

**“NATIONAL CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE”
FOUNDATION**



**EXPERT PANEL REPORT
INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION OF
"GAVAR STATE AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE AFTER ACADEMICIAN A. TAMAMSHEV" (SNCO)**

Yerevan – 2024

INTRODUCTION

The institutional accreditation of the Gavar State Agricultural College after Academician A. Tamamshev (hereinafter referred to as TLI or college) is carried out based on an application submitted by the College. The process of institutional accreditation is organized and coordinated by “National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance” Foundation (hereinafter ANQA), guided by regulation on “State Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Academic Programmes in RA” set by RA Government Decree N 978-Ն (dated June 30, 2011) and by Decree N 959-Ն on “Approval of RA Standards for Professional Education Accreditation” (dated June 30, 2011).

The expert examination was conducted by an independent expert panel, comprising four local experts, as mandated by the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation's regulations on “Formation of the Expert Panel.”

The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Republic of Armenia funded the accreditation process.

The institutional accreditation is aimed not only at external evaluation of quality assurance but also at continuous improvement of the quality of management and academic programmes at the institution. Special emphasis was placed on the cooperation between the institution and employers, as well as its impact on educational content.

The hereby report comprises the results of the evaluation of the TLI's institutional capacities by the State Accreditation Criteria and Standards.

Context of the Evaluation of the College's Activities

The activities and history of the TLI

The Gavar State Agricultural College after Academician A. Tamamshev (SNCO), is an educational institution under the RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports (MoESCS) that offers academic programs in the field of agriculture, making it the only such institution in the Gegharkunik region.

The college was founded in 1929 in Nor Bayazet and was initially named the Livestock and Veterinary Technical School. Over the years, it has undergone multiple reorganizations and name changes. In 1971, it merged with the Sovkhoz of Kamo and was restructured as a Sovkhoz-Technical School. In 1992, as part of privatization and economic reforms, it was renamed the Kamo Agricultural Technical School.

Since April 1996, the institution has been known as the "Academician A. Tamamshyev State Agricultural College of Gavar" under the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Armenia. In December 2002, it was renamed SNCO "Academician A. Tamamshyev State Agricultural College of Gavar". In 2012, the college came under the jurisdiction of the RA Ministry of Education and Science, and since 2019, it has been operating under its current name, The Gavar State Agricultural College after Academician A. Tamamshev (SNCO), under the RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports.

As part of the institutional accreditation process conducted by the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA), the institution was conditionally accredited for two years, as per Decision No. 48 of the ANQA Accreditation Commission, dated May 17, 2021.

Development Directions and Educational Programs of the College.

The Gavar State Agricultural College after Academician A. Tamamshev is the only VET institution in the Gegharkunik region that trains specialists in the field of agriculture.

Currently, the college offers six professional academic programs, of which five are secondary vocational programs, and one is a preliminary vocational (craftsmanship) program.

As a key institution for agricultural education and specialist training in the region, the college plays a vital role. However, most students come from the enlarged Gavar community, primarily due to transportation challenges between settlements in the region.

According to the 2017-2025 Gegharkunik Regional Development Strategy, one of the priority areas is the modernization of agriculture, including the development of high-value agriculture and the processing of agricultural products through advanced technologies. Another key priority is enhancing human capital, ensuring that young specialists are trained in line with regional labor market needs. The college's academic programs, particularly in veterinary medicine and dairy and dairy product technology, contribute to achieving these goals.

The faculty consists of 27 full-time lecturers and four part-time employer-lecturers. As of September 2024, the college has 281 students enrolled.

Student enrollment across specializations is as follows:

- Finance - 62 students (out of 75 licensed spots)
- Accounting - 43 students (out of 45 licensed spots)
- Transport Organization and Management - 52 students (out of 80 licensed spots)
- Veterinary Medicine - 36 students (out of 80 licensed spots)
- Dairy and Dairy Product Technology - 49 students (out of 80 licensed spots)
- Computer Operations - 39 students (out of 90 licensed spots)

Statistics on graduate employment indicate that the percentage of graduates who continue their studies at universities ranges from 18.8% to 35.7%. The number of graduates who secure employment before graduation is relatively low, averaging one to two students per year.

While the overall percentage of graduates working in their field remains low, there has been a positive trend in recent years, reaching 9.4% (5 graduates). Meanwhile, the unemployment rate among graduates has fluctuated between 13.5% and 30.3% in different years.

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION

The independent expert panel formed in accordance with the requirements of “Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel”, National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation, carried out the expertise of the Gavar State Agricultural College after Academician A. Tamamshev institutional capacities. The evaluation was conducted according to 10 institutional accreditation criteria set by the RA Government Decree N 959-Ն, dated June 30, 2011.

The expert panel also considered that in 2020, the College underwent an institutional accreditation process, resulting in the award of conditional institutional accreditation for a period of two years in 2021. Based on the deficiencies and recommendations identified in the expert report, a revised follow-up plan and timeline for addressing these shortcomings were approved in 2021.

In alignment with levels 4 and 5 of Armenia’s National Qualifications Framework, the College delivers primary vocational (craft-based) and secondary vocational academic programs. During the evaluation, the expert panel recognized that Gavar State Agricultural College is the sole institution in the region offering secondary vocational education in agriculture. Its mission is oriented toward addressing regional educational needs and contributing to economic development.

An analysis of the College’s management and quality assurance systems reveals that it has not yet undertaken sufficient measures to implement its strategic objectives. The College’s strategic plan identifies key priorities, including the creation of an attractive educational environment, the provision of high-quality and efficient student-centered services, and the enhancement of management effectiveness.

The institution’s development strategy considers the regional context, with a focus on training specialists in agriculture and related fields. However, the absence of a well-defined data collection mechanism prevents the College from making data-driven decisions that would optimize the planning and management of educational processes. Implementing data-informed decision-making, alongside assessing stakeholder needs, would enable the institution to make evidence-based improvements in its academic programs and governance.

Within the framework of strategic planning, refining the implementation roadmap and adjusting the planning timeline would facilitate the effective execution of both short-term and long-term initiatives. Additionally, the College must reassess the methodology and content of its existing surveys while developing and integrating alternative approaches and tools for data collection.

By examining the College’s strategic management and quality assurance processes, the expert panel concludes that integrating data-driven analytical mechanisms and aligning strategic planning with quality assurance processes will contribute to the institution’s sustainable development and the establishment of a quality culture.

Despite its limited financial resources, the College effectively implements its academic programs. It possesses adequate infrastructure and material-technical resources, including classrooms and laboratories, which require continuous improvement and development. Additionally, the College has

created opportunities for utilizing the resources of partner organizations. However, the expert panel identifies challenges in organizing practical training, and addressing these issues would enable students to fully benefit from the resources of partner organizations, ensuring equal opportunities for all.

Gavar State Agricultural College offers a range of academic programs designed to develop sector-specific skills and practical knowledge in students. These programs primarily focus on agriculture, veterinary sciences, and related fields. Students can also participate in Work-Based Learning courses, which are organized in collaboration with partner organizations and production enterprises.

Nevertheless, there are certain gaps in the College's academic programs that require improvement. First, the programs need to be updated to align with the evolving demands of the labor market. Additionally, student-centered learning approaches and innovative teaching methodologies should be incorporated into the curricula. Moreover, establishing clear mechanisms for evaluating and monitoring the effectiveness of academic programs will enhance the College's ability to meet labor market requirements successfully.

The research sector at TLI is still in its developmental phase and holds significant potential for improvement. The systematic implementation and modernization of research programs require greater attention and investment. To enhance the quality and effectiveness of research, it is crucial to establish strategic frameworks for planning and conducting research activities, thereby fostering active engagement among students and faculty in research initiatives.

The College also has opportunities for growth in the areas of external relations and internationalization. Expanding international partnerships is a key priority for diversifying research activities and enhancing institutional collaboration. However, current international engagements and external affiliations remain limited, necessitating further expansion and deepening of partnerships. Strengthening English language instruction and developing intercultural competencies essential for international cooperation would be instrumental in advancing these efforts. Additionally, participation in international initiatives such as Erasmus+ and similar programs would facilitate knowledge exchange and contribute to the enhancement of the educational environment. These measures would raise the College's reputation, support the professional development of students and faculty, and strengthen its presence within the global academic community.

The College's existing transparency and accountability mechanisms require further refinement. At present, these mechanisms do not provide stakeholders with a comprehensive understanding of institutional performance, nor do they significantly enhance public recognition and institutional credibility.

The expert panel acknowledges that, while the College is taking steps to assess regional socio-economic development opportunities, challenges, and risks, further reinforcement of its strategic development initiatives is necessary. This includes strengthening outreach efforts to prospective applicants, increasing student enrollment, ensuring the effective implementation of academic programs, expanding external partnerships, and enhancing international collaboration.

Strengths of the Institution:

- Inclusion of internal stakeholders in the decision-making process.
- Availability of study materials and assignment packages for all academic programs and modules.
- The college's experience in organizing the state certification exam in the employer's environment and assessing students' practical skills in the workplace (within the framework of the "Veterinary Medicine" academic program).
- Employer-lecturer involvement in certain academic programs, ensuring the provision of practical assignments derived from the workplace.
- The trend of rejuvenation within the faculty.
- Technical equipment and provision of laboratories and classrooms for all academic programs.
- Effective mechanisms for student recruitment and the continuous growth in student numbers.
- New collaboration agreements and increased involvement of partner organizations in academic programs.

Weaknesses of the Institution:

- The absence of external stakeholders' involvement in the processes of strategic goal setting, strategy assessment, and analysis of implemented activities.
- The lack of connection between short-term and long-term planning.
- Incomplete implementation of the quality assurance system and the inefficiency of data collection mechanisms.
- The absence of resource planning for organizing laboratory work.
- Lack of control over practical training and the inefficiency of improvement mechanisms.
- The descriptive nature of student reports in the academic progress system, which does not reflect the student's professional development or emerging issues during the academic process within the organization.
- Incomplete implementation of monitoring mechanisms for academic programs in the academic progress system and a slow pace of AP improvement.
- The inadequacy of student assessment criteria.
- Overwork of certain lecturers.
- The low level of professional employment among graduates.
- Lack of motivation among the faculty to follow innovations, developments, and international best practices in the professional field.

Recommendations:**Database management**

- Define effective performance indicators to assess the achievement of goals and objectives in the strategic plan, develop a clear timeline for implementing actions, assign responsibilities for each action, and plan financial resources.

- Promote effective collaboration between the College's departments by developing and implementing cooperation mechanisms.
- Base the short-term planning and accountability of all departments on the College's Strategic Development Plan and its implementation timeline.
- Initiate and ensure the participation of the College's leadership team and the Quality Assurance Officer in training sessions on quality assurance to promote a thorough understanding and effective implementation of the QA culture and system.
- Link the Quality Assurance Officer's reports to the department's work plan, ensuring a clear connection between objectives and outcomes, making them more analytical, and including specific solutions to issues.
- Improve data collection mechanisms, revise the content of questionnaires to include questions that identify issues, and develop a methodology for analyzing survey results to support data-driven decision-making.
- Implement a new human resources management system, including performance evaluation, professional development, and incentive mechanisms for employees.

Credible award of qualifications

- Ensure that, before engaging in work-based learning (particularly in the "Dairy and Dairy Product Technology" specialization), students have sufficient time in educational laboratories. Work-based learning should be conducted in small groups to guarantee equal participation and effective feedback for all students.
- Review the format of the WBL student report, allowing for the presentation of acquired practical skills and competencies.
- Ensure the full implementation of the assessment criteria and mechanisms established within the framework of WBL.
- Plan the necessary resources for each curriculum and WBL program, ensuring the proper equipping of laboratories and estimating the material and financial resources required for laboratory activities.
- Expand learning resources by enriching the library collection with essential professional literature and providing access to electronic libraries.
- Review and enhance the monitoring mechanisms of curricula by involving both internal and external stakeholders in the process, ensuring the extraction and analysis of in-depth data.
- Assess the effectiveness of WBL by conducting benchmarking against successful academic programs at other higher education institutions, considering international best practices.
- Identify the professional development needs of lecturers and organize targeted training sessions to evaluate their effectiveness.
- Take steps to diversify financial revenue sources.
- Involve both specialized faculty members of the respective curricula and a wide range of stakeholders in the monitoring and quality assurance processes of academic programs.

Long-term development

- Define clear research directions within the college's specializations, considering the needs of employers.
- Implement a faculty incentive system to encourage the execution and publication of research and educational-methodological work.
- Establish research and independent study topics that include the analysis of specialized issues, fostering students' creative and critical thinking skills.
- Update the college's official website and enhance its visibility on social media platforms by involving students with IT expertise, ensuring comprehensive and accessible information for stakeholders.
- Develop and implement English language training programs for faculty and students, assessing the effectiveness of the courses.
- Organize regular meetings with regional employers to strengthen the connection between the institution and the labor market.
- Analyze the main reasons for low graduate employment rates and take steps to improve employment outcomes.
- Ensure the independence of the Student Council by developing and implementing mechanisms that promote student autonomy.
- Explore the possibility of offering short-term courses and training programs based on market demand to generate additional financial revenue.

Armen Harutyunyan, Chair of Expert Panel

03.12.2024

DESCRIPTION OF EXTERNAL REVIEW

COMPOSITION OF EXPERT PANEL

The following expert panel conducted an external evaluation of the institutional capacities of the Gavar State Agricultural College after Academician A. Tamamshev.

1. **Armen Harutyunyan** - Vice-Rector of Yerevan State Institute of Theatre and Cinematography, PhD in Art Studies, Associate Professor, head of the expert panel.
2. **Elena Martirosyan** - Deputy Director for Academic Affairs at the French-Armenian Vocational Education Center, expert panel member.
3. **Narine Hovhannisyan** - Lecturer at the Armenian National Agrarian University, PhD in Technical Sciences, Associate Professor, expert panel member.
4. **Inga Harutyunyan** - Student of "Pharmacy" at Ararat Regional State College, Student-Expert.

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

Haykuhi Barsegyan, Public Relations responsible at ANQA, coordinated the work of the expert panel.

All the members of the expert panel and the coordinator have signed independence and confidentiality agreements.

PROCESS OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW

The College applied for state institutional accreditation by submitting to ANQA, filling out the application form, and presenting copies of the license and respective appendices (01.02.2024).

The ANQA Secretariat checked the data presented in the application form and the appendices in the application package.

After deciding to accept the application(19.02.2024), ANQA and the College signed an agreement. The timetable of activities was prepared and approved.

Self-evaluation

Considering that the educational institution is going through institutional accreditation for the first time and is in the initial stage of the formation of the culture of quality assurance in college, ANQA conducted four-day online workshops in February. The workshops aimed to prepare colleges for the organizational stages of the accreditation process. During the workshops, the interpretations of the institutional accreditation criteria and standards, the electronic questionnaire to be filled in for applying for institutional accreditation, and the features of self-evaluation and SWOT analysis were presented. The educational institution carried out a SWOT analysis, which was discussed with the employees of the ANQA. During the implementation of the self-evaluation, the ANQA organized discussions to clarify the issues.

The revised self-evaluation of the college's institutional capacity was presented on 03.05.2024. Representatives of the institution's administrative and educational staff, lecturers, and students were involved in the self-evaluation process.

Preparatory phase

After the TLI submitted the self-evaluation report and the attached documents, the ANQA coordinator reviewed the package to ensure it met the ANQA's requirements. The self-evaluation and the attached documents were provided to the expert panel for the preliminary evaluation. The composition of the expert panel was agreed upon with the College and was confirmed by the order of the ANQA Director. Within the scheduled time, the expert panel summarized the preliminary evaluation results, and the Chair of the expert panel and the process coordinator set the site visit schedule.

Preparatory visit

Before the site visit, a preparatory online visit to the college was conducted on 05.09.2024. The ANQA coordinator, the head of the institutional program accreditation department and the head of the expert panel were present at the meeting. During the meeting, the schedule of the site visit was introduced and agreed upon with the college, and discussed. Mutually agreed-upon decisions were made regarding the technical, organizational, and informational issues of the site visit, as well as the behaviour and ethical norms of the meeting participants.

Site visit

The expert panel site visit occurred from September 16 to 18, 2024. During the week preceding the site visit, the members of the expert panel and the coordinator visited the college, observed the infrastructure and resources of the college, conducted class observations, and observed exams. Then, the experts and the coordinator had a closed meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the college according to the standards, clarify the questions to be asked of the target groups, and discuss the procedures for the meetings and the next steps.

The site visit started and ended with meetings with the college director. All the meeting participants were randomly selected from a pre-provided list. All scheduled meetings were held. During the visit, the expert panel studied documents.

At the end of each working day, the expert panel held closed meetings to discuss the results of the interim expert assessment, and at the end of the visit, the main results were summarized.

The expert panel reached its conclusion on the criteria after discussing and analyzing all members' work, always applying the principle of consensus.

Expert panel report

The expert panel members and the ANQA coordinator prepared a preliminary version of the expert report. After the expert panel members approved it, the preliminary report was provided to the college on 18.11.2024.

The college did not provide feedback on the preliminary version of the report. The expert panel prepared the final version of the expert report, which was approved by the panel on 03.12.2024

Haykuhi Barseghyan

Coordinator of the Expert Panel / 03.12.2024

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

CRITERION	CONCLUSION
<i>I. Mission and Purposes</i>	Satisfactory
<i>II. Governance and Administration</i>	Unsatisfactory
<i>III. Academic Programmes</i>	Satisfactory
<i>IV. Students</i>	Satisfactory
<i>V. Faculty and Staff</i>	Satisfactory
<i>VI. Research and Development</i>	Unsatisfactory
<i>VII. Infrastructure and Resources</i>	Satisfactory
<i>VIII. Societal Responsibility</i>	Satisfactory
<i>IX. External Relations and Internationalization</i>	Satisfactory
<i>X. Internal Quality Assurance System</i>	Unsatisfactory