NATIONAL CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE FOUNDATION

EVALUATION REPORT

French University in Armenia

Yerevan

Armenia

FEBRUARY 2024

UFAR has mandated jointly the Hcéres and ANQA to perform its external evaluation. The evaluation is based on the "Evaluation standards for foreign higher education institutions", adopted by the Hcéres Board on January 31st, 2022. These standards are available on the Hcéres website (hceres.fr).

In the name of the expert panel[1] :

Jérôme Caby, President of the panel

In the name of Hcéres[1] :

Stéphane Le Bouler, Acting President

The Higher Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Hcéres) is an independent public authority. It is responsible for evaluating higher education and research institutions, research organisations, research units, and study programmes.

[1]In accordance with articles R. 114-15 and R. 114-10 of the Research Code, evaluation reports are signed by the chair of the expert committee and countersigned by the President of Hcéres.

CONTENTS

I – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 4
UFAR IDENTITY SHEET 4
MAIN RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION 4
II – DESCRIPTION OF THE JOINT EVALUATION PROCEDURE 5
PRESENTATION OF THE METHODOLOGY OF THE JOINT EVALUATION BY HCERES AND ANQA 5
COMPOSITION OF THE EXPERT PANEL 5
VISIT DESCRIPTION 6
III – EVALUATION REPORT 6
INTRODUCTION 6
FIELD 1: STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT 6
Standard 1: The institution defines its institutional positioning at local, national, and international level 6
Standard 2: Based on its positioning, the institution defines a strategy at local, national, and international levels, which it translates into operational objectives and which it monitors 7
Standard 3: The institution is involved in its environment and develops a partnership policy as part of its strategy 8
Standard 4: The governance of the institution is based on an organisation, communication and information system adapted to its strategy 9
Standard 5: The institution has a global quality policy 10
Standard 6. The institution manages the implementation of its strategy by relying on forecasting tools, budget programming and a structured internal management dialogue 10
Standard 7. Human resources policy and the development of social dialogue reflect the institution's strategy and contribute to the quality of life at work of its staff. 11
Standard 8. The institution integrates into its strategy a real estate policy supporting its development 12
FIELD 2: POLICY ON RESEARCH: INNOVATION AND THE INCLUSION OF SCIENCE IN SOCIETY 13
Standard 9: The institution's research policy defines structural guidelines 13
Standard 10: The institution has a policy for resource and support for research 13
Standard 11: In its policy of innovation and inclusion of science in society, the institution defines structuring guidelines 14
Standard 12: The institution pursues a policy of resources and support that benefits its activities in terms of innovation and the inclusion of science in society 14
FIELD 3: EDUCATION, STUDENT AND CAMPUS LIFE POLICY 16
Standard 13: The institution has a quality education policy and educational offer, consistent with its positioning and strategy 16
Standard 14: The institution develops a set of institutional mechanisms to ensure the pedagogical quality of its educational offer 16
Standard 15: The institution analyses the attractiveness, performance and relevance of its educational offer and promotes student success from orientation to professional integration 17
Standard 16: The institution monitors the development of its programme offering and ensures that it is sustainable, by relying on a human resources policy consistent with its education policy and by implementing a continuous improvement approach. 18
Standard 17: The institution supports the development of student and campus life, student engagement in governance, and promotes student well-being. 19
IV – CONCLUSION 20
V – LIST OF ACRONYMS 21
VI – COMMENTS OF THE INSTITUTION 22
VII – COMMENTS OF THE FRENCH MINISTRY FOR EUROPE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS 25

I – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UFAR IDENTITY SHEET

Status: Interstate university

Creation date: 2001.

French higher education institutions involved: Jean-Moulin Lyon 3 University (since 2001) and Paul-Sabatier Toulouse III University (since 2018).

Budget share (2022):

- 91.24% from tuition fees;
- 6.35% from state financing;
- 2.41% from other types of income, including donations.

Human resources:

- 14 deans and heads of chairs;
- 239 teaching staff, including 3 permanent researchers;
- 45 French professors (34 from Lyon 3 University and 11 from Toulouse III University);
- 85 administrative staff.

Number of faculties: five – Computer science and applied mathematics (IMA), law, finance, management, and marketing.

Number of students (2023): 2,000 overall and 2% in masters' degree. Bachelor's degrees last 4 years and master's degrees 2 years.

Employment rate (2022): six months after graduation, 93% of UFAR students are employed (out of which 18% combine study and work), 4% are in military service, 2% are pursuing further studies and 1% are unemployed.

Research unit: 1 multidisciplinary research unit in the making and partnerships with several laboratories in Armenia and France.

MAIN RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

Comment on the self-evaluation procedure

UFAR produced a serious and robust self-evaluation report, in a collegial manner and by consulting stakeholders with a genuine desire for transparency. Requests for additional data from experts during the on-site visit were responded to accurately and on time.

Main strengths

- Good reputation of the university in the Armenian labour market and good relations with the public and business sectors.
- Double degrees with two French Universities specifically tailored to the Armenian labour market.
- A very committed administrative and teaching staff.
- A student-centred university.
- Good overall educational offer and support for students.
- An extensive language offer for students.
- High employability of graduates.
- Agreements with foreign partner universities to enrol PhD students.
- Strong ecosystem for innovation and inclusion of society in science through the Accelerator 28.

Areas for improvement

- Fragile institutional governance;
- Lack of permanent academic staff that leads to low research outputs;
- Inadequate growth strategy to increase the number of students in comparison with the resources of UFAR;
- Low attractivity of the master's programmes;
- Insufficient infrastructures at two levels;
    - Facilities: The current building does not offer satisfactory study and work conditions,

- Information systems and quality assurance: although there are numerous routines, most processes are not documented. It creates a gap in the transfer of information between employees, which can become problematic if there is high staff turnover. A comprehensive information system allowing a standardised gathering of quantitative data is still missing.

Panel recommendations

- Strengthen the institutional governance: the President of Toulouse III University should sit on the Board of Trustees and the Board members should better address the main problems of UFAR.
- Recruit permanent academic staff in the three main faculties of the university (law, management and IMA) and develop a genuine research policy.
- Review the university's strategy to make it sustainable and gain support from internal and external stakeholders.
- Introduce a 4-year renewable term for the rector in accordance with usual academic standards.
- Dialogue with the stakeholders to fund new premises – the university will not be able to self-finance its new premises and needs support from its stakeholders, in particular from the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, including its local representatives.
- Implement a stronger quality assurance system based on digital tools, both from an administrative (e.g. dashboards) and pedagogical (e.g. achievement of learning outcomes) perspective. The help of the French partner universities in these areas should be very welcome.
- Develop an "apprenticeship offer" in the master's degrees (i.e. students alternate study at university and work) in order to meet the expectations of the Armenian students to pursue further education while earning money and gaining work experience.
- Develop some courses in English (for example, during only one selected semester) to attract international students and provide current students with the opportunity to benefit from internationalisation at home.

II – DESCRIPTION OF THE JOINT EVALUATION PROCEDURE

PRESENTATION OF THE METHODOLOGY OF THE JOINT EVALUATION BY HCERES AND ANQA

Given the specific characteristics of the French University in Armenia, which was created following a cooperation agreement signed in 1995 between the Armenian and French governments, it was decided that a joint evaluation carried out by the Armenian National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA) and the French High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Hcéres) would be relevant.

Such a joint evaluation involved a binational expert panel with 3 Armenian experts, including the student and professional experts, and 3 French experts. It was jointly coordinated by ANQA and Hcéres, who agreed to use the Hcéres standards for foreign higher education institutions and to supplement them with ANQA criteria as guidelines. Indeed, it was recognised that the frameworks used by ANQA and Hcéres are similar in content and that both comply with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Therefore, this joint evaluation relied on a single binational expert panel, coordinated by two agencies, organising one single on-site visit to UFAR and producing one evaluation report. Nonetheless, the outcomes of the evaluation, namely the national accreditation by ANQA and international accreditation by Hcéres are adopted in a separate procedure by the competent body of each agency. The two accreditation decisions are published in a separate document.

COMPOSITION OF THE EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was chaired by **Jérôme CABY**, Full Professor of corporate finance at Sorbonne Business School and General Delegate of FNEGE (French Foundation for Management Education) in France. The panel was composed of the following experts, in alphabetical order:

- **Marie-Hélène ABEL**, Full Professor in computer science at the University of Technology of Compiègne, France and Head of the computer engineering department.
- **Arthur DAVTYAN**, Applied statistics and data science bachelor student at Yerevan State University and career guidance advisor at Ararat Regional State College.

- **Marie-Hélène FOSSE-GOMEZ**, Full Professor in management and marketing at the University of Lille School of Management, France and Director of the masters' programme in retail.
- **Vache GABRIELYAN**, Dean of Manoogian Simone College of Business and Economics at the American University of Armenia.
- **Arman TATOYAN**, Full Professor in law at Yerevan State University, the American University in Armenia and the Academy of Justice of Armenia and founder of the Tatoyan Foundation Center for Law and Justice.

The Hcéres was represented by **Sophie GUILLET**, Head of agency cooperation (department for European and international affairs) and ANQA was represented by **Varduhi GYULAZYAN**, Head of the institutional and programme accreditation division.

VISIT DESCRIPTION

The on-site visit took place at UFAR in Yerevan from 2 to 4 October 2023. It consisted essentially of 25 interviews with internal and external stakeholders and a campus tour. Prior to the visit, these stakeholders had been chosen jointly by the Hcéres, ANQA and UFAR. According to the Law of the Republic of Armenia on language, the interviews were held in Armenian with simultaneous translation into English.

The experts, ANQA and Hcéres representatives were well welcomed at UFAR which had provided them with a room dedicated to the joint evaluation and fully equipped for the translation from Armenian to English as well as for the online meetings with representatives of the French universities and of the Board of Trustees. The experts could carry out this visit in good conditions and UFAR was responsive to their demand for additional documents.

III – EVALUATION REPORT

INTRODUCTION

UFAR is an intergovernmental university established in 2001 on the model of a professional higher education institution without a research mission back then. Its activities rely on a partnership with two French universities (Lyon 3 University and Toulouse III University) and is fully recognised in Armenia. It enjoys a very good reputation among students, their families and the Armenian business and public sectors. It has experienced a strong growth in its student numbers (from 1,100 in 2019 to 2,000 today). The recognised quality of education delivery is one of the main assets of the university but is fragile from various perspectives. The growth has taken place without any real questioning of its financial or educational model, even as the conditions of operation of higher education institutions around the world have changed considerably. The time has come for strategic reforms. In order to safeguard the quality of the institution, decisions and remedial actions must be taken quickly, including by the governments which funded the university. This report makes many recommendations to support the continuous improvement of UFAR.

FIELD 1: STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Standard 1: The institution defines its institutional positioning at local, national, and international level

A university operating in a highly competitive national environment with a unique offer of foreign double degrees opening a door to the world

Since its inception, the university has specialised in four main domains: finance, law, management, and marketing and has recently developed (2018) a faculty of applied mathematics and computer science in accordance with the new Armenian government's economic strategy based on information technologies. The university delivers double degrees with French universities (from Lyon 3, for finance, law, management and marketing degrees and from Toulouse III for computer science degrees), which is one of UFAR's strong points. The input of the French professors from both universities in teaching activities is significant but rather low at the bachelor level (16% of teaching hours including 11% in law, 13% in marketing, 29% in management, 18% in finance and 20% in computer science, only for the 3rd and the 4th years of the bachelor) and at the master level (25% of teaching hours including 25% in law, 30% in marketing and 20% in management). The two partners,

especially Lyon 3, should consider strengthening their involvement in teaching activities to reinforce UFAR's positioning as a *French* University in Armenia.

At the national level, UFAR indeed operates in a very competitive system and is recognised by its environment especially thanks to the issuance of foreign double degrees. In particular, UFAR competes with two other intergovernmental universities, the American University of Armenia (management field) and the Slavonic (Russian-Armenian) University, which do not offer foreign double degrees. UFAR also competes with the Erevan State University in the field of law.

Although UFAR presents itself as seeking to become a reference university in the Caucasus, it has no academic relationships with the other countries of the region and does not have a particular strategy to attract students from the region. This is due to two main factors. First, because of the language barrier since courses are provided in Armenian in the first year; second, because of the difficult regional geopolitical situation of Armenia in the Caucasus region that cannot be resolved in the foreseeable future. To date, most of its international agreements have been with European institutions, particularly from France.

A university focused on student success and professionalisation, but with a lack of permanent academic staff leading to a very low research activity

As the university itself clearly states in its strategic plan, it is positioned to provide employment opportunities for its students, thus meeting the needs of the Armenian economy. According to the latest student integration survey and the stakeholders met during the on-site visit, UFAR successfully achieved this objective given that 93% of students are employed six months after graduation. To achieve this, the university has developed a professionalised educational offer that relies on the involvement of numerous qualified Armenian professionals. It also develops students' language skills through the teaching of French, English and an elective foreign language. This gives UFAR graduates an additional asset.

However, this professionalised positioning has, until recently, resulted in a lack of interest in the research dimension inherent to universities. For historical reasons, research was not considered within UFAR when it was launched. Indeed, according to its status, UFAR's missions were supposed to be focused on professional higher education and doctoral research. The university was inspired by the French *Institut d'Administration des Entreprises*. Since 2017, UFAR has become aware of the need to develop its research activities. This requires the recruitment of permanent academic staff, which is still in its infancy. Only recently have 3 permanent academic staff (teacher-researchers) been recruited and a specific status created.

Standard 2: Based on its positioning, the institution defines a strategy at local, national, and international levels, which it translates into operational objectives and which it monitors

A formulation of the university's strategy weakened by governance issues

A strategic plan for 2021-2025 was drawn up by the previous rector, but UFAR considers it needs to be reviewed. The current strategic plan is based on 2 main strategic orientations: upgrading (in concrete terms, improving the operational performance of all the functions of the university) and differentiation (gateway to the world, professionalisation, integrity and feminisation). Because of the high turnover in the rector's position (most of the previous rectors remained in office for only 2 years), the university faces difficulty in establishing a long-term vision and implementing the necessary actions. A 4-year renewable term for the rector, in accordance with usual academic standards, is recommended. In addition, governance issues, including ineffective formal university governance, i.e. the lack of real involvement of the Board of trustees, and a lack of commitment from key external stakeholders, such as the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs significantly weaken the process of elaborating the strategy and its medium-term coherence (see Standard 4 on governance).

An inadequate current growth strategy that could weaken the quality of the educational offer and the reputation of the university

The number of UFAR students has grown rapidly, from 1,100 in 2019 to around 2,000 at the start of the 2023 academic year, and is expected to reach 2,200 in 2025 and 3,000 in 2030 with the opening of new degrees taught in English in 2024-2025. The new English-language programmes are intended to boost UFAR's international appeal, although the university points out that this is a real dilemma for the identity of a French-speaking university. The strategic plan foresees a much more moderate increase in administrative staff (85 administrative staff in 2023, 90 in 2025 and 95 in 2030) and the creation of a truly permanent academic staff made of researchers (3 researchers in 2023, 5 in 2025 and 10 in 2030) and teaching staff (none in 2023, six in 2025 and eight in 2030). From a financial point of view, the budget is set to increase, which is logical given that most of

UFAR's resources come from tuition fees. Nevertheless, the projected budget increase from 2023 to 2030 (+44%) is lower than the increase in enrolments (+50%), even though the proportion of tuition fees is expected to fall (from 91.24% in 2023 to 85% in 2030). This increase in headcount also requires the integration of a new campus, the financial and political feasibility of which remains unresolved (see Standard 8, real estate). This growth strategy could increase the structural problems of the university in terms of premises, lack of full-time permanent academic staff, support for students, etc. and more fundamentally weaken what makes the attractiveness of the university: the quality of its educational offer and its reputation.

Before considering such growth, the university must strengthen the robustness and monitoring of its procedures and quality assurance policy (see Standards 4 and 5), assess the perception by the market (students and companies) of this volume strategy, strengthen its permanent academic staff and secure external financing of its real estate (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and other donors; the university itself will not be able to self-finance new premises). Finally, the university does not have a real quantitative dashboard to monitor the implementation of its strategy in both the short and long term. The university has defined a strategy but it lacks consistency and permanence in relation to the high turnover of the rectors and the lack of commitment of the main external stakeholders. The objectives of achieving a significant growth in the number of students may even jeopardise its future and should be reassessed.

Standard 3: The institution is involved in its environment and develops a partnership policy as part of its strategy

An increasing integration into the national and international academic networks

At the national level, UFAR, which had remained relatively timid for many years, initiated many agreements during the recent period thanks to participation in several Erasmus+ projects and AUF (*Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie*) membership, especially in the field of computer science. The creation of a joint doctoral school in Computer Science with the Armenian IIAP (Institute for Informatics and Automation Problems) and in collaboration with the IRIT (Computer Science Research Institute of Toulouse) is the result of an Erasmus + project (ARMDOCT) and paves the way for agreements with ambitious content as most of the previous agreements were mere memoranda of understanding with few concrete actions.

At the international level, collaborations with the universities of Lyon 3 and Toulouse III are the pillars of international partnerships. UFAR is also involved in several Erasmus+ Projects (related to doctoral schools, work-based learning and green and sustainable future) and has the occasional support of the AUF. An international department has been created in 2022 (one officer in 2022, two since June 2023) to support international student (and staff) mobility. Some student exchange agreements have been signed with foreign universities in Austria, France, Germany, Spain and Tajikistan. However, to date, the number of outgoing student mobility is very low (3 in 2021-2022) and there is no incoming student mobility (due in particular to the geopolitical situation, as explained above). More outgoing mobilities are planned for the academic year 2023-2024: between 40 and 50 mobilities are foreseen, with an extension to the master's level. The situation is much better when it comes to student mobility for internships, which is in line with the professionalised orientation of the university (75 students in 2023 – 32 % of the student body in bachelor's degrees – in Belgium, France and Switzerland). UFAR's strong links with the diaspora associations enable students to benefit from financial support for their internships. Since 2023, UFAR itself has also provided some funding to cover transport costs.

Strong links with the public and business sectors that benefit the professional integration of students

UFAR has developed a strong network of partnerships with companies that are involved in many aspects of university life and maintains strong links with the public sector, particularly in terms of scholarships (subsidies that represent 7% of the university budget) and support for vulnerable students. For instance, the university has developed strategic partnerships and sponsorships with some companies such as Softconstruct, Inecobank or ACBAbank in Armenia, Infodis and the *Île de France* region in France. These provide students with scholarships, internships, case studies, industrial projects, etc. Many companies participate in the university's job fairs and they praise the quality of the relationship with the corporate relations department to recruit employees or interns. UFAR's corporate social responsibility policy focuses on inclusiveness, gender equality and assistance to vulnerable populations.

In the end, it seems that UFAR has recently developed its academic network at national and international levels while maintaining strong ties with the private and public sectors that promote the professional integration of students.

Standard 4: The governance of the institution is based on an organisation, communication and information system adapted to its strategy

Weak board guidance in the context of the intergovernmental nature of the university

The university operates under an international agreement which affects the structure of its governance. The absence of Toulouse III University representatives on the Board of Trustees seems striking. The composition and deliberations of the Board seem to indicate a lot of enthusiasm and support, but it would appear that the business model of the university has never been addressed. Particularly, there was no evidence presented that the board prioritised the fundamental issue of the lack of full-time academic staff at the university. The *de jure* French visiting professors partly fulfil the role of full-time staff and there seems to be almost daily interaction between the deans in Yerevan and their associate deans in the respective French universities, thus contributing to an active and ongoing cooperation between UFAR and the universities of Lyon 3 and Toulouse III. However, their limited physical presence in Armenia makes this model questionable. The quite rapid expansion of the university under this "limited in-person permanent staff" or "outsourced permanent staff" model did not seem to attract the deserved discussions from the Board.

The lack of full-time staff remains a major obstacle to further growth and compliance with French and Armenian licensing requirements. The intergovernmental setup of the university in the Armenian context requires more assertive leadership from the French state representatives. Such leadership can be duly performed without interfering in academic affairs and maintaining the academic integrity of the educational process. The absence of Toulouse III University representatives on the Board could have been most effectively addressed through the leadership of the French State representatives. The university should also consider opening up the Board to internal stakeholders such as students, administrative and academic staff in accordance with common academic standards. This would allow third parties to have direct information and exchange with them about UFAR.

Structurally induced short-term perspective

The administration is frank and open in its assessment of the situation and is willing to take the necessary steps to improve the institution within the paradigm of "limited in-person permanent staff", through gradual capacity building. For example, although the current administration has done a lot of work in ensuring the soundness of the finances of the university, the lack of continuous policy and records may hinder the strategic deliberation capacity of the institution (e.g., longer-term planning). While there are no signs of politically motivated influence or interference and the university is committed to providing high-quality double degree education, the practice of short-term tenure of the rectors induces unnecessary volatility and short-term perspective of the executive leadership of the university. This is evident not only in terms of the horizon and details of the strategic plans but also in different emphases and scopes of both financial and non-financial planning and reporting. Despite the meetings of the Scientific and Pedagogical Council, the lack of permanent academic staff hinders the institution by making it impossible to fulfil the university service requirement. As UFAR has planned in its strategic targets for 2023, it is very much advisable in this environment to work towards the restoration of the French Secretary-General position that was removed by the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs in 2019. While these problems do not threaten the day-to-day operation of the university, they cannot be solved overnight and should be addressed in a systematic, long-term fashion.

A structured external and internal communication policy

The university has a communication and public relations department consisting of three people who ensure the coherence of the policy in this area and offer their services to other departments. It is in charge of both internal and external communication. This department is very dynamic and initiates many actions, but still lacks a real integrated strategy including a clear and shared purpose and targets. An annual plan and budget are established each year for management approval. A brand book has been implemented in 2021 to strengthen the university's visual identity and regular surveys are conducted to assess the perceptions of the university's image. Social networks are at the heart of UFAR's external communication given its young target audience (26,459 followers on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram in 2022-2023). Press relations are also organised around numerous quotes in the Armenian and French press (277 in 2022-2023), regular events (e.g. *La Nuit du Droit*) and an updated website. All this in two main languages, Armenian and French depending on the targets. Some of these actions are monitored through a quantitative dashboard. For internal communication, the university uses Microsoft 365 and a Moodle platform. The development and partnership department of UFAR also contributes to the external communication of the university with the organisation of job fairs, fundraising campaigns and the monitoring of Alumni relations (currently nearly 3,000 alumni). A new website for alumni is about to be released with a section dedicated to job offers. Sustainability is taken into account with less advertising campaigns or mails for the benefit of digital media.

A satisfactory information system that requires further integration and developments

Although UFAR has an operational information system that meets its main needs, takes care of ensuring the security of its IT system and has implemented backup and recovery procedures, the university's information system remains fragmented. A new, more integrated system is being tested and will have to be further developed in the future (see Standard 5 on quality assurance).

The university seems to have a dedicated, but very small leadership team that works hard to maintain the academic integrity of the institution qualifying them for a French diploma, but lacks strong guidance on behalf of the Board that may assure longer-term perspective and continuity.

Standard 5: The institution has a global quality policy

The quality assurance process is regulated and periodical, but limited in scope and methodology

The university developed and adopted a quality assurance (QA) policy in 2018 that is led by a 5-member QA Commission that meets at least once a semester. Interestingly, due to the lack of permanent staff and other key staff, the Commission includes officers usually not common in quality assurance processes (e.g., the head of the HR department). The quality assurance agenda is quite narrow and is based largely on student feedback. Although the creation of an office for quality assurance is commendable, it still lacks sufficient support. In particular, there is a need for consistent database management that would allow analytical comparisons and the identification of trends across the university. Data accuracy seems to be an issue vis-a-vis students repeating certain courses. As a result, some data generated by the system (e.g., the progress of male students) seem to make the picture artificially worse in reports than the number of male students the visiting team observed on the campus would have otherwise indicated. The staff responsible for organising the collection and analysis of data (which currently includes student feedback) are enthusiastic and committed, but lack specific training in quality assurance. Updating and formalising the whole process and providing training and IT resources seem to be a primary task.

Programme reviews need more systematic inputs throughout the review cycle

The university pays attention to the quality and timeliness of the programmes. The programmes are constantly updated at the margin from multiple sources: feedback from French colleagues, feedback from students, factual information on the local economic and industry developments, etc. There is a Development Committee *(Conseil de perfectionnement)* that should review academic programmes every two years. Until now, only the Computer Science programme has done it. The process is not formalised, and there are no clear linkages on how different modes of quality assurance inquiry fit into the review cycle. For instance, the university has active engagement with the business community, but there are no modes of inquiry with the community about the appropriateness and timeliness of the learning outcomes of the programmes. The 2-year review cycle also seems to be too short. While the practice of marginal improvements should stay in place, a longer-term, more comprehensive and regulated approach to the academic programme review should be adopted, with more focus on student learning outcomes.

The university is working hard to ensure its conducts robust examinations that signal fairness and quality of education, and it is widely acknowledged both in the market and by the students themselves. At the same time, the procedural quality assurance framework is almost solely based on student feedback, with other elements of quality assurance being weak or missing.

Standard 6. The institution manages the implementation of its strategy by relying on forecasting tools, budget programming and a structured internal management dialogue

Non-diversified income streams make the university vulnerable

UFAR is financially autonomous and its income mostly comes from tuition fees. There is limited support from the French Government (the salary of the rector and €50,000 per annum) and the Armenian Government (social grants for the students). Within this framework, the university has been bound to rely on a "limited in-person permanent staff" model and has doubled the student body in the last 5 years. The increased income has allowed, among other things, the introduction of the very important Computer Science programme and engaged Toulouse III University as an important strategic partner. However, this approach cannot provide for further development, as the marginal revenue generated through such a process cannot guarantee either the

financing of the spatial expansion (that is required for the chosen path of growth) or the increased research output (a corollary of PhD. programmes) that the university is craving.

Strategic development directions require closer alignment of budgetary and financial practices

The university needs a longer-term planning horizon and the separation of current and capital budgeting practices required for spatial expansion and major infrastructure projects. While operations are frugal and the university is not facing any threats to its continuity, current practices cannot provide for further expansion of the university. The Board needs to address this issue more closely, as the management alone cannot solve this issue. Currently, it seems that the close-knit small management team is engaged in the budgeting exercise, but with the development of in-presence permanent academic staff, there will be a need for greater involvement of both academic staff and non-managerial staff. This would also require the development of budget rules (e.g., size of payroll, communication, etc.).

The university has a very frugal approach to budgeting, and especially under the new management, is very keen to operate parsimoniously and annually generate a small surplus that will enable it to expand the university's activities. At the same time, over-reliance on tuition fees for funding the university and the structurally-induced short horizon of the management make the long-range planning of the university development problematic.

Standard 7. Human resources policy and the development of social dialogue reflect the institution's strategy and contribute to the quality of life at work of its staff.

Limited scope of human resources services

As mentioned above, the university operates within the "limited in-person permanent staff" model. While officially permanent teaching staff is legally solely employed by UFAR, 3 full-time researchers and 4 deans can be considered as the "core" full-time employees. At the same time, five programme Chairs and many teachers have a history of long-term service (sometimes a decade and more) to the university. Given the comparatively limited knowledge of French (as opposed to Russian and English) and limited availability of visiting French professors, this model was appropriate when setting the university.

Currently, the management is very attentive in hiring local faculty and the rector personally participates in all interviews with prospective teachers. There are regulations in place about hiring administrative, teaching and research staff, but they seem to include limited regulations and guidelines about hiring criteria, as well as pay and salary ranges. The university has adopted the Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics in 2022 that seems to regulate, among other things, anti-corruption principles, procurement principles, HR issues, ethical issues, etc. It would be better to have separate policies that would clearly address only the HR, or Procurement issues. While the university is attentive to staff training and health issues and is keen to ensure the progressive treatment of the employees in the framework of the existing business model, HR help in strategic alignment of the university and long-term capacity building remains limited. The question of career management arises only for a fraction of the staff paid by UFAR: full-time academic staff, researchers and administrative staff (85 people in 2023). Although not a cause for concern, staff turnover is not negligible (e.g. it reached 12% of departures in 2022, even if many staff were also recruited in that year). The staff promotion policy is being structured: the levels and the procedure seem well defined, but the development of key performance indicators to be reached to be granted a promotion is less well established. The progress of this project varies according to the departments.

Limited resources

While the management is keen to improve HR practices and capacities, and has used consulting services to that end, the human resources development manager needs to access more resources, both human resources and IT, to better navigate the process of strategic alignment of human resources with the ambitious growth goals of the university.

Within the "limited in-person permanent staff" model, the university follows a frugal model of having only a full-time top management and staff, and a very limited and nascent permanent local academic staff. The current administration has engaged consultants to set HR policies, but the implementation of the model is partial and limited.

Standard 8. The institution integrates into its strategy a real estate policy supporting its development

Tight space to operate against a backdrop of rapid student growth

UFAR owns a building with a total surface of 5005 square metres and rents an additional 915.87 square metres from IIAP's building to host the faculty of Computer science and applied mathematics. The university has grown from 1,100 students in 2019 to 1,790 in 2022 and roughly 2,000 in 2023. While such an expansion pace definitely creates issues, and there are not enough common learning spaces and amenities (most importantly, students raised concern for cafeteria and spaces for physical activities), these spaces can be rented and operated within proximity of the campus and allow for cumbersome, but continuous operation of the university. The remoteness of these facilities may create issues, but they are not insurmountable from the perspective of academic quality. Given the Armenian government's long-term project of an academic city and the university's more immediate and pressing spatial needs, the Board should address this issue head-on, as UFAR's current business model will not be able to pay for a new building, even in the unlikely event of continued rapid growth of the university. Indeed, the Government of Armenia wishes to centralise higher education in a newly proclaimed project of an academic city, outside of Yerevan.

While the space issue is the utmost priority identified by UFAR in its self-evaluation report and has been echoed throughout the interviews of all groups of stakeholders, it is not the main bottleneck of the university's further growth. The university is attempting to overcome the current impasse with the Armenian government's Academic City project by focusing on compensating for this by improving its digital infrastructure (e.g. providing online lectures and other services to students to save space).

MAIN CONCLUSIONS ABOUT FIELD 1

Main strengths

- Good reputation of the university in the Armenian labour market and good relations with the public and business sectors, ensuring a high employability of graduates.
- Double degrees with French universities.
- A very committed administrative and teaching staff.
- Good overall educational offer and support for students.
- An extensive language offer for students.
- A structured internal and external communication policy.

Areas for improvement:

- Fragile institutional governance (Board of Trustees), which explains most of the university's weaknesses
- A high turnover of rectors, which does not allow for a long-term vision at the top of the university.
- Lack of permanent academic staff resulting in very weak research activity.
- Insufficient infrastructure at two levels:
    - Facilities: The current building does not offer satisfactory study and work conditions. Inadequate growth strategy to increase the number of students in comparison with the resources available to the university. This is expected to affect the quality of the educational offer and weaken the university's reputation.
    - Information systems and quality assurance: although there exist numerous routines, most processes are not documented and put at risk the university in particular in case of employees' resignations. A comprehensive information system allowing a standardised gathering of quantitative data is still missing.

Panel recommendations:

- Strengthen the institutional governance: the President of Toulouse III University should sit on the Board of trustees and the Board members should better address the main problems of UFAR.
- Recruit permanent academic staff in the three main faculties of the university (law, management and computer science) and develop a genuine research policy.
- Review the university's strategy to make it sustainable and gain support from internal and external stakeholders.
- Introduce a 4-year renewable term for the rector in accordance with usual academic standards.
- Dialogue with the stakeholders to fund new premises – the university will notbe able to self-finance its new premises and needs support from its stakeholders, in particular from the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, including its local representatives.
- Implement a stronger quality assurance system based on digital tools, both from an administrative (e.g. dashboards) and pedagogical (e.g. achievement of learning outcomes) perspective. The help of the French partner universities in these areas should be very welcome.

FIELD 2: POLICY ON RESEARCH: INNOVATION AND THE INCLUSION OF SCIENCE IN SOCIETY

Standard 9: The institution's research policy defines structural guidelines

UFAR research policy, a recent and still timid development

In the field of Armenian research, there is a notable lack of coherent policy and of a critical mass in doctoral studies, despite ongoing European Union initiatives to address this issue. Indeed, Armenia actively participates in various programmes, including Horizon Europe. The development of research at UFAR is a relatively recent endeavour, with more significant progress since 2018. This situation is mainly due to the limited number of permanent academic staff since its inception. At the time, UFAR was meant to be business-oriented. As soon as the problem was identified around 2016, the university decided to overcome this problem by launching a doctoral programme to facilitate the recruitment of permanent academic staff; it also hoped that the future doctors would become academic staff at UFAR. The university has also created a single research unit to foster multidisciplinary research and promote scientific publications. This research unit welcomes not only doctoral students and the few permanent researchers, but also non-permanent researchers. However, UFAR must be aware that only the scientific publications of its own permanent staff can really be attributed to it, even if other researchers mention a secondary affiliation to UFAR.

Mixed results on doctoral studies.

UFAR has signed agreements with partner universities to facilitate the enrolment of doctoral students, starting with law and management. These students receive financial support, including a monthly stipend, and are supervised by professors from the collaborating French universities (Lyon 3 and Toulouse III). UFAR PhD graduates are then recruited as academic staff, and enjoy favourable conditions for research and publication of academic work. Although UFAR has managed to enrol some doctoral students (15), the rate of enrolment has not met initial expectations. This inconsistency is a constant challenge, as some students have successfully defended their theses (6), while others have dropped out (5). 4 students are still in progress.

In response to these difficulties in attracting doctoral students in other fields, UFAR has adjusted its policy to focus on disciplines such as computer science, applied mathematics, and artificial intelligence. UFAR is actively coordinating an Erasmus+ project focused on the establishment of a collaborative doctoral school: "Reforming Doctoral Education in Armenia in Line with the Needs of Academia, Industry and Current EU Practices" (ARMDOCT). The university is working towards the creation of a joint doctoral school in computer science with a particular emphasis on applied research and international collaboration under the banner of UFAR, IIAP (Institute for Informatics and Automation Problems in Armenia) and IRIT (Computer Science Research Institute of Toulouse III).

Standard 10: The institution has a policy for resource and support for research

Increasing resources and support to develop research

In 2022, UFAR introduced a comprehensive policy for resource and support system, covering various aspects. This might not support intensive research but it is a good first step and is in line with the objectives UFAR has set up for research activities. The policy and support system include:

- the integration of research in UFAR's educational offer;
- the presentation of the first provisional research budget in 2023 (which started modestly with €8,500, excluding PhD student support, but it is expected to increase by the end 2023);
- the diversification of funding sources (including partner companies, Franco-Armenian diaspora associations, the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, the Armenian Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport, and European projects);
- the leveraging of external resources to increase the research budget by supporting academic staff to present at international conferences; supporting scientific events on campus; introducing a "research incentive scheme" that provides a financial bonus to the doctoral students and academic staff who mention UFAR affiliation when publishing; and supporting those among UFAR's professional teaching staff who choose to pursue a PhD.

Furthermore, the responsibility for monitoring national and international calls for projects lies in the hands of the research unit and the deans. The calls for projects are managed by the information and communication

department and distributed to the relevant deans. As regards the implementation of a strategic monitoring system, it is part of the future doctoral school plan.

Prioritising resources for research in computer science as a relevant first step

UFAR's resources for research are expected to be prioritised around the joint IIAP-IMA doctoral school with IRIT, which will be launched in 2024 with a budget of €40,000, including €20,000 from UFAR and €20,000 from external sources, such as industrial funding, national and European calls for projects. This emphasis on computer science in relation to local businesses and government demand as well as the partnership with IIAP and IRIT is commendable as it avoids scattering scarce resources. Nevertheless, the university should take better account of its other major fields of expertise (law and management) which also need to turn to research.

The allocation of resources to research is recent and still relatively low. UFAR has chosen to focus primarily on the field of computer science in order to reach a critical size, which is a relevant starting point. However, it will have to be careful not to neglect the development of research activities in its other fields of expertise.

Standard 11: In its policy of innovation and inclusion of science in society, the institution defines structuring guidelines

Innovation and inclusion of science in society as a leading priority

Despite a rather weak research base, UFAR has built a solid foundation for innovation through its long-standing relationships with companies and participation in science-related projects and events. The university promotes innovation through compulsory project-based learning in each of its programmes, particularly in the faculty of computer science and applied mathematics where some students have launched their own start-up. The university is also actively involved in partnerships and associations that bring together universities and companies to encourage innovation and the dissemination of scientific knowledge. Many UFAR alumni have launched their own start-up ventures, and some have created social enterprises focused on addressing societal issues, such as combating violence against women – the student who launched a start-up on that topic is then benefited from the Cartier Women's Initiative fellowship programme. UFAR also collaborates with non-governmental organisations to develop student's analytical thinking and problem-solving skills through programmes such as "CaseKey Academy". In addition, UFAR hosted a "Smart Cities" hackathon in autumn 2023, bringing together students from its faculties and other universities.

Accelerator 28: an original and relevant initiative

UFAR highlights "Accelerator 28", an innovative business development programme launched in 2021 with five partner Armenian universities. It operates as an incubator and was inspired by the French PEPITE system. The PEPITE status stems from the *Esprit d'Entreprendre* plan developed in 2014 by the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research to create local centres to raise awareness, support, and coordinate student entrepreneurship in higher education institutions in all French regions. Accelerator 28 aims to promote entrepreneurship and the creation of start-ups in Armenia by providing support, mentorship, and resources to aspiring entrepreneurs (including seminars on topics such as strategy, communication, etc.). Projects are selected and organised around multidisciplinary teams with students from various study programmes and last 6 months. So far, it has financially supported 5 projects (out of 43 examined), but it is expected to host 7 projects per semester in the near future.

UFAR is actively working to bolster innovation and the inclusion of science in society through various initiatives, partnerships, and programmes, in which Accelerator 28 plays a key role.

Standard 12: The institution pursues a policy of resources and support that benefits its activities in terms of innovation and the inclusion of science in society

A support in the making

While UFAR is actively involved in innovation and entrepreneurship, there is a lack of a clear support and resource policy. UFAR collaborates with partner companies, public and private entities to support innovation initiatives. Although there are existing statutes for Accelerator 28, they need to be further elaborated with performance indicators and a multi-year budget forecast. Currently, there is no specific budget for innovation, but rather for each faculty. The budget of Accelerator 28 itself is modest (€8,000 in 2023), even though specific projects may receive specific external financial support (e.g. one project received a €22,000 grant from the

Armenian Ministry of High Technology). In addition, UFAR needs to strengthen the skills of the staff involved and dedicated staff should be recruited. Academic staff are encouraged to register their activities within Accelerator 28.

A strategy in transition

UFAR's strategic plan for 2021-2025 focuses on professionalisation, placing entrepreneurship and innovation at the heart of its educational mission. Thus, the university has partnerships with over 100 companies, many of which are willing to fund projects including start-ups. The university also collaborates with public and private partners, nongovernmental organisations, and government ministries, some of which are involved in Accelerator 28. UFAR highlights the importance of Accelerator 28 in coordinating innovation efforts and proposes the adoption of the PEPITE status to serve as an entrepreneurship portal for all students. This status is being discussed as part of a European Erasmus+ project involving Armenian universities. In addition, UFAR is moving from a policy of responding to external proposals to a real strategic innovation policy. A new strategy is being developed around 3 axes: dissemination of science in society, promotion of scientific innovation and entrepreneurship, and addressing social and societal issues. The estimated budget for innovation in 2023 is around €20,000.

The university's financial investment in innovation and the inclusion of science in society is still modest, but the strategy and initiatives are relevant and beginning to take effect.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS ABOUT FIELD 2

Main strengths

- Creation of the joint IIAP-UFAR doctoral school in 2024.
- Agreements with foreign partner universities to enrol PhD students.
- Recruitment of doctoral students as academic staff.
- Various sources of research funding.
- Promotion of innovation through compulsory project-based learning in collaboration with companies.
- Accelerator 28, a good ecosystem for innovation and inclusion of society in science.

Areas for improvement

- Lack of full-time academic staff.
- Relatively low budget allocated to research.
- Low research output by permanent staff (publications).
- Insufficient number of PhD students and too many dropouts.
- Too much concentration on a single field of expertise at UFAR (computer science).

Panel recommendations

- Recruit full-time academic staff within a 5-year plan.
- Define a clear process to encourage UFAR teachers to get a PhD.
- Define a clear strategic monitoring policy to manage calls for research projects.
- Define a clear innovation policy (budget, indicators, partners, etc.).
- Implement a support policy for doctoral students to help them defend their thesis and reduce the number of drop-outs.
- Develop partnerships with companies.
- Identify promising students and encourage them to do a PhD.
- Subscribe to scientific mailing lists, those of the partner university communities for instance: the objective. is to better identify the call for papers, calls for projects, etc.

FIELD 3: EDUCATION, STUDENT AND CAMPUS LIFE POLICY

Standard 13: The institution has a quality education policy and educational offer, consistent with its positioning and strategy

UFAR has a small but relevant range of bachelor level courses, leading to high employability of students.

In line with the status of French University in Armenia, all the programmes offered by UFAR are double degrees with a French university (either Lyon 3 University for the law and management programmes or Toulouse III University for the IMA programmes). Moreover, a good knowledge of French is also a requirement for most programmes. In fact, 225 hours are devoted to the study of the French language during the first year and a B2-level in French is required to graduate from a bachelor's degree. The discovery of French culture is a by-product of this learning. The mastery of several languages (at least also English and Russian) is one of the targeted objectives of all the programmes and constitutes a large part of the developed soft skills. Other targeted soft skills are communication competencies and international openness.

In line with its strategy, the range of programmes covers five core disciplines that represent the field of expertise that UFAR wanted to develop (law, marketing, finance, management, applied mathematics and computer science). They have attracted more than 800 secondary school graduates in 2022 (even if 2023 shows a slight decrease in the number of students enrolled). Bachelor's programmes are interdisciplinary rather than highly specialised. They provide the Armenian labour market with well-educated but not too specialised graduates. The high integration rate of bachelor's graduates in the labour market (91% of students are employed six months after graduation) is a good indicator of the relevance of this choice. The internship at the end of the curriculum is one of the specificities of all the programmes offered by UFAR. UFAR supports its students' internships by organising regular job fairs and by providing financial support to 4th-year students who undertake an internship abroad (from €2,500 to €3,000 per student). This policy contributes to the good placement of graduates in the Armenian labour market, which is one of UFAR's main objectives. Overall, the educational offer is relevant at the bachelor's level.

A less attractive offer at master and doctoral levels due to the national context

Master's programmes are much less attractive, and their attractiveness is decreasing (from 94 students in 2021 to only 34 in 2022). Even though enrolment in master's degrees in Armenia is rather low given that students usually work after their bachelor's degree, this poor performance is a worrying figure because master's degrees generally represent a large part of the educational offer of French universities. The requirement of a good command of French, at least at the B2 level (or in English for the IMA programme) is another obstacle to the recruitment of more master's students. UFAR lacks both the human resources (in terms of quality and quantity) and the space required to develop and diversify its offer of master's programmes. There are also very few students in the doctoral programme, as explained in Standard 9. However, despite the university's significant efforts, the number of candidates is likely to remain very low anyway, as the number of Armenian graduates enrolled in postgraduate studies at the national level has been limited to 194 in 2022.

UFAR's stated priority is to provide employment opportunities for its students and to supply the Armenian labour market with well-trained graduates. The high rate of employability of UFAR graduates indicates that this goal has been achieved. It is unfortunate that as a French university, UFAR is struggling to develop its educational offer at the master's and doctoral levels but it is serving the Armenian society which is not that much focused on master's and doctoral studies at the moment. In this way, UFAR's educational offer is fit for purpose.

Standard 14: The institution develops a set of institutional mechanisms to ensure the pedagogical quality of its educational offer

Finding a balance between academic requirements and professional expectations

Double degrees imply that the programmes meet the academic requirements of Armenia and France. The content of the courses (description, examinations, methods, etc.) is mainly discussed between Armenian deans and their French associate deans. Additional exchanges are also necessary between French teachers and their Armenian counterparts when they share the same course. This collaboration seems to be a fluid process and consensus-building is considered essential. Adaptation to the Armenian context seems to be limited to a maximum of 20% of the French curriculum. This percentage varies according to the programme: for example, it is more important for the marketing programme than for the IMA programme, due to the specificities of the Armenian labour market. However, the large share of the teaching hours given by Armenian professionals: 69% of the teaching hours at the bachelor's level and 60% of the teaching hours at the master's level. This ensures

that the content of the programme is in line with the expectations of the Armenian market. The balance between lecturing hours and practical hours varies according to the programmes and their level to ensure appropriate student engagement, especially for foreign languages. Innovative teaching methods such as case-based teaching and problem-solving introduce more professional inputs into the programmes. The final internship in the bachelor's programme is another example of the balance between theoretical and professional skills development. The Moodle platform is used to communicate the objectives and the content of the courses. However, few teachers make full use of its potential as a pedagogical tool for student-teacher interactions and to provide additional pedagogical resources such as quizzes, videos, etc. The Moodle platform is also currently used by the administrative staff to communicate with the students.

A concern for quality at all stages

UFAR's concern for quality starts when recruiting new students. Indeed, UFAR entrance exam is designed to select students on the basis of criteria relevant to study at UFAR such as their ability to reason in mathematical terms, to use a foreign language or to write in Armenian. Such criteria are supported by specific tests related to the disciplines chosen by the students. This exam helps to differentiate UFAR from its competitors, most of whom use a unified exam and can be considered an asset. Current and former students described this examination process as smooth and professional (e.g. results are communicated by email in a timely manner).

As far as the quality of teaching is concerned, the deans and heads of Chairs are at the heart of the system. Not only are they responsible for adapting the academic programme to the Armenian context, but they are also the main contact for both teachers and students in Armenia. For example, students can raise any learning issues, either anonymously or during a meeting, directly or through the Student Council, the student representative body. Deans and heads of Chairs seem to be very open to suggestions from students. Teachers can also share teaching issues, either in regular meetings, organised by the deans or heads of Chairs, or more informally. The small size of the building is an opportunity in this case. The quality of teaching also depends on the pedagogical methods used. Deans and heads of Chairs are aware of the necessity to adapt teaching methods and the proportion of practical hours to the course objectives and to develop new methods and approaches. An example of this policy is the planned "training of trainers" programme. Another example of this concern is the ongoing brainstorming on learning strategies to improve the success of French language exams and certificates. Final term exams are set and administered according to French regulations, with independent observers, bag checks, anonymous written tests, etc. These conditions may seem harsh, but they ensure a fair treatment that all students, especially alumni, find valuable in the end. When requesting an explanation of a grade, students can access their exam copies and understand their mistakes through comments on their copies.

Overall, the university implements appropriate procedures to ensure a good balance between the professional orientation and the academic requirements of the courses as well as good coordination between the French and Armenian parties. The quality of the teaching process is a constant concern.

Standard 15: The institution analyses the attractiveness, performance and relevance of its educational offer and promotes student success from orientation to professional integration

A considerable amount of data is produced throughout the student life cycle

As explained in Standard 5, one department has been in charge of the implementation of the QA policy since 2018. A considerable amount of data is therefore produced each year through several surveys. The mechanisms and tools to regulate QA are well documented. Data is produced throughout the entire student life cycle. Before the admission of students, UFAR's attractiveness is evaluated thanks to two indicators: the evolution of the number of enrolled students in relation to the number of secondary school graduates (a stable percentage over the last 4 years, between 3,5% and 4,3%) and the brand capital of UFAR (awareness and perceptions through a survey conducted in 2021). During their studies, the students are asked to evaluate the quality of teaching, the effectiveness of administrative services or the learning resources. The statistics feed into discussions at the Scientific and Pedagogical Council and faculty meetings. Teaching staff and administrative staff complete other satisfaction surveys. After graduation, as UFAR has adopted a professionalised orientation, the employment rate is a crucial key performance indicator. Since 2016, a survey has been conducted 6 to 9 months after graduation and shows a high integration in the workplace, as explained before. The accuracy of this data is confirmed by the very high response rate (from 84% to 100%, depending on the years). In addition to meetings with graduates and employers, this survey helps to adapt the content of the programmes to the needs of the Armenian labour market.

However, there is no dashboard to ensure consistency and to analyse the data across cohorts of students over time. The achievement of student learning outcomes is also currently difficult to measure. The QA process for

teaching and learning influences the current policy, but there is no clear evidence that it influences the pedagogical strategy. Although job placement surveys benefit from a remarkable response rate, UFAR should address the issue of the low response rate in the student satisfaction survey on teaching and learning activities. It could, for example, make access to examination results dependent on responses to these surveys.

Students' success and wellbeing at the heart of the educational project

Despite the limited space in the building, UFAR provides its students with valuable resources such as up-to-date and relevant computers and software (such as Sphinx or SPSS for marketing courses). The library is small but students have access to the online resources of Lyon 3 University. On-campus events are organised, in line with pedagogical objectives, to develop soft skills (e.g. *Nuit du Droit*, blockchain hackathon, etc.). The UFAR team demonstrates a real commitment to helping students succeed. The university has developed courses to increase student success in the French language certificate, such as free French courses during the summer, as failure of the French language certification is a major cause of repetition and dropout. Training sessions are offered for students eager to do their internship abroad to discuss issues related to the application form, the intercultural issues that may arise, etc. In 2023, 75 bachelor's degree students and 5 master's students completed an internship abroad. A tutoring service is about to be introduced to better support the students throughout their studies. As all men in Armenia, UFAR male students are required to complete two years of military service at the age of 18. UFAR has developed the PREM'S programme (*Plan de reintegration des étudiants ex-militaires vers le succès*), which aims to support young male students returning from the army. It is praised by its beneficiaries, with whom the panel of experts met during the site visit. The Development and Partnership Department also provides courses integrated into the curriculum to most 3rd-year bachelor's students to improve their ability to enter the labour market (drafting a CV, meeting with professionals, visiting companies, etc.). This initiative seems successful given the high employment rate of UFAR students.

Some (structural) issues are not yet fully addressed

One of the main sources of dissatisfaction expressed by the students concerned the timetables. The limited number of permanent academic staff (who are more flexible than the professional teachers) and the limited time spent in Armenia by the French visiting professors make it difficult to draw up a convenient timetable. Moreover, a certain number of students have part-time jobs and the constant changes in the timetable are difficult for them to cope with. As long as UFAR does not manage to recruit a permanent academic staff, it will be difficult to solve this issue. Besides, the graduation success rate can be misleading because it does not take into account the number of students who repeat a year or drop out. This 4-year graduation rate is decreasing, especially for male students. Even if some explanations are provided (reform of the secondary school, departure for the army) this result must call for meticulous analysis and remedial actions.

As explained above, UFAR's double degrees asset can become a pitfall when it comes to attracting international students. Indeed, the university does not attract many French-speaking secondary graduates; 90% of the admitted students at UFAR have never studied the French language. This could be partly due to the fact that only a few Armenian young people choose to study French at school. In 2023, there were no international students who had no previous relationship with Armenia. Even if the current situation in Armenia does not favour the welcoming of a large number of foreign students, this language requirement prevents UFAR from being considered an international university. Since a good command of English seems to be more valuable in the labour market, the question of teaching English or teaching in English, even in a French programme, needs to be addressed. UFAR is well aware of this and has already launched a master's programme in English at the IMA faculty to overcome this issue. It is also thinking of creating short programmes in English.

The university collects a lot of data on the learning process and the staff are committed to student success although some structural issues remain such as timetable management, French language proficiency, the internationalisation of the student body, and a high level of repetition and drop-out during studies.

Standard 16: The institution monitors the development of its programme offering and ensures that it is sustainable, by relying on a human resources policy consistent with its education policy and by implementing a continuous improvement approach.

The multiplicity of statuses makes human resources policy complex

UFAR academic staff have 3 different statuses that complexify the HR policy:

- The professors of the two French partner universities (for example, 45 professors taught at UFAR in 2022-2023) are paid for the hours they work, in accordance with the French rates, and their transport and accommodation costs are covered by UFAR. They are exclusively involved in specialised courses in the 3rd and 4th years of bachelor's and master's degrees, where they cover 26% of the teaching hours;

- Slightly less than 10% of the teaching hours are taught by a small number of permanent academic staff and some of the administrative staff are also involved in teaching activities;
- Professionals provide a significant volume of hours, including at the master's level. They are by far the most numerous.

The teaching team is therefore heterogeneous by nature. French professors who provide a substantial part of the teaching, especially in master's programmes, are only physically present for a limited time. Although some have been working in Armenia for a long time, their main institution remains their university in France and UFAR cannot intervene in their career development. As for the professional teachers, some have a main activity outside teaching and others are working simultaneously for multiple higher education institutions.

A fast-growing teaching staff consisting mainly of part-time professors

The teaching staff is constantly increasing, from 206 teachers in 2018-2019 to 258 in 2022-23 which amounts to an increase of 23% in 4 years, corresponding to a constant increase of about 6% per year. However, this increase is much lower than the increase in the number of students (+62% over the same period). This raises questions about the workload of the teachers, especially as the proposed tutoring project (20 students followed by teachers to ensure their well-being and success) may add to the burden. The recruitment process for new teachers is explicit and involves several persons including the rector. However, there is no very explicit grid or criteria for recruitment. This could foster a sense of unfairness and unequal treatment between teachers. The higher remuneration of French teachers contributes to increasing this sense of unfairness. Although the university tries to implement a remuneration policy that is quite attractive compared to the Armenian labour market, with hourly wages ranging from $11.36 to $23.39 (compared to the Armenian hourly wage of $11.62), this does not seem to be enough to provide a competitive advantage. However, the social insurance system offered appears rather advantageous in the Armenian context. In addition, the university can count on a large pool of enthusiastic alumni who enjoy teaching at their home university to renew or supplement its teaching staff. Indeed, 40 to 60 new teachers are recruited each autumn to replace those who leave or to ensure new courses. The good reputation of UFAR is therefore an important asset in this field. Every year, the HR department asks teachers about their training needs. It then organises training accordingly. Teachers are also asked to complete satisfaction surveys but the response rate is very low (15%). UFAR should try to strengthen its quality culture and sensitise its staff to the importance of such surveys.

To deliver its teaching, the university relies on a very diverse teaching staff, including external professionals. This results in a complex human resources policy that still needs to be better structured to sufficiently support UFAR's educational offer.

Standard 17: The institution supports the development of student and campus life, student engagement in governance, and promotes student well-being.

A university aware of its spatial limitations and actively pursuing solutions

From April to May 2023, UFAR, in collaboration with the Student Council, surveyed 91 out of 1,779 students (5.1%) and found that 64.8% had housing problems. Although the survey is not very representative, this issue was also highlighted by the students met during the site visit. To address this challenge, UFAR plans to collaborate with the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) to provide students with accommodation in AGBU facilities starting from the 2023-2024 academic year. Over the years, UFAR has regularly reviewed its material and technical base. At present, its facilities, including a main building of 5,005 square metres, do not require any significant enhancements. However, the self-evaluation report acknowledges that the university still faces challenges related to the teaching environment due to space constraints. To overcome this issue, UFAR has rented additional premises, including 915.87 square metres for IMA faculty courses and two gymnasiums totalling 504.8 square metres. In the main UFAR building, there is a 178-square-metre reading room designed to accommodate 40 students. With the support of the Student Council, they create opportunities for their students to participate in various courses, training, and seminars that contribute to the personal growth of the students. These topics included cybersecurity, Unreal Engine, career development, and more.

A university that takes care of its students and allows them to participate in decisions on various aspects of its administration

UFAR is committed to supporting soldiers who participated in the 2020 war. As explained before, the university hired an external psychologist and organised extracurricular training, especially in French language learning, to address the specific needs and challenges of the students returning from the front. Since 17 April, 2023, UFAR also recruited an in-house psychologist who offers anonymous psychological counselling services to enrolled students. This measure has significantly simplified the process of accessing psychological support, with around

50 students seeking help between April and July. UFAR operates a partial tuition reimbursement system, offering discounts provided by both the State and the university. During the 2022-2023 academic year, 603 students benefited from these discounts. According to the self-evaluation report, the principle of involving students in decision-making processes is fundamental to UFAR's approach. The Student Council plays a pivotal role in this regard, holding positions in 4 out of the 11 university committees, namely the Disciplinary Committee, Scientific and Pedagogical Council, Development Committee, and Quality Assurance Committee. Moreover, students regularly engage in routine meetings with various members of the administration.

Despite its spatial limitations, the university seeks solutions for its students and is willing to improve the working environment. It offers important support to students, including financial support through scholarships and seeks to involve them in decisions that affect them.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS ABOUT FIELD 3

Main strengths

- Demanding bachelor's degrees highly recognised by employers and the Armenian population.
- Double degrees with French Universities tailored to the Armenian job market.
- High employability of graduates (as a key performance indicator of the quality of the educational offer).
- Committed and professional teaching staff.
- Constant exchanges and communication to face day-to-day issues.
- A student-centred university (e.g. student success as the main concern of the teaching staff, housing. programme for students in progress, psychological help provided to students, etc.).
- Scholarship policy for students.
- Student involvement in decision processes.

Areas for improvement

- Low attractivity of the master's programmes.
- Research processes and methodology are not at the heart of the academic programme.
- Constant changes in the timetable make the balance between study and job difficult for students.
- Space constraints prevent UFAR from developing more programmes or student activities.
- Housing shortage for students.
- Lack of attractive programmes for international students due to the high language requirements.

Panel recommendations

- Develop an "apprenticeship offer" in the master's degrees where students alternate study at university and work, to meet the expectations of the Armenian students to pursue higher education while earning money and gaining work experience. This could be a pedagogical innovation in the Armenian context that would give UFAR a competitive advantage. This might be challenging to implement but the university could rely on its partners' experience (especially Lyon 3 University).
- Develop a stronger doctoral offer in partnership with either French or local institutions.
- Pursue the development of a limited offer of courses in English (for example during only one selected semester) to attract international students and provide current students with the opportunity to diversify their soft skills.

IV – CONCLUSION

As noted in the introduction, UFAR is at a crossroads if it is to remain a fully-fledged university. The question of governance should be addressed as a priority with its founders, as well as the relative issue of its financial sustainability. It must integrate all the attributes of a university and in particular that of relying on a permanent faculty and research activity in its various fields of activity. To achieve this, it has many assets, including double degree agreements with French universities, a very committed staff, a real concern for the education of students and a very good reputation in Armenia that the high employability of its alumni fosters.

V – LIST OF ACRONYMS

AGBU – Armenian General Benevolent Union

ARMDOCT – Reforming Doctoral Education in Armenia in Line with the Needs of Academia, Industry and Current EU Practices

AUF – *Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie* (French-speaking University Agency)

CV – Curriculum vitae

HR – Human resources

IIAP – Institute for Informatics and Automation Problems

IMA – *Faculté d'informatique et de mathématiques appliquées* (Faculty of Computer science and applied mathematics)

IRIT – *Institut de Recherche en Informatique de Toulouse* (Toulouse Institute for Computer Science Research)

PEPITE – *Pôles étudiants pour l'innovation, le transfert et l'entrepreneuriat* (Student centres for innovation, transfer and entrepreneurship)

PhD – Doctor of Philosophy

PREM'S – *Plan de Réintégration des Etudiants ex-Militaires vers le Succès* (Plan to reintegrate ex-military students into society)

QA – Quality assurance

UFAR – French University in Armenia

VI – COMMENTS OF THE INSTITUTION

UFAR
ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆՈՒՄ ՖՐԱՆՍԻԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՄԱԼՍԱՐԱՆ

Yerevan, March 27, 2024
Ref: 01/144

Salwa Nacouzi
Rector of French University in Armenia (UFAR)
1st Building, 10 Davit Anhaght Street, Yerevan 0037

To
Mr. Stéphane Le Bouler,
Acting President of
High Council for Evaluation of
Research and Higher Education (Hcéres)
2-8 rue Albert Einstein, 75013 Paris, France

Mr. Ruben Topchyan
Director of
The National Center for
Professional Education Quality Assurance
Foundation (ANQA)
22, Orbeli Brothers St, 0028 Yerevan, Armenia

Dear President Stéphane Le Bouler,
Dear Director Ruben Topchyan,

I hereby acknowledge receipt of the evaluation report concerning the French University in Armenia (UFAR) and extend my gratitude to the committee of experts for their diligent efforts. This comprehensive assessment holds significant value for the future of our university. It is noteworthy that this evaluation, conducted jointly by Hcéres and ANQA, marks a significant milestone as the first of its kind, allowing UFAR to align with the requirements of both countries and furthering the objectives of bilateral cooperation.

Upon review, it is evident that the evaluation findings are in line with those identified during our internal self-assessment. While the recommendations provided offer valuable insights, I believe there are opportunities for supplementary comments and clarifications to enrich the experts' analysis constructively.

As rightly indicated in the evaluation report, UFAR stands at a pivotal juncture after more than two decades of operation, and our management team is acutely aware of this reality. Strategic reforms are imperative, necessitating a review of the university's statutes and comprehensive governance reforms. Such endeavors call for a collective commitment from all stakeholders, including the primary founders, namely the French and Armenian governments.

The report aptly underscores several areas of weakness in three fields: strategic and operational management, research and innovation, training and student life. These identified areas warrant focused attention and concerted efforts towards improvement.

1

Strategic and Operational Management: Governance in Review and the Imperative for Enhancement

Governance

The evaluation report sheds light on weaknesses predominantly stemming from the composition and functions of the Board of Trustees (hereinafter referred to as BOT), the selection procedures for the Rector, and the limited commitment of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (hereinafter referred to as MEAE).

The statutes of the French University in Armenia Foundation, established in 2003, have undergone several amendments but no longer align with the evolving needs of the university and the broader academic landscape in Armenia. To address this, plans are underway, with the MEAE duly informed, to revise these statutes by 2024. This revision aims to restructure the BOT, incorporating internal stakeholders (students, staff representatives), university experts, and the President of the University of Toulouse III. Concurrently, the missions of the BOT will be redefined. UFAR had already recognized this need prior to the evaluation process. The BOT, originally scheduled for renewal at the end of 2023, has been extended to allow for thorough examination and restructuring of its governance framework. Building upon the recommendations outlined in the report, UFAR will enact necessary revisions in 2024.

Regarding the selection of the Rector, the authority lies with the MEAE. Expertise France acts as the recruiting agency under the supervision of the MEAE. The recruitment process and contractual terms are to those applicable to an International Technical Expert (ETI), entailing a two-year contract, renewable once.

To enhance the recruitment and contractual framework for rectors of French institutions abroad similar to UFAR, it is recommended to establish a dedicated procedure. We suggest incorporating a local representative on the interview panel and instituting a tenure of 4 years with a possible extension of 2 more years for the appointed rectors. Additionally, an annual evaluation mechanism for the incumbent rector, inclusive of feedback from local staff, needs to be implemented.

It is evident that increased involvement from the MEAE is desirable. However, certain clarifications need to be made regarding the observations made by the experts. Notably, the MEAE has exhibited heightened support for UFAR this year by quadrupling its grant to €200,000 for 2024, despite this being an exceptional allocation. This substantial increase underscores the Ministry's unwavering commitment. Furthermore, it's noteworthy that the joint evaluation was entirely funded by the Ministry.

Over nearly two decades, the MEAE has provided consistent support to the university, initially amounting to €100,000, which was reduced to €50,000 in 2021. Additionally, the MEAE funded the position of an expatriate General Secretary, a position that was phased out in December 2019.

The decrease in support from the Ministry may be attributed to UFAR's enhanced financial sustainability, albeit its fragility remains a concern. The discontinuation of the General Secretary position likely reflects the growing emphasis on local expertise. Nevertheless, UFAR aligns with the recommendation from Hcéres to reinstate this position. As highlighted in the

evaluation, the current French physical presence is limited, with only the Rector serving as a permanent French staff member. The appointment of a General Secretary would elevate France's visibility within the institution. Additionally, it is imperative to advocate for greater support from the Armenian authorities as well, given UFAR's status as an inter-state institution. The Armenian government should be encouraged to bolster its support for UFAR more assertively.

I. Operational Management: Organizational Structures, Processes, and Digitalization

The assertion in the report regarding the absence of internal dialogue structures requires clarification. As of June 2024, UFAR has established a University Council convening monthly, comprising representatives from administrative and academic staff, department heads, deans, and chairpersons. Notably, the first elections for representatives of technical and administrative staff were held in the last quarter of 2023, and these representatives now serve on the University Council.

While the report acknowledges the efforts to implement procedures, it criticizes their partial execution, particularly concerning human resources and quality assurance. These procedures were recently introduced in 2022, indicating scope for refinement. Following the experts' visit, endeavors have been underway to enhance outcomes, with ongoing efforts slated for escalation through the introduction of dashboards and monitoring indicators in 2025.

Undoubtedly, the completion of digitizing all procedures is imperative for achieving objectives. Commencing in 2022, digitization is presently undergoing a testing phase and is anticipated to conclude by early 2025. This initiative aims to establish a digital workspace facilitating the consolidation and accessibility of all management tools as part of a comprehensive digitization endeavor.

Development Policy

While we acknowledge the apprehensions expressed by the experts regarding the potential development of UFAR given its current financial circumstances, it is imperative to highlight that in 2019 and 2020, we initiated feasibility studies to explore the possibility of relocating to a more suitable site. Both studies indicate that sustainable development is achievable without incurring excessive debt. It is worth noting that any relocation endeavor necessitates the endorsement and support of pertinent ministries in both countries as well as contributions from Franco-Armenian benefactors. Fundraising efforts are underway and are included in our strategic plans. Moreover, decentralized cooperation plays a significant role in Armenia, and UFAR can rely on support from regions such as Île-de-France and the ARA region, which have committed €3 million towards the relocation project.

It is imperative to discern between development and massification, as UFAR remains committed to upholding a high standard of education. There is no intention to augment the student intake for existing academic programs (hereinafter referred to as AP). In the medium

term, UFAR aims to introduce new science programs, particularly in emerging fields such as cyber security and artificial intelligence. Restricting itself to its current offerings could jeopardize the university's standing, relegating it to a lower position in the rankings among Armenian universities. Notably, our competitors are introducing highly competitive programs.

In the short term, UFAR, having recently launched lifelong learning initiatives, will continue to expand its repertoire with short courses and micro-credentials. The long-term objective is to design clusters of micro-credentials which, when fully completed, can lead to a Master's degree. This approach is envisioned to foster university development and bolster enrollment without incurring the financial risks associated with traditional Master's programs.

We eagerly await the impending vote on higher education reform in Armenia, slated for autumn 2024, as it holds the potential to enable the acquisition of degrees through the accumulation of micro-credentials.

The University has the capacity to undertake requisite measures to bolster its quality assurance protocols and procedures, specifically focusing on human resources, concurrently with the ongoing relocation efforts, which are presently of paramount importance. The current state of the building poses significant safety hazards for the 2,000 students utilizing it, as indicated in a safety report issued on 15 December 2023 by an independent firm. Furthermore, the division of the university across two sites adversely impacts institutional management and student well-being.

This relocation imperative is not merely linked to the university's advancement but is essential for its survival. Without relocation and given the unchanged premises, maintaining the current student capacity in the forthcoming years would pose considerable challenges. The political backing from the MEAE is instrumental in facilitating at least a temporary relocation, pending the realization of the Academic City—a project envisaged by the Armenian government to consolidate all higher education institutions in Armenia on the outskirts of the capital. However, the completion of this project is anticipated to take another 10 to 15 years.

Strategy

In terms of strategic direction, the experts have identified a deficiency in the absence of a dashboard featuring both quantitative and qualitative monitoring key performance indicators (KPIs), alongside a multi-year budget. This indeed represents a managerial weakness that we are committed to swiftly rectifying. As part of our initiatives for 2024-2025, we have already outlined plans to revise our strategic plan, incorporating the recommendations outlined in the evaluation report, accompanied by a monitoring framework comprising both qualitative and quantitative indicators. Moreover, training sessions for staff members, including department heads, deans, and chairpersons, focusing on strategy comprehension and its implementation through department-specific dashboards, are foreseen for the latter half of 2024.

II. Education Policies and Student Success: Education Model and Internationalization

A model praised by the labour market but still holding back internationalization

The report underscores the educational hurdles confronting the university, with UFAR recognized for its provision of high-quality education and building trust from both public and private sectors. Nonetheless, the current education model, characterized by bilingual French-Armenian (Eastern Armenian) instruction and renowned double diploma programs, poses challenges to internationalization, particularly hindering the influx of incoming students and faculty.

The report advocates for the incorporation of English-taught semesters to facilitate increased mobility. UFAR will contemplate this possibility, albeit its implementation appears to pose significant challenges. The majority of our students commence their university studies without proficiency in French. Consequently, they are required to enhance their French language skills and undertake specialized courses in French starting from the third year, posing a considerable challenge. Furthermore, the report criticizes the limited proportion of courses delivered in French, however, the potential introduction of English-taught semesters will exacerbate this concern. At present, the university has opted to provide all its lifelong learning courses in English to attract a broader student and professional body.

Looking ahead, a crucial decision must be made regarding the language of instruction. This entails choosing between maintaining French as the primary language, thereby upholding the university's commitment to high-quality education for the local community, or transitioning to English instruction to position UFAR as a leading institution regionally and globally. This decision will be integral to the formulation of the 2025-2030 strategy, requiring input from the founders and French partner universities. The MEAE and the University of Lyon 3 are aware of these issues and are already looking into them.

Student Success at the Heart of the Institution: Added Value for UFAR

Despite the suboptimal infrastructure, UFAR's students and faculty benefit from a satisfactory working environment, as underscored in the report, owing to the close rapport fostered between the management team, faculty, administrative staff, and students.

Regarding staff, apart from the scheduled regulatory meetings, ad hoc gatherings are arranged upon request. Comprehensive social benefits, including health insurance and maternity leave, are extended, alongside regular merit-based bonuses. Salaries are aligned with the Armenian average wage, with the lowest salaries reaching up to three times the minimum wage.

Regarding students, the initiation of a Bachelor's degree success plan, featuring personalized tutoring in the first year, commenced at the outset of the 2023 academic year has yielded commendable outcomes. Additionally, management maintains consistent communication with the Student Council and provides backing for its initiatives. While there is acknowledged room for enhancement in the systematic evaluation of teaching, it nonetheless affords students the

opportunity to actively engage in their educational pursuits. Furthermore, full-time psychological and a medical service are accessible to students.

III. Research and Innovation Policy

The report commends UFAR's innovation policy while highlighting research weaknesses attributed to the absence of full-time teaching and research personnel and the structural deficiencies of the Masters program.

Indeed, it is accurate that a research policy was designed in 2016 but not implemented until 2018. Nonetheless, UFAR merits recognition for formulating a highly advantageous support framework for doctoral candidates and researchers compared to other local, public, and private universities. Both full-time and part-time teaching and research staff receive financial and logistical assistance for publications, and participation in international conferences. In addition to the above-mentioned advantages, doctoral students receive financial assistance for their doctoral mobility as well. Although the outcomes remain modest, this support has begun to yield results since 2022. Even part-time instructors are now publishing on behalf of UFAR, and substantial outcomes are anticipated over the next five years.

The experts' observation regarding UFAR's research strategy prioritizing computer science research over other disciplines, necessitates clarification. There is no intention on the part of UFAR to marginalize other fields. The university's commitment to a research-driven approach to teaching mandates equitable conditions and incentives for all doctoral candidates and faculty engaged in research endeavors. However, UFAR faces constraints in terms of both human and financial resources, limiting its capacity to establish robust research centers, with the exception of computer science. Notably, computer science benefits from collaborative efforts between IRIT Toulouse and the IIAP of the Armenian Academy of Sciences under the auspices of a doctoral school.

All researchers at UFAR have the possibility to forge affiliations with laboratories linked to French partners, a practice strongly endorsed by the university. Alternatively, researchers may opt to collaborate with national and international laboratories, resulting in publications credited to both institutions. UFAR further facilitates research endeavors across diverse disciplines through administrative assistance provided by a specialized research unit, which ensures researchers remain informed about pertinent communications and publication prospects.

Two significant challenges persist for UFAR, for which immediate solutions are not readily available, as they stem from structural issues unique to the country: firstly, research necessitates a skilled cadre of researchers and doctoral candidates. However, Armenia lacks a cohesive national strategy to promote research. Moreover, the teaching and research community in Armenia is ageing, compounded by the absence of measures for career advancement to enhance the profession's appeal. Consequently, the majority of educators engage in multiple employment endeavors to ensure a satisfactory standard of living. This concern was underscored by experts during interviews with UFAR faculty members, many of whom exhibit a preference for part-time employment over full-time positions. This challenge is particularly pronounced at UFAR due to its professionally oriented courses.

UFAR
ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆՈՒՄ ՖՐԱՆՍԻԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՄԱԼՍԱՐԱՆ

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that UFAR is a university of excellence and a benchmark in the Armenian context. The work currently underway to review its training model and strengthen its governance and managerial capacity is a forward-looking effort to maintain the quality of its academic programs and prepare it for the coming decade, which will involve major modernization challenges.

Finally, I would like to reaffirm UFAR's appreciation for the analysis and collaborative endeavors undertaken by the expert panel from Hcéres and ANQA.

Please, accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

Salwa Nacouzi

Rector
French University in Armenia (UFAR)

VII – COMMENTS OF THE FRENCH MINISTRY FOR EUROPE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

AMBASSADE
DE FRANCE
EN ARMÉNIE

Liberté
Égalité
Fraternité

Le Conseiller de Coopération et d'Action Culturelle

N° 024-0131400

Erevan, le 25 mars 2024

Cette Ambassade a l'honneur de transmettre au panel d'évaluation de l'UFAR HCERES/ANCA les commentaires du Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères de la République française :

Nous saluons l'exhaustivité de cette évaluation conjointe franco-arménienne et remercions le panel pour la précision de ses observations et de ses recommandations.

Nous rappelons que la mise en œuvre de cette évaluation conjointe a été soutenue par le MEAE afin d'aider l'UFAR à renouveler son ambition dans un contexte nouveau marqué par le renforcement de notre coopération avec l'Arménie, et par la réforme du système d'enseignement supérieur arménien.

Nous soulignons la multiplication par 4 du soutien financier du MEAE à l'UFAR en 2024 via une prise en charge directe par l'administration centrale de notre subvention annuelle à l'établissement, fléchée vers le financement des programmes sociaux de l'UFAR.

[pour rappel : Evaluation financée par DGM/DDC/ESR, à hauteur de 60 000€ en 2023 ; Subvention de 200 000€ de DGM/DDC/ESR à l'UFAR en 2024]

Nous faisons observer que depuis la visite du panel de l'évaluation conjointe en octobre 2023, un certain nombre de ses recommandations ont d'ores et déjà fait l'objet d'actions de la part de l'UFAR : jalons posés vers la constitution d'un corps académique permanent, numérisation des démarches, projet d'introduction de l'anglais comme langue d'enseignement, ainsi que de la part de ce ministère (relocalisation).

En particulier, le sujet de la relocalisation de l'UFAR demeure au centre de l'attention de ses tutelles institutionnelles depuis plusieurs années. Le fait que le CA de l'UFAR du 15/12/2023 se soit saisi de ce sujet urgent a permis d'envisager avec les autorités arméniennes une relocalisation temporaire de l'UFAR. Pour rappel : le bâtiment actuel de l'UFAR est une concession par l'Arménie à titre d'investissement de l'Etat arménien datant de 2003 (cf. Statuts de la Fondation UFAR). Le MEAE, s'appuyant sur une concertation entre la rectrice, le poste et le Département, se mobilise au plus haut niveau de l'Etat français pour faciliter une relocalisation rapide de l'établissement par l'Arménie.

Comme suggéré par le panel, le MEAE est en faveur d'une reconfiguration du Conseil d'administration (CA) de l'UFAR afin que celui-ci puisse inclure toutes les parties prenantes, notamment académiques,

du projet UFAR, en particulier l'Université de Toulouse III Paul Sabatier, partenaire des formations proposées par l'UFAR depuis 2018.

S'agissant du mandat du Recteur de l'Université, le MEAE prend bonne note des recommandations du panel visant à soutenir une continuité dans la gouvernance de l'UFAR en proposant que son Recteur puisse bénéficier d'un mandat de 4 ans, renouvelable. Il convient toutefois de rappeler que ce poste est financé par le MEAE via le déploiement d'un Expert Technique International, dont les conditions d'emploi par Expertise France (employeur) sont celles d'un contrat d'expatriation de l'expert d'une durée de 2 ans, renouvelable une fois. Ce support de poste est donc incompatible pour envisager la mise en œuvre de cette recommandation. Une solution alternative pourrait être recherchée mais elle risquerait de faire perdre l'avantage de la prise en charge directe par l'Etat français.

Il est certain que le succès de l'établissement tient à ce qu'il a jusqu'à présent répondu aux besoins des entreprises et de l'administration publique d'Arménie. L'évolution du marché de l'emploi milite cependant pour la modernisation de l'offre pédagogique de l'UFAR qui doit viser l'employabilité de ses diplômés. Les partenaires académiques français doivent accompagner cette évolution de l'offre vers les nouveaux secteurs de recrutement en Arménie. A cet égard la proposition d'une offre de Master en apprentissage permettrait de pallier la faible attractivité de l'offre académique de niveau Master en Arménie, tout en facilitant la venue des enseignants français (missions) ; elle permettrait aussi de soutenir l'Arménie dans le déploiement de dispositifs d'apprentissage au sein de son enseignement supérieur.

La réforme de l'enseignement supérieur en Arménie pourrait se traduire par la levée de l'obligation d'enseigner en arménien. Cette situation offrirait une nouvelle opportunité à l'UFAR (enseignement en français et en arménien) pour développer une offre de formation en anglais, tout en renforçant l'accompagnement de ses étudiants vers l'obtention d'un niveau intermédiaire de français (niveau B) à l'issue de leur formation.

Je vous prie d'agréer, Madame, Monsieur, l'expression de ma considération distinguée.

AMBASSADE DE FRANCE EN ARMENIE
SERVICE DE COOPERATION ET D'ACTION CULTURELLE

Guillaume Narjollet
Conseiller de coopération et d'action culturelle
Directeur de l'Institut français d'Arménie

NATIONAL CENTER FOR
PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION
QUALITY ASSURANCE FOUNDATION

2 rue Albert Einstein
75013 Paris, France
T. 33 (0)1 55 55 60 10

hceres.fr @Hceres_ Hcéres