sciences are more passive in this regard. As a positive development in this field can be mentioned the establishment of a Laboratory of Biology in September 2018 within the framework of the "Modernization of Biology in Artsakh" program presented by the Chair of Biology of ArSU.

Part of the research development is the publication of the "Scientific Bulletin of Artsakh State University" twice a year in two separate volumes ("Social Sciences", "Natural Sciences"). It is a positive fact that conferences are organized at the University, including international conferences, in which students and teaching staff actively participate. Students and lecturers also participate in conferences organized in RA universities.

Despite the diverse work done, there is generally a lack of mechanisms to guide, coordinate, and internationalize research, and med- and long-term strategies based on long-term strategy.

6.3 The Institution ensures the implementation of research and its development through sound policies and procedures.

Several orders and regulations have been developed at the institution to develop the conduction of research, in particular, the regulation for publishing scientific, methodological and other literature of ArSU, the regulation for publishing ArSU scientific bulletin, the regulation on academic honesty and dishonesty. It should be noted that the existing regulations do not define the policy of development of ArSU research direction, which would mark the development of the University as a result of the research.

The institution encourages the research activities of the teaching staff by publishing their scientific articles, monographs or educational-methodical manuals. The institution has also established a procedure for competitive selection and placement of positions of the teaching staff, in which the research component is also highlighted.

As a positive fact, it should be noted that there are several centers in the institution: the Center for Armenian Studies, the Psychological Center, the Legal Clinic. However, the Psychological Center

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[9] The text was edited as a result of the observations made by the University.

and the Legal Clinic mainly carry out consulting work, and the research field is not a significant part of their activities.

In general, there is no close cooperation between the centers operating in the institution and the faculties in terms of conducting interdisciplinary research. There is some interconnectedness between the chairs of the same faculty, but it is not developed either.

Although since 2017 there has been some positive progress in obtaining grants, no systemic approach or clear mechanisms have been introduced. Grants are mainly received only from the Artsakh Republican Committee of Science; they have limited funding of up to 60,000 drams. Accordingly, a small number (3-4) of students (PhD students and applicants) are involved in research. There are no grants from the RA State Committee of Science or from abroad in this region.

Some progress has been made in increasing the efficiency of scientific publishing. Work has been done to improve the quality of scientific journals published at the university, as well as to publish valuable and quality works of university lecturers, scientists, to promote textbook-making activities, and to publish up-to-date scientific monographs.

6.4 The Institution emphasizes internationalization of its research.

In 2019-2023 strategic plan, the institution emphasizes the internationalization of research activities through several steps.

The teaching staff of ArSU is quite active in terms of publishing articles in the University periodical. However, it should be noted that in recent years, the number of publications of university lecturers in international journals has decreased. In 2018-2019 only 6 works have been published abroad, in less internationally renowned periodicals. This fact is substantiated in the self-analysis of the institutional capacity of ArSU by the fact that so far the publications in the international journals have not been taken into account in the evaluation of the teaching staff. There is no data on the index of citations of scientific works published in international journals.

In addition, the number of articles published of ArSU teaching staff with researchers or scholars of RA or foreign universities is very limited (in this term the Chair of Biology can be distinguished)[10], there are no joint research programs, though the University has contracts with several foreign universities in Armenia.

6.5 The Institution has well established mechanisms for linking research with teaching.

The creation of educational and educational- methodical manuals is encouraged in ArSU. During the site-visit, it became clear that the teaching staff is quite active in compiling such manuals. In all the departments there were textbooks and manuals compiled by the lecturers of ArSU, which are used in the provided courses.

One of the mechanisms of interconnection of research activities and educational process in ArSU is the performance of individual work by students in the courses included in all academic programs, during which students perform analytical work. However, there are no clear mechanisms at the institution for evaluating the effectiveness of individual work; they are still based on the oral

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[10] The text was edited as a result of the observations made by the University.

observations of the lecturers. As a result of the study, it became clear that the research-analytical part is under-represented in individual works.

Another mechanism is the research done by students in the framework of a final paper or master's thesis. Students have the opportunity to suggest their favorite topic. ArSU QA Center urges that the topics are not repeated, taking into account the data of at least the last three years. However, the review of the master's theses during the site-visit showed that some of them are descriptive and the research part is incomplete.

Considerations:

The expert panel positively assesses that ArSU is making efforts for the development of the research direction. However, although research is officially a priority in the strategic plan, it is one of the least developed areas of ArSU activity. A clear definition of the research strategy and research priorities will contribute to the balanced development of the field, besides, it will outline the development of the University in the coming years, and the development and implementation of clear research implementation mechanisms will support the creation of high quality research products.

In order to promote the involvement of ArSU students in research work, the course on Research Planning has been introduced, students carry out individual work within all subjects. It can be assumed that the mentioned works can contribute to the development of students' research work, development of critical and analytical thinking skills, stimulate the interest of a certain circle of students in scientific and research works. If appropriate conditions are provided by the institution, such as foreign language courses, a surcharge for research, it is possible to create a team of young scientists who can conduct interdisciplinary research, study the problems of Artsakh and later internationalize it.

If appropriate conditions are provided by the institution, such as foreign language courses, an additional payment for research, it is possible to create a team of young scientists who can conduct interdisciplinary research, study the problems of Artsakh and later internationalize it.

The work done to foster the efficiency of scientific publishing activities aimed at promoting the research work of the teaching staff can also be assessed positively. The research works are also emphasized in the procedure of competitive selection of the teaching staff.

On the other hand, as a result of the discussion of the SER on institutional capacity of ArSU and as a result of the site-visit, a number of issues were raised. Most of them are related to the feasibility of the research goals set in the strategic plan for 2019-2021, the lack of coordinated work on the issues set for their implementation, the absence of developed policy and procedures, the clear list of scientific directions related to the problems of Artsakh. The research work is decentralized, mainly reflecting the research preferences of individual lecturers, with the exception of the work of several chairs and the Center for Armenian Studies, which are somewhat coordinated. No interdisciplinary research is carried out at the institution; there are no mechanisms for internationalization of research. In fact, no project involving interdisciplinary research teams is being implemented. The strategic goals in this direction have not been cascaded down to the level of faculties and chairs, their implementation is not coordinated at the University level. It seems that the implemented projects depend on the initiative of individual researchers; there are no comprehensive research plans. All of this hinders the achievement of the defined goals and the motivation of the lecturers to do research.

There are several research projects in ArSU, but they do not meet the definition of scientific research, as they are expert services (for example, services provided by the Legal Clinic or Psychological Center). The publications made by the staff of ArSU are small and are published in local magazines. This is because lecturers are not really interested in research, as publications in international journals have not been taken into account in the evaluation of the teaching staff so far. It is unknown to what extent those publications are available to the public as information about references is not collected. The implementation of these works will contribute to the implementation of coordinated research activities in all areas.

This weak progress of ArSU in the field of research is conditioned by the fact that research is not sufficiently included in the teaching process. There are no institutions that will facilitate scientific research and technology transfer to business or industry.

Advances in research at the present stage of development require more valuable research and support for researchers, which can be in the form of individual promotion and financial support from the University.

SUMMARY: Taking into account that the organization and development processes of research in the University are carried out in an unsystematic way, research is mainly carried out on the individual initiative of lecturers, student participation in research is low, the research component in final papers and master's theses is weak, research directions are not clearly defined, the research component is given very few points within the stduents' assessment and it does not affect the overall assessment, in general, there is a problem of education being research-based, the objectives of the strategic plan are not specified, coordinated with the relevant research policy, there is no internationalization of the research, the expert panel finds that ArSU does not meet the requirements of Criterion 6.

CONCLUSION: *The compliance of the institution's institutional capacities with the requirements of criterion 6 is unsatisfactory.*

RECOMMENDATIONS:
- To develop a mechanism for the evaluation of the quality of conducted research.
- To create a platform promoting business-university research cooperation.
- To create a fund in order to support the implementation of research programs that are priority for ArSU.

VII. INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES

CRITERION: **The Institution has necessary resources to create learning environment and to effectively support the implementation of its stated mission and goals.**

FINDINGS

7.1. The Institution has an appropriate learning environment for the implementation of current academic programmes.

The University has 4 buildings and a dormitory attached to it. According to the SER the University has a library and 2 reading halls, one of which is a student reading hall (equipped with computers and internet), the other is a scientific one. Reading rooms can accommodate up to 39 readers at a time. The library is regularly replenished with the necessary literature. During the site-visit it

became clear that the library cooperates with different libraries of the Republic of Armenia for the replenishment of books. There is also a partnership with the Swiss Foundation within the framework of which ArSU obtained books for 3495000 AMD [11].

At present, modern literature in the field of science is scarce. Some electronic literature resources are available to students.

During the site-visit it became clear that a new building is being built in ArSU, where there will be natural science laboratories with new equipment, a modern library, which will serve the university staff, students and the public. Cooperation has been set with the Library of the American University in Armenia regarding the newly built library, which will provide access to international networks.

According to the SER, there are 7 laboratories and 6 computer classrooms in ArSU, but those laboratories are not equipped with modern equipment. The construction of a new building is planned to solve this problem.

There are two medical centers in ArSU, which are equipped with all the necessary first aid medicines, there is a patient register.

ArSU has a Legal clinic where people can turn to and get necessary concultancy from the lawyer. ArSU has also a Psychological Center which serves not only ArSU students but the larger public of Artsakh as well. There is also a pre-military training room in ArSU, which is equipped with the necessary equipment.

There is a printing house at ArSU which is equipped with several printing equipments, and the manuals developed in ArSU are printed in the printing house.

The institution also has a "Google Classroom" system, which gives students more access to course materials. The university has a large number of computers for courses and exams, but the computer base will also need to be updated in the near future.

7.2 The Institution provides appropriate financial resources with necessary equipment and facilities as needed to achieve its mission and goals.

According to the SER, most of the financial incomes of the institution consist of tuition fees (51.9%), state funding (42.6%) as well as other incomes (5.5%). Expenditures on research have tripled in the last two years.

Most of the financial expenses are allocated to the salary fund. However, the institution is trying to find other financial sources to improve resources. The newly built building will significantly improve the level of infrastructure. It should be noted that currently financial planning at the institution is not carried out according to the goals of the strategic plan.

7.3 The Institution has policy on financial distribution and capacity to sustain and ensure the integrity and continuity of the programmes offered at the Institution.

According to the 7th subpoint of the 7th provision of the Charter of ArSU, the University independently determines the staff list of all categories, carries out the selection, appointment, distribution and certification of employees, including regulations on staffing of scientific-pedagogical staff, heads of departments and scientific and educational units. The management of financial resources and their targeted distribution are based on the preparation of the estimate of the annual budget and control over the budget execution through the submission of reports. For the purpose of managing and

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[11] The text was edited as a result of the observations made by the University.

monitoring the implementation of the budget, the accounting department submits a quarterly report on the received revenues and expenditures, indicating the actual deviations as well.

However, it became clear from the expert analysis that there is no policy of allocating financial resources to ensure the implementation and continuity of the goals of the educational programs in ArSU.

7.4 he Institution's resource base supports the implementation of Institution's academic programmes and strategic plan, which promotes sustainability and continuous improvement of quality.

According to the SER, the resource planning and distribution in ArSU is carried out according to the objectives envisaged in the strategic plan. The distribution of the academic workload of the teaching staff is carried out at the end of the academic year. Each chair presents to the Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs the workload for the lecturers of the chair, which serves as a basis for calculating their salaries and planning the resources allocated to the salary in the budget.

Classroom allocation and planning are carried out by the faculties at the beginning of the academic year, based on the number of students studying in each specialty.

7.5 The Institution has a sound policy and procedure to manage information and documentation.

According to the SER dissemination of information through the web page significantly contributes to the enhancement of the awareness of stakeholders. The website publishes information on the activities of the governing bodies, structure, reports, admissions, faculties, current news, Students' Council and Students' Scientific Union.

In the conditions of COVID19 epidemic, ArSU managed to introduce the "Google Classroom" system, to train the teaching staff in a short time to use that system. The introduced system was able to ensure the uninterrupted work of the institution in the conditions of online education. The expert visit showed that the teaching staff and students positively evaluate the experience of using the "Google Classroom" system. The institution's website also provides useful information, students can see class schedules, contact information of teaching and support staffs as wellas the news of ArSU.

The institution has approved the procedure for submitting proposals, submitting complaints and appeals, but applications are accepted only on paper.

7.6 The Institution creates safe and secure environment through health and safety mechanisms taking into account the students with special needs.

From the SER and site-visit it became clear that at present the University is not able to meet the needs of students with special needs. According to the management of the institution, the newly built building will provide such opportunities.

There are two medical centers in the institution, which are equipped with the necessary items for first aid. Both staff and students are free to use the services of the medical center. Surveys carried out among the stakeholders show that 69.2% of students are satisfied with the services of the medical center. There is also a civic defence headquarters in the institution, there are evacuation schemes and fire extinguishers on the floors. Surveys show that 52.6% of students are satisfied with the security service.

According to the SER, the University does not have a centralized food organization system, it is implemented by individual entrepreneurs on a lease basis, and there are two of them, whose sanitary-hygienic condition is controlled by the University. These problems will be completely solved in the renovated building of the University.

7.7 The Institution has special mechanisms in place for the evaluation of the effectiveness, applicability and availability of resources given to the teaching staff and learners.

QA Center regularly conducts surveys to assess the satisfaction with resources. Examples include surveys conducted to assess the quality of medical unit and security services. However, at the moment, the results of those surveys are not always analyzed in depth. There are few examples of solving the problems identified on the basis of survey results.

It should be noted that there are no grounds for informing ArSU stakeholders about the results of surveys conducted for the assessment of satisfaction with resources. Internal stakeholders are not informed about the steps planned by the University to solve the problems mentioned by them in the questionnaires.

Considerations:

The expert panel positively assesses the fact that there are appropriate educational buildings in ArSU, in which there are corresponding educational laboratories and a library. However, the construction of a new building, the equipping of laboratories and libraries will contribute to the more effective implementation of learning.

It is positive that the "Google Classroom" system has been introduced in the University conditioned by the epidemic, which has given students more access to the course materials.

The financial resources of the University are formed mainly from tuition fees. According to the expert panel the decrease in the number of students, the small variety of income sources (more than half of the income consists of tuition fees and 42% are subsidized from the state budget) endanger the long-term financial stability.

The expert panel positively assesses the fact that the University has a stable system of disseminating information and raising the awareness of stakeholders. The university also has an internal network, but no modern systems are used to organize electronic document circulation. Electronic documentation system will increase the efficiency of internal document management.

It is positive that the QA Center regularly conducts surveys to verify the satisfaction with the resource base, but there are no elaborated mechanisms to inform the stakeholders about the results of the resource satisfaction surveys of ArSU, which may endanger the implementation of improvements based on the identified problems.

The expert panel considers it necessary to make planing for resource updates, which will allow estimating the necessary financial expenses.

SUMMERY: Taking into account that the learning environment at ArSU is generally efficient, the available resources contribute to the effective implementation of the academic programs, there is a library at ArSU, the library is regularly replenished with the necessary literature by both international partners and local partners, a new building is being constructed at ArSU, where both the natural science laboratories and the modern library will be equipped, the policy of distribution of financial resources is carried out with bottom up approach, the expert panel finds that the institution has the necessary resources for the creation of an effective learning environment and for the efficient implementation defined mission and goals.

CONLCUSION: *The compliance of the institution's institutional capacities with the requirements of criterion 7 is satisfactory.*

Recommendations:
- To develop a procedure on the regular assessment of educational infrastructure.
- To adjust the infrastructure to the people with special needs.
- To ensure students' access to electronic database and international bibliographic databases.

VIII. SOCIETAL RESPONSIBILITY

CRITERION: The Institution is accountable to the government and society for the education it offers and the resources it uses as well as for the research it conducts.

FINDINGS

8.1 The Institution has clear policy on accountability.

According to SER the process of ArSU accountability is coordinated by the following laws of the Republic of Artsakh: Law on Education, Law on Higher and Postgraduate Education, Law on State Non-Commercial Organizations, by a number of decrees of the Government of Artsakh Republic, as well as by the Charter of ArSU. The higher giverning body is ArSU Board. Rector's annual reports are presented in the sessions of ArSU Board. All the structural units present reports according to the given formats and all those reports are summerized in one document in the form of a report for the academic year.

Financial report which is developed by the Accounting department is also included in the annual report. It is available on the official web-site of the University.

As it is mentioned in the SER, the system of accountability of faculties is defined by the Charter of ArSU and other legal acts. The deans present the reports to the Big Board and the heads of other structural units present the reports to the Scientific Council.

Besides the reports presented to ArSU Board, according to the defined order the University presents reports also to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Artsakh, to The Tax Service of Artsakh, to Statistical Service and other state agencies.

Enhancement of the accountability of the University is set as a strategic priority however the study of reports revealed that reports are not presented according to strategic goals. [12]The study of reports showed that they are rather extensive, they present the information and facts about the University however there are less analysis, problems are not revealed, there are no final conclusions or comparison with action plan. The reasons for the unfilfilled activities are not analysed.

8.2 The Institution ensures transparency of its procedures and processes and makes them publicly available.

ArSU has developed regulations for the organization of public events and dissemination of information through which public activities are coordinated.

Since 2018 the Department of Public Relations and Media has become a separate department the aim of which is to enhance the positive ranking of the University. The department presents annual report about the implemented PR activities. However, during the site-visit it became clear that presice PR policy is not developed.

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[12] The text was edited as a result of the observations made by the University.

One of the main tools for the assurance of transparency of activities is ArSU official web-site (www.asu.am) and facebook page. In section "News" of the web-site information about the public events and activities carried out at the University is published. ArSU annual reports, SER, strategic plan, electronic versions of scientific journals are available on ArSU official web-site. Besides, videos about the life at the University are also put on the web-site. During the admission period the section "Applicant" is updated every day. Information about the University's everyday life as well as all the events is published on the official web-site of ArSU as well as on facebook page of the University. However academic programs are missing on the web-site and legal acts are summed up in one comprehensive document.

The official web-site is available in English and Russian as well however in both Russian adn English versions of the web-site information about the UNiversity and especially its structural units is very limited and in most sections of the web-site content-wise material is missing.

According to SER, ArSU has "Artsakh University" newspaper (it has been published since 1993) which touches upon educational, scientific, social and cultural activities of the University. It is disseminated among the internal and external stakeholders as well as among other interested organizations. During the site-visit it turned out that coditioned by the political and financial situation the number of publications of the newspaper was reduced.

One of the mechanisms of ensuring the transparency of processes is close cooperation with mass media. The University applies policy on supporting professional activities of journalists.

It should also be mentioned that there is no policy on the development of public relations ArSU.

8.3 The Institution has sustainable feedback mechanisms for establishing contacts with society.

Development of public relations and active involvement of the University in public projects is one of the most important objectives of the Strategic plan. According to SER, the University actively cooperates with mass media, TV programs and press conferences are orgniazed wth the participation of ArSU management and teaching staff. The Department of Information and Public Relations conducts daily monitoring of press based on the analysis of which evaluation and review of current policy is carried out.

ArSU official web-site and active usage of official pages on social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Google +, Instagram) promote development of public relations. There is a section of "Question and Answer" on the web-site where the visitors can get answers to their questions within a day. Quick responces are given also through official mail of the University (rector.am, lratu.asu@mail.ru)

During the site-visit it turned out that the Department of Information and Public Relations conducts surveys among public for gathering opinions about the university, its official web-site and activities. However, analysis of such data has not been carried out.

8.4 The Institution has mechanisms that ensure knowledge /value/ transfer to the society.

Being the center of creating scientific thinking of the republic, ArSU gives importance to the enhancement of educational and scientific-cultural level of the society. According to the data presented in the SER, trainings for the teaching staff are always organized. Preparatory courses and consultacy services are organized for applicants with the aim of professional orientation.

During the site-visit it turned out that one of the applicable mechanisms of transferring knowledge to society is visit to public schools, military units and orphanages. Eductional events are organized and are illustrated and published on the official web-site of ArSU.

Electronic versions of scientific works are available on the web-site. University library is open not only for University staff and students.

The expert panel got aware that in the building that is being reconstructed it is envisaged to have also a canteen, sports and meeting halls that will be available for public at large.

Inside the University there is a Psychological Center and Legal Clinic that provide free of charge consultancy to the citizens of the Republic of Artsakh. Information about the services is disseminated through newspaper, radio and TV. Evaluation of the service results is carried out through the comparison of the number of users annualy.

It should be mentioned that there is no evidence about the transfer of knowledge in the form of a expert opinion to the sphere of agriculture or business. This is probably conditioned by the low level of conduction of scientific research. There is no information to what extant suggestion of final papers are presented by the representatives of business and how they are used to solve a concrete issue of the sphere.

Considerations:

The expert panel is positive about the fact that there is bottom-up and top-down system of accountability at ArSU. It is praiseworthy that nearly all the structural units form their reports according to the planned activities and they present their report to respective councils for discussion. At the same time the expert panel mentioned that in order to improve the effectiveness of organization of the works, improvement of accountability mechanism and investment of analytical approach will contribute to the identification of problems, analysis of the reasons for the unfulfilled work and introduction of the culture of continuous improvement at the University.

It is a positive fact that ArSU web-site and facebook page are operating actively where activities of the University are published, ArSU main documents are available to the public, stakeholders have the opportunity of getting feedback through the official web-site and facebook page.

Hovewer application of English and Russian versions of the web-site as well as availability of the main documents in foreign languages will give an opportunity to enhance the visibility of the University on international level as well as will foster reinforcement of external relations. It should also be mentioned that in the Armenian version of the web-site academic programs are missing. The existance of the academic programs will contribute to the raise of awareness among the applicants.

The expert panel gives much importance and positively assesses the activities of ArSU towards transfer of knowledge. ArSU Legal Clinic, Psychological Center, trainings for school teachers, visits to military units contribute to the raise of awareness about ArSU activity among the society as well as to the transfer of knowledge among the society at large.

SUMMARY: Taking into consideration that ArSU has a great experience of accountability, accountability is ensured in all the levels, both interal and external, the first experience of critisims are slef-evaluation reports, the University realizes the investment of reports with this approach, there is a web-site and facebook page, that are quite actively operating, all the internal activities are illustrated, ArSU policy and prodecures are available to the public through the web-site, the web-site ensures

feedback, there are mechanisms of transferring knowledge to the society, e.g. trainings for school teachers, there is a Psychological Center and a Legal Clinic that provide free of charge services to the society, the expert panel finds that ArSU meets the requirements of the criterion.

CONCLUSION: *The compliance of the institution's institutional capacities with the requirements of criterion 8 is satisfactory.*

Recommendations:

- To carry on the improvement of mechanisms of transferring knowledge to the society contributing to the enhancement of awareness of ArSU activities to society at large.

IX. EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND INTERNATIONALIZATION

CRITERION: The Institution promotes experience exchange and enhancement through its sound external relations practices, thus promoting internationalization of the Institution.

FINDINGS

9.1 The Institution promotes its external relations through sound policies and procedures aimed at creating an environment conducive to experience exchange and enhancement and internationalization.

ArSU internationalization goals are stipulated in ArSU 2019-2023 strategic plan. Particularly, ArSU strives to ensure comprehensive development of University external relations and promote internationalization of ArSU activities. As priority directions enlargement and diversification of University international relations, promotion of continous activities on institutional and program levels with foreign universities and higher education international organizations, enlargement of university international scientific cooperation and diversification of cooperation with public organizations are mentioned.

Strategy on external relations and internationalization is developed, where ArSU's priorities and necessary steps for this sphere are defined, however clearly tangible indicators for the evaluation of results of the mentioned actions are missing in this document. Every year ArSU Vice-Rector on Science and International Cooperation presents annual report on the carried out activities. During the study it became clear that in those reports mostly facts about the carried out activities are mentioned but analysis of results and obstacles are not presented.

After the expert panel analysis it became clear that ArSU constantly improves its relations with different organizations, educational institutions of the Republic Artsakh and the Republic of Armenia as a result of which students get the opportunity to have trainings, exchange of experience of the teaching staff is organized, specialists from RA educational institutions give lectures in ArSU.

ArSU constantly cooperates with schools of the Republic of Artsakh for professional orientation, for the organization of joint intellectual, sports and cultural activities for students and school children.

For the development of internationalization ArSU cooperates with education institutions of non-recognized states and exchanges experiences, ArSU tries to use the potential of the Diaspora to activate the mobility of students and teaching staff.

Activities towards internationalization are carried out through the Ministry of Extenal Relations of Artsakh. It should be mentioned that the development of internationalization is still a challenge for ArSU.

9.2 The Institution's external relations infrastructure ensures regulated process.

Since September 2018 the Department of Science, PhD studies and International Cooperation has been operating at ArSU the functions of which were previously implemented by the Department of University Education Quality and International Cooperation. The Department is accountable to the Vice-Rector on Science and International Cooperation.The Department has the following staff members: Head of the Department, 1 methodist, 1 inspector and 1 specialist of international cooperation.

According to its charter, the Department coordinates the processes on awareness of international scientific-educational projects, grant projects and applications of scientific and educational projects suggested by foreign universities. In terms of research activity, the Department coordinates the organization of teachers from abroad and the issue of te publication of ArSU staff in international journals.

After studying defined goals and objectives of ArSU strategy on external relations and internationalization it can be stated that the Department of Science, PhD studies and intenational cooperation implements only small part of them and concrete actions towards the implementation of activities mentioned in the strategy are not envisaged.

9.3 The Institution effectively collaborates with local and international counterparts.

ArSU cooperates with about 45 RA and foreign universities based on contracts and memoranda. Based on the mentioned contracts as well as due to the efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Artsakh foreign lecturers are invited to ArSU to have lectures or to conduct seminars. However, this process is one-sided In order to solve the problem of ensuring mobility of teaching staff and students ArSU cooperates with RA universities and tries to organize mobility with the help of the universities of the RA.

Academic programs were benchmarked with similar academic programs of Khazakstan and Russia, several teaching and learning practices of the universities of Russia were studied and were adopted. A positive fact is the organization of international conferences and international camps whih gives an opportunity not only to present Artsakh and its cultural and historical heritage to foreign lecturers and students but also to help teaching staff and students of ArSU to improve their proficiency in English and to make contacts with foreign colleagues and students for future cooperation.

The cooperation with local organizations- schools, colleges, universities, state governing bodies of Artsakh, financial organizations and banks is limited in the organization of trainings and invitation of lectures from those organizations. The cooperation does not involve for example scientific-research sphere. In general, there is no policy on the analysis of current obstacles and implementation of activities towards internationalization.

9.4 The Institution ensures internal stakeholders' appropriate level of a foreign language to enhance efficiency of internationalization.

Within the framework of the program on the enhancement of qualifications of the teaching staff, obligatory trainings of foreign language for the teaching staff are organized as the management and the teaching staff of the University understand the importance of a foreign language proficiency

for the enhancement of the quality of education as well as or internationalization of scientific-research activities.

It is also stipulated in the strategic plan of ArSU that gradually the number of courses taught in a foreign language should be increased, the policy on communicating in more than one foreign language should be promoted at the University, etc. The requirement of knowing a foreign language was added as a mandatory requirement while recruiting for job.

According to the data of 2018 presented by the University, 46,1% of the teaching staff members know English and 100% know Russian. 36,2% of BA students and 48,6% of MA students know English. 39,3% of BA and 100% of MA students know Russian.

After the expert panel analysis it turned out that in spiite of the University's efforts, currently the level of English language proficiency among both students and teaching staff is low.

During the site-visit it turned out that there are limited number of studies of international practice by the teaching staff for the enhancement of the quality of education.

Considerations:

The epxert panel is positive about the fact that ArSU continuously developed its external relations by enlarging the scope of cooperation with RA HEIs, local organizations and schools. It's good that ArSU realizes the importance of internationalization and takes steps towards it. In the strategic plan of ArSU the development of external relations and internationalization was defined as a priority and a number of regulatory documents were developed for the improvement of the sphere.

The efforts of ArSU management directed to overcoming academic isolation and coming to international arena indeserve a special attention. Firstly the University develops its cooperation with RA HEIs and HEIs of non-recognized states. Cooperation agreements were signed with 47 foreign partners including Leuven Catholic University, Academy of Sciences of Russia, Catholic University of Pier Pazman in Hungary, Haykazyan College in Beyrut, University of Basker Country. Academic programs were benchmarked, teaching and learning practices of some Russian universities were studied and adopted, foreign students attend ArSU Summer school, with the help of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Artsakh invited lecturers come from Czech Republic, Netherlands and Russia, Armenian Diaspora sponsors some grant projects, limited number of students and teaching staff members have visitied the universities abroad. The implemented activites promote reinforcement of external relations and enhancement of visibility of the university in the international arena.

The coordination of the activities towards internationalization is weak. The Department of Science, PhD and International Cooperation is dealing with those activities, and the mentioned department among other functions implements also the coordination of activities towards internationalization besides, this direction is also the function of a Vice-Rector.

Due to the non-recognition of the Artsakh Republic and limited financial resources, the actual results of these actions are very modest. There is practically no exchange of students and lecturers. The university does not participate in research conducted jointly with foreign universities. This also applies to universities in countries that are not recognized internationally. The University does not offer academic programs or courses in a foreign language for itself or for foreign students.

For ArSU, internationalization is more than just the exchange of teaching staff and students, as the most important components of internationalization are more than mobility programs, they include the application of international standards in governance, research and development, teaching and learning, curriculum. In such a difficult situation, it is necessary for ArSU to reformulate the existing

points in the strategy for this field, to direct it to the more intensive development of steps towards internationalization within the university. The most important thing here is to improve the knowledge of a foreign language, especially English, among students and teaching staff. This, among other things, requires an increase in foreign language teaching hours (currently only 3 semesters), requiring at least a C1 level of English proficiency for young, newly hired staff. English language training is very important for teachers. Well command of English will increase the employability of graduates and the involvement of staff in international research programs. Students should participate in online courses organized by partner universities, be informed about available free courses, use the open educational resources available on the Internet. The quality of research should be improved in order to be attractive to foreign universities. It is very necessary to invite well-known Diaspora graduates as invited lecturers, experts, sponsors, and donors. And finally, the activites to enhance the internationalization of the University must be carried out within the framework of the policy adopted for internationalization, which will confirm the strong commitment of ArSU towards internationalization.

SUMMARY: Acknowledging that international non-recognition of the Artsakh Republic seriously hinders the internationalization process of Artsakh State University, nevertheless, taking into account the fact that the University did not carry out purposeful work, at least to study and localize the success of RA internationalized universities, omitted the opportunity to implement "internationalization locally" the evidence of which is the lack of documented data on these studies, the almost absence of professional administrative staff with internationalization functions at the university, the expert panel finds that the institutional capacity of the University does not meet the requirements of Criterion 9.

CONCLUSION: The compliance of the institution's institutional capacities with the requirements of criterion 9 is unsatisfactory.

X. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

CRITERION: The Institution has an internal quality assurance system, which promotes establishment of a quality culture and continuous improvement of all the processes of the Institution.

FINDINGS

10.1 The Institution has quality assurance policies and procedures.

Accroding to the self-evaluation report, QA activities launched at ArSU in 2014 when the policy on education quality assurance of ArSU was adopted. Until 2018 the QA processes were directed to educational process and had control nature.

Since 2014 activities have been carried out towards investment of QA mechanisms at ArSU, regulations were developed, working groups were formed. Among the developed regulations are also the Regulation and questionnaire on sociological survey for the evaluation of scientific-pedagogical activity and moral features of the teaching staff, Regulation on the organization of qualification enhancement program of the teaching staff, Regulation on the organization and conduction of class observations at ArSU, etc.

In 2019-2023 strategic plan of ArSU more coordinated approach was showed to the development of quality culture and in September 1, 2018 The Center for University Education Quality

Assurance and International Cooperation was renamed into Quality Assurance Center and with the decree of the Scientific Council as of November 9, 2018 the new charter of the center was approved. "ArSU Quality Assurance Manual" was developed to regulate QA processes at ArSU. The manual includes issues on quality assurance and quality management. QA policy of ArSU was also developed. The aim of the QA policy is to create quality culture and methods to reach them, however it should be mentioned that there is no clarification in any document how the quality culture is understood and localized within the context of ArSU activity.

There are three stages presented in the QA manual: transitional, quality culture and total quality management. However, the information about how the following three directions: education, scientific research and university management, are combined in one system is missing in QA manual.

It is mentioned in the self-evaluation report that QA principle is in the basis of University strategy. Nevertheless, none of the goals directly concerns quality assurance, quality culture or internal quality assurance system. The QA policy is not linked to ArSU strategy.

In general, from the observations made by the expert panel during the site-visit as well as based on the self-evaluation report it can be concluded that the apprehension about the PDCA cycle is not complete. Though several data is collected for the evaluation mainly through surveys, it is not sufficiently analyzed and ratified as there are no clear mechanisms for it. It should also be mentioned that QA Center pays more attention to the evaluation of the effectiveness of education process pushing aside the study of the effectiveness of scientific-research activity and management system.

10.2. The Institution allocates sufficient material, human and financial resources to manage internal quality assurance processes.

The Center for the Development of University Education that had been operating since September 1, 2012, in 2014 was renamed into a Department for the Development of University Education. Nevertheless, this department implemented mainly the functions of organization and control of education process paying less attention to the development and investment of quality assurance mechanisms and implementation of PDCA cycle.

After the adoption of 2019-2023 strategic plan QA Center was established with its respective charter. The Center is accountable immediately to the Rector and Scientific Council. The Center has 4 staff members: the Head of the Center, 2 methodists and 1 specialist and their functions are defined in the QA charter. The Center is provided with necessary material resources however there is no separate line in the University budget for the organization of processes of QA center.

It's worth mentioning that the functions of QA Center still need to be clarified as there are some functions that can be implemented by the Department of Students' Affairs and Career, e,g, organization of surveys among the alumni and getting feedback from them, or by the QA Committees attached to the faculty councils. However, it should be mentioned that for the last two years QA Center has implemented several joint activities with faculties and chairs.

QA Center has implemented several training courses, particularly about outcome-based approached to the development of academic programs, about the definition of course learning outcomes and their compliance with academic program learning outcomes, about the application of teaching and learning methods promoting student-centered education. Besides, trainings on the development of effective tests were also organized.

QA Center cooperates with the QA Standing Committee of the Scientific Council as well as with the Q|A Standing Committees attached to Faculty Councils (their working regulations are still in the process of development). QA Center also cooperates with the academic program responsible appointed by the chairs. The above-mentioned states that through the cooperation of different circles the University shows an institutional coordinated approach to education quality assurance. From the expert analysis it became clear that QA Center does not have a clear plan that would be derived from ArSU strategy and would present the steps of QA processes of the Center and envisaged meetings.

10.3 The internal and external stakeholders are involved in quality assurance processes.

The importance of the involvement of internal and external stakeholders in QA processes became obvious during the development of 2019-2023 startegic plan and conduction of self-evaluation.

During the self-evaluation of ArSU institutional capacities the University has made concrete actions towards the enlargement of the participation of internal and external stakeholders. Representatives of stduents and teaching staff are involved in all councils and working groups according to the set regulations. During the site-visit it became clear that students give importance to their participation as they are sure that their voices are heard, issues raised by them are discussed and get solutions.

In terms of external stakeholders, it should be mentioned that steps are taken also to activate the cooperation with them, round table discussions were organized. The main problem concerning external stakeholders is that the main employer in the Republic of Artsakh is the Government. The University ensures its link with the Government also due to the invited lecturers that are mostly from the state sector however there are also teacher from private sector, particularly from IT sphere. The cooperation with external stakeholders is ensured also by involving them in final attestation committees.

The activities carried out during the self-evaluation of ArSU for institutional accreditation was a great incentive for the development of quality culture during which the participation of internal stakeholders in QA activities (teaching staff, students) was enlarged. Several questionnaires were developed, and a number of surveys were conducted for the assessment of educational needs of students. Academic programs were revised taking into account learning outcomes and their alignment with NQF descriptors, course descriptions were developed. QA Center organized not only professional development courses for the teaching staff, but also different meetings directed to the enhancement of awareness about QA mechanisms. During the development of 2019-2023 strategic plan and within the framework of self-evaluation processes the cooperation with external stakeholders was also enlarged. Due to the involvement of internal and external stakeholders in the mentioned processes, changes were made also in the academic programs that are highly evaluated by students and teaching staff: expansion of the time-periods for trainings, investment of the individual component in courses, etc.

10.4 The internal quality assurance system is periodically reviewed.

The activities towards creation and investment of the QA system at ArSU started in 2014 and its functions were carried out by different structural units of the University which assumes that QA policy was regularly reviewed during these years. However, most of the changes have been made since the establishment of QA Cenetr in 2018.

Since 2018 amendments were made in several regulations, in the formats of academic programs, course descriptions as well as in questionnaires. During the site-visit it became clear that PDCA cycle is not closed yet. QA related activities of the University that are based on PDCA cycle, do not include information about analysis of ArSU performance and even do not answer the question to what extant the carried out changed have improved the quality of the main processes and the effectiveness of the strategic plan.

10.5 The internal quality assurance system provides valid and sufficient grounds for the external quality assurance processes.

In order to ensure external evaluation of quality assurance self-evaluation of institutional capacities of ArSU has been carried out for which 10 working groups were established with the involvement of internal and external stakeholders. Together with the self-evaluation report a number of other grounds were presented: ArSU regulations, procedures, reports, minutes of the sessions of Scientific Council, faculty councils and chairs, questionnaires for the conduction of surveys, descriptions of academic programs, courses and trainings, minutes of class observations, etc. that gave an opportunity to make a comprehensive impression about educational and research processes at ArSU, to reveal some problems and to formulate questions and judgments. It should be mentioned that most of the above-mentioned documents are also available at ArSU web-site.

However, some parts of the self-evaluation report are descriptive and not analytical, they contain general formulations without concrete examples, justifications and necessary grounds.

There is a mechanism of data collection at ArSU, however information is not gathered about all the spheres and analysis of data is not carried out for all cases.

10.6. The internal quality assurance system ensures the transparency of the processes at the Institution providing valid and up to date information on their quality to the internal and external stakeholders.

Internal and external stakeholders get information about the acitivties of the University mainly through the official website and facebook page. The documents and reports about the main activities of ArSU are available on the University website.

There is a separate webpage of QA Center on the University web-site where functions and charter of the Center are presented.

During the site-visit it beame clear that summeries of analysis of surveys and focus groups as well as reports of the QA Center are not published on the University website. It is worth mentioning that the results of the carried out surveys are not always discussed and presented to the target groups. Besides, there are no improvement plans developed based on the identified issues.

Considerations:

The expert panel is positive about the fact that QA processes are in the center of attentionof ArSU management staff. Generally, several positive features can be mentioned about QA processes at ArSU. It is obvious that ArSU management gives much importance to the creation of quality culture and has taken concrete steps and continues to implement investment of institutional mechanisms of education quality assurance processes. ArSU provides necessary human and material resources promoting improvement and reinforcement of QA system in all units of the University.

The development of several regulations, establishment of QA Center, as well as for the last three years the review of academic programs and courses, carried out surveys, activities towards summarization of survey results, involvement of a wider circle of internal and external stakeholders in the development of ArSU strategic plan and self-evaluation report can be assessed positively. Continous efforts of all these activities can promote development and reinforcement of QA culture at ArSU.

On the other hand, the carried out activities cannot be considered as complete, as QA Culture is still in the process ofdevelopment at ArSU. Functions of the QA Center need to be clarified. Evaluation of the scientific-research sphere and the effectiveness of the management system were left out of QA processes.

The meetings during the site-visit proved that the issues concerning QA are not sufficiently uprehended by the public. Enhancement of awareness of internal stakeholders is the greatest challenge for the effective improvement of quality culture. In this respect there is a need to initiate university-wide discussion about QA policy, internal QA system and its outcomes. It is necessary to root the term "quality culture" in the current institutional traditions of ArSU. Self-evaluation report is an important tool for identification of key priorities in QA policy and to give them a new wave in the process of quality enhancement. In order to enhance the level of awareness of students about QA mechanisms, students' structures can be involved. According to the opinion of the expert panel, the QA system does not ensure the whole necessary information about the further improvement of education. Hence, it is advisable to review method of gathering information about the quality of processes, to evaluate the reliability and relevance of that method and only after it to put that in database.

SUMMARY: Taking into account the fact that there are basic documents for QA: QA manual, policy, toolkit, QA Center is equipped with staff members well aware of the University problems, there are supporting units in faculty level, PCDA cycle is operating at the University, questionnaires have been reviewed, there are some mechanisms for data collection such as surveys, focus group discussions, it is envisaged to enlarge QA framework, stakeholders take part in QA processes, there are incentives for quality culture at ArSU, the expert panel finds that ArSU meets the requirements of Criterion10.

CONCLUSION: The compliance of the institution's institutional capacities with the requirements of criterion 10 is satisfactory.

Recommendations:
- To update QA manual thouroughly presenting internal QA system, involving the definition of all processes, procedures, organizational structure, mutual cooperation among the structural units as well as KPIs for quality.
- To enhance the awareness and commitment of academic society about quality assurance and quality culture by organizing trainings, improving feedback mechanisms, promoting dialogue between the stakeholders, as well as by promoting cooperation among different structural units of ArSU.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

CRITERION	CONCLUSION
1. Mission and Purposes	Satisfactory
2. Governance and Administration	Satisfactory
3. Academic Programmes	Satisfactory
4. Students	Satisfactory
5.Faculty and Staff	Satisfactory
6. Research and Development	Unsatisfactory
7. Infrastructure and Resources	Satisfactory
8. Societal Responsibility	Satisfactory
9. External Relations and Internationalization	Unsatisfactory
10. Internal Quality Assurance System	Satisfactory

June 21, 2021

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Menua Soghomonyan, Head of the Expert Panel

APPENDIX 1. CVs OF THE EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS

Menua Soghomonyan - In 2004 he graduated from the MA of the Faculty of International Relations of Yerevan State University. In 2007 he got the degree of a Candidate of Historical Sciences. In 2007-2008 he lectured at the Chair of History in Yerevan State Medical University. In 2008-2015 he was the Assistant at the Chair of Political Institutes and Processes at YSU, in 2008-2011 he was the Deputy Dean of the Faculty of International Relations at YSU, in 2011-2019 he was the Scientific Secretary of YSU, in 2019 he was the Vice-Rector for Educational Affairs at YSU. Since 2015, he has been an associate professor at the Chair of Political Institutes and Processes at YSU. He is an author and co-author of a number of books and articles.

Lilit Badalyan- In 1992-1997 she studied at Yerevan State Linguistic University (formerly Yerevan Pedagogical Institute after V. Brusov) at the Faculty of Roman and Germanic Languages. In September 2008 she defended his dissertation /on the topic of "Word-formation Possibilities of English Verbs "Destruction" in Comparison with Armenian"/ and received the degree of a Candidate of Philological Sciences. In 1997-2019 she worked as an associate professor at the Chair of English of Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences. Since December 2019 she has been working as a Head of the Chair of Linguistics and Theory of Communication at Yerevan State University of Languages and Social Sciences.

Vahagn Vardanyan- In 2007-2011 he studied at the Faculty of Informatics and Applied Mathematics at YSU and was awarded a bachelor's degree. In 2011-2013 he studied at the Faculty of Informatics and Applied Mathematics at YSU and was awarded a master's degree. In 2013-2016 he worked as a PhD student at IT Educational and Research Center at YSU. The topic of the research was "Methods of Static Optimization of Languages with Dynamic Types". He got the degree of a Candidate of Technical Sciences. Since 2011 to present he has been working as a researcher in System Programming Laboratory at YSU. Since 2020 to present he has been working as a lecturer at the Institute of Mathematics and Informatics of RAU.

Mischeslav Socha- In 1969 he graduated from the University of Lodz (Poland) with a master's degree in Economics. In 2000 he got the desgree of a Doctor of Sciences at the University of Warsaw. He currently teaches at the University of Warsaw, the Leon Kozminsky Academy, the Northern State University, the European College, and the School of Public Administration. He has been a member of the Advisory Board of the Polish Accreditation Committee since 2014, and a member of the International Advisory Board of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee since 2017. Since 2002 he has been an expert at Polish Higher Education Accreditation Committee, and since 2014 he has been a member of European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) Financial Committee. He has participated in numerous research projects, national and international courses and conferences. He is an author and co-author of more than 120 scientific papers, reports of more than 40 conferences that were published in a number of local and foreign journals.

Ashkhen Arzumanyan- She is a 3rd year student in the Faculty of Chemistry of YSU. In 2020 she has participated in the courses for students-experts organized within the project of "Student Voice" of ANQA.

APPENDIX 2. SCHEDULE OF THE SITE-VISIT OF EXPERT PANEL

08.03.21 – 12.03.21

	08.03. 2021	Launch	End	Duration
1	Departure to Artsakh	09:00	14:00	300 minutes
2	Observation of resources	15:30	17:30	120 minutes

	09.03. 2021	Launch	End	Duration
1	Meeting with the Rector of Artsakh State University	9:30	10:30	60 minutes
2	Meeting with the Vice-Rectors	10:45	11:45	60 minutes
3	Meeting with the Deans	12:00	12:40	40 minutes
4	Break, discussions of the expert panel	13:00	14:00	60 minutes
5	Meeting with the self-evaluation working group	14:10	14:50	40 minutes
6	Meeting with employers	15:00	16:00	60 minutes
7	Meeting with alumni	16:15	17:15	60 minutes
8	Observation of documents, close meeting of the panel	17:30	18:30	60 minutes

	10.03.2021	Launch	End	Duration
1	Meeting with the members of Artsakh State University Council	09:30	10:10	40 minutes
2	Meeting with the Heads of Chairs	10:30	11:30	60 minutes
3	Meeting with the full time teaching staff members and double jobbers (10-12 representatives)	12:00	13:00	60 minutes
4	Break, discussions of the expert panel	13:10	14:10	60 minutes
5	Meeting with the representatives of Student Council and Student Scientific Union (8-10 representatives)	14:20	15:00	40 minutes
6	Meeting with students (10-12 representatives)	15:20	16:20	60 minutes
7	Observation of documents, close meeting of the panel	16:30	18:30	120 minutes

	11.03.2021			Launch	End	Duration
1	Class observations			09:30	10:30	60 minutes
2	Parallel meeting with the representative(s)	Meeting with the representative(s)	Meeting with the representative(s)	11:00	12:00	60 minutes

				Launch	End	Duration
	responsible for "Armenian Language and Literature" academic program	responsible for the "Finances" academic program	responsible for "Information Technologies" academic program			
3	Break, discussions of the expert panel			12:30	13:30	60 minutes
4	Parallel meeting with the teaching staff of "Armenian Language and Literature" academic program	Meeting with the teaching staff of "Finances" academic program	Meeting with the teaching staff of "Information Technologies" academic program	13:40	14:40	60 minutes
5	Parallel meeting with the students of "Armenian Language and Literature" academic program	Meeting with the students of "Finances" academic program	Meeting with the students of "Information Technologies" academic program	15:00	16:00	60 minutes
6	Observation of documents, close meeting of the panel			16:30	18:30	120 minutes

	12.03.2021	Launch	End	Duration
1	Meeting with the Heads of the structural units (Department of Organization and Control of Education Process, Department of Science, PhD and International Cooperation, Department of Accounting, HR Department, Department of Students' Affairs and Career, PR Department)	09:30	11:00	90 minutes
2	Open meeting	11:30	12:10	40 minutes
3	Meeting with QA Center staff members	12:30	13:30	60 minutes
4	Break, discussions of the expert panel	13:40	14:40	60 minutes
5	Close meeting of the panel	14:50	17:30	160 minutes
6	Meeting with the Management of Artsakh State University	17:30	18:00	30 minutes

	13.03. 2021	Launch	End	Duration
1	Departure to Yerevan	11:00	16:00	300 minutes

N	Name of the Document	Criterion
1.	List of the scientific-research topics /if available/	1
2.	Analysis made for the development of strategic plan /if available/	1
3.	Work order of the Governing Board	2
4.	Policy on the promotion, support, maintenance and recruitment of staff /if available/	2
5.	Reports presented to Governing Board in 2018-2019, 2019-2020	2
6.	Samples and analysis of surveys conducted among the external stakeholders for needs assessment	2
7.	Activity plans of structural units and their managers	2
8.	Final works of Infomatics and Applied Mathematics for 2018-2019	3
9.	Sample of an annual report, where suggestions on the improvement of the academic programs are mentioned	2
10.	External opinion about the academic programs got form Vanadzor State Pedagogical University and from internal stakeholders	3
11.	Sample of a curriculum where semesters and selective courses are mentioned /within the presented academic programs/	3
12.	Sample of a course description where the topics of group and individual works are presented per week	3
13.	IT academic program curse descriptions with topics	3
14.	Samples of previous course descriptions	3
15.	Conclusion of the summary of questionnaires filled in by the students	3
16.	Summary of class-observations	3
17.	Some academic programs implemented at ArSU	3
18.	Samples of assignments of professional courses within the framework of the presented academic programs /mid-term and final assignments/	
19.	A few samples of final papers within the framework of the presented academic programs	
20.	Sample of self-analysis of lecturers	5
21.	Minutes of the session of the chair where the summary of the survey results conduced among the students are presented	5
22.	List of scientific or scientific-methodical works published by ArSU lecturers	5
23.	List of lecturers who had an enhancement of qualification	5
24.	List of lecturers who participated in conferences (information about the conference)	5
25.	Samples of students surveys and the results	7
26.	Staff list (workload)	7
27.	Regulation on the reporting of structural units	8
28.	"Everyday monitoring and analysis of media and internet magazines is carried out by the Department of PR and Information". The document of analysis	8
29.	Final analysis of internships	10
30.	Questionnaires of surveys conducted among the alumni, summary of survey results and analysis /if available/	10
31.	Results of round-table discussions of faculties, such as the case of the Faculty of Economics	10
32.	"In February 2017 the regulation and questionnaires of student surveys were reviewed". The reviewed documentation /if available/	10
33.	All the surveys conducted within the last three years and their analysis	10
34.	Plan of Quality	10

35.	Reports of the QA Center for the last 3 years	10
36.	Analysis and minutes of Psychological Center	4
37.	Working plan of a group supervisor	4
38.	Guide for the first year students	4
39.	Procedure of exam appeal processes	4
40.	Samples of self-analysis of Students' Scientific Union and Students' Council	4
41.	The best 5 theses of Informatics and Applied Mathematics	6
42.	Annual reports of external relations and internationalization (for the last 3 years)	9

APPENDIX 4. RESOURCES OBSERVED

1. Classrooms
2. Chairs
3. Structural units
4. Laboratories
5. Cabinets
6. Library
7. Reading hall
8. Psychological Center
9. Legal Clinic
10. Medical Unit

APPENDIX 5. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF ArSU

Rector

Vice - Rector for Academic Affairs

Vice - Rector for Scientific Affairs and International Cooperation

Vice - Rector for Administrative Affairs

Vice-Rector on Students, Alumni and Public Relations Issues

- Department of Organization of Educational process
- Department of Control of Educational process
- Departmnet of practice
- Department of Information Technology and Systems Service

- Department of science, postgraduate studies and International Cooperation
- Armenology Center
- Scientific Library

- The Accounting Department
- Personnel department
- General department
- Administrative staff
- Center for Quality assurance

- Department of personnel service
- Publishing house

- Department of student affairs and career
- Department of Information and public relations
- Psychological center

Faculties

- Natural Sciences
- History and Law
- Pedagogy and sport
- Economics
- Philology