

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



**EXPERT PANEL REPORT
INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION OF
GYUMRI STATE TECHNICAL COLLEGE**

Yerevan – 2025

INTRODUCTION

The institutional accreditation of Gyumri State Technical College (hereinafter referred to as TLI or College) is carried out based on the application submitted by the College. The process of institutional accreditation is organised 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 the independent expert panel established in accordance with the requirements set by the “National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance” foundation under the regulation on “Formation of the Expert Panel”. The Panel comprises 4 local experts.

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

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

The report presents the results of the evaluation of the TLI's institutional capacities against the State Accreditation Criteria and Standards.

Context of the Evaluation of the VET Institution's Activities

Background and History of the Institution

The Institution was founded in 1932 as the “Gyumri State Technical College” and remains the only institution in the Republic specialising in the training of railway professionals. Throughout its history, the Institution has undergone several name changes.

Since January 2003, the College has been the legal successor to “Gyumri Railway College” CJSC (established in 1932) and “Gyumri S. Safaryan Construction College” (established in 1968).

The College's registered address is: 29 Tigran Mets Street, Gyumri, Shirak Region, Republic of Armenia.

Development Directions and Educational Programmes

According to the “Shirak Region Development Strategy of the Republic of Armenia for 2017–2025,” territorial development focuses on three key priorities: the development of information and telecommunications technologies, the modernisation of agricultural technologies and rural development, the promotion and support of small and medium-sized industrial enterprises, and the development of tourism.

The vision for the Shirak Region for 2017–2025 is to become a leading region of the Republic of Armenia by ensuring sustainable socio-economic opportunities within communities, establishing a competitive economy, and maintaining a high level of employment.

The Institution delivers secondary vocational education through full-time and part-time (extramural) modes of study across seven specialities:

1. Accounting, qualification awarded: Accountant.
2. Technical Maintenance of Computing Equipment and Computer Networks, qualification awarded: Technician in Technical Maintenance of Computing Equipment and Computer Networks.
3. Organization and Management of Transportation in Railway Transport, qualification awarded: Technician-Dispatcher in the Organization and Management of Transportation.
4. Automation, Telemechanics and Communication in Railway Transport, qualification awarded: Technician in the Operation and Technical Maintenance of Telemechanics, Communication and Automation Systems in Transport.
5. Technical Operation of Railway Electric Locomotives, qualification awarded: Electrotechnician in the Operation and Technical Maintenance of Railway Electric Locomotives.

6. Technical Operation of Railway Rolling Stock, qualification awarded: Technician in the Technical Operation of Railway Wagons.
7. Construction of Railways, Maintenance of Railway Tracks and Track Facilities, qualification awarded: Technician in Railway Track and Track Facilities Maintenance.

The College employs 39 teaching staff, of whom 17 are full-time, 13 are part-time, and 9 are engaged on an additional contractual basis. Eleven members of the academic staff are practitioners in their respective fields, primarily employees of “South Caucasus Railway” CJSC.

As of December 2024, the Institution has a total student population of 315, comprising 148 full-time and 167 part-time (extramural) students.

The College applies the following tuition fee policy:

- For full-time students: AMD 90,000 per academic year;
- For part-time students and employees of South Caucasus Railway: AMD 75,000 per academic year;
- For international students: AMD 120,000 per academic year.

Graduate tracer studies indicate that in the 2021–2022 academic year, of 164 graduates, 26% continued their studies at higher education institutions in their field, 13% were conscripted into military service, and 40% were employed, of whom 25% were employed in their field of specialisation.

According to data from the 2022–2023 academic year, of 91 graduates, 5% continued their studies at higher education institutions in their relevant speciality, 73% were employed, and 70% of those employed were working in their field of qualification.

Regarding employment outcomes, the specialities “Organization and Management of Transportation in Railway Transport” and “Automation, Telemechanics and Communication in Railway Transport” show the strongest performance indicators.

Sources. The contextual description of the College’s activities is based on documentation and evidence provided by the Institution, including:

- the Self-Evaluation Report.
- the Strategic Plan and its implementation timetable.
- unit-level plans and procedures.
- meetings held during the expert panel site visit.
- the regional development strategy.
- other relevant policy and conceptual documents.

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION

The expertise of the Gyumri State Technical College and its institutional capacities were assessed by an independent expert panel formed in accordance with the requirements of the “Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel” of the «National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance» Foundation. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with 10 institutional accreditation criteria outlined in the RA Government Decree N 959-Ն, dated June 30, 2011.

During the evaluation, the expert panel noted that the technical college in Gyumri, Shirak region, is the only secondary vocational education institution in the Republic that primarily offers academic programs in railway-related specialisations, with long-established professional traditions. The panel also noted that the College is undergoing institutional accreditation for the first time and is in the early stages of developing its quality assurance culture.

The expert panel notes that the College’s current activities are conducted systematically. In essence, the College’s governance is situational; however, the management team’s high professional qualifications and experience in organising the educational process enable the effective implementation of both managerial and academic processes. The panel finds that, to elevate governance processes to an institutional level, it is necessary to develop and implement outcome-based objectives, together with measurable qualitative and quantitative performance indicators to assess their effectiveness.

The analysis of the governance and quality assurance systems of Gyumri State Technical College indicates that, although steps have been taken to introduce a quality assurance culture and mechanisms, these efforts are not yet comprehensive. The quality assurance system remains in the implementation phase and does not sufficiently support evidence-based decision-making. Comprehensive studies of the factors influencing institutional performance have not been conducted, and institutional decisions are not grounded in systematically collected, analysed, and verified data. Establishing and consolidating the quality assurance system at the College is essential for fostering a data-driven management culture. The expert panel emphasises that introducing analytical mechanisms grounded in reliable data and aligning strategic planning with quality assurance processes will contribute to the College's sustainable development and the formation of a mature quality culture.

The Expert Panel considers it essential to highlight the significant involvement of partner organisations in implementing academic programmes, particularly the cooperation with the principal partner, South Caucasus Railway CJSC. This collaboration enables the College to maintain a direct link with the sector’s only major employer organisation. Close engagement with external stakeholders facilitates the adoption of managerial decisions that enhance academic programs and ensure the credible award of qualifications.

The state educational standards underpinning the College's academic programmes have largely been developed for this institution in collaboration with employers. This has ensured that program content aligns with labor market demands. At the same time, a significant proportion of the teaching staff engaged in instruction comprises practising specialists from the employer organisation. As a result, students acquire the professional skills and practical competencies required by the sector. Notably, employer resources are extensively utilised to develop students' professional competencies, particularly during technological and pre-graduation internships.

By applying both traditional and innovative professional teaching and learning methodologies, the academic staff ensure that graduates achieve learning outcomes in knowledge and skills that are generally satisfactory to employers. The assignments provided to students effectively support the development and enhancement of practical skills while emphasising the acquisition of solid theoretical foundations. Consequently, the College can graduate specialists who are competitive and in demand in the labor market.

The College employs highly qualified and pedagogically experienced faculty members, including young lecturers. The academic staff is complemented by active industry professionals and employers, through whom the College ensures the implementation of practical assignments and direct exposure for students to the real working environment. The involvement of employer-lecturers significantly contributes to the development of students' practical competencies, aligning with sectoral requirements.

The Expert Panel notes that, given the specific features of the reviewed study programs and the sector's development vision, the strong commitment of employer-lecturers to transferring their professional skills and experience to college students is particularly commendable.

According to the Expert Panel's assessment, the College needs to introduce mechanisms for systematic needs assessment of academic staff, as well as for the development of their professional, pedagogical, and other necessary competencies, alongside incentive mechanisms for faculty members. Planning professional development activities based on the results of faculty evaluation will contribute to strengthening staff capacities and enhancing teaching effectiveness.

Implementing the College's study programs requires an environment and infrastructure that align with their specific characteristics. To deliver its academic programs, the College has laboratories, specialised classrooms, and other necessary infrastructure, as well as appropriate materials, technical resources, and a base that requires continuous improvement. The Expert Panel positively evaluates the opportunity for students, in practical classes and internships, to utilise the resources of partner organisations.

The College has established student recruitment mechanisms. Activities organised for prospective applicants contribute, to a certain extent, to recruitment efforts. Nevertheless, the College maintains a

relatively small student body, which directly affects its budget. Despite limited financial resources, the College ensures the implementation of its educational programmes; however, the lack of resources allocated to development remains a concern. From this perspective, the Expert Panel emphasises the need to implement processes to diversify funding sources and ensure the sustainable delivery of academic programs. At the same time, despite its limited financial capacity, the College effectively utilises partner organisations' resources and infrastructure in the educational process, enabled by flexible decision-making and active cooperation.

The College lacks a clearly defined research direction or priority area. Although research activity at the secondary vocational education level may be closely linked to the development and practical implementation of the relevant professional field, this component remains underdeveloped. The Expert Panel considers that, for the full and effective implementation of the academic programs, it is necessary to define potential research directions aligned with the delivered programmes, plan concrete steps for their realisation, and emphasise the research component not only among students but also by creating favourable conditions for academic staff to engage in research projects.

In the field of external relations and internationalisation, the College demonstrates development potential. The College recognises the importance of establishing international partnerships to diversify its practical and research activities; however, there is a need to enhance the effectiveness of its external relations management. The Expert Panel notes that the College's external links and international cooperation are currently limited. At the same time, the College can expand its geographic reach by establishing partnerships with similar educational institutions in the Russian Federation. Such collaboration would strengthen the College's reputation, ensure the continuous professional development of students and academic staff, and increase its engagement within the international educational community.

The College needs to clarify and formalise the mechanisms that ensure accountability and transparency for its implemented processes. At present, these mechanisms do not provide stakeholders with a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the College's activities, nor do they enhance the institution's visibility and reputation within the broader community.

The official online presence of any higher education institution is a fundamental prerequisite for institutional transparency and public accountability. It enables the institution not only to present itself in a professional and structured manner and to provide accessible information to stakeholders, but also to enhance its accessibility to international partners, establish and maintain external relations, and ensure appropriate levels of accountability and transparency.

The Expert Panel emphasises the need to establish an official website for the College. This will enable the institution to present itself comprehensively to the public, ensure effective feedback mechanisms with internal and external stakeholders, increase public awareness of its activities, and strengthen trust in its graduates among the state and society.

Strengths of the Institution:

1. The active involvement of both internal and external stakeholders in the College's governance bodies enables the consideration of diverse stakeholder perspectives in academic and managerial decision-making processes.
2. The College's management team's extensive professional experience and strong awareness of sector-specific challenges contribute to informed decision-making aligned with industry needs.
3. The engagement of experienced industry practitioners across all academic programs, fostering the effective development of students' practical competencies.
4. The development of most of the College's academic programs in direct cooperation with the employer ("South Caucasus Railway" CJSC), ensuring alignment with labor market demands and professional requirements.
5. Above-average graduate employment rates in their respective fields of qualification.
6. The high professional qualifications of the academic staff.
7. The availability of adequate material and technical base, including specialised classrooms, training grounds, and laboratories, together with the active utilisation of partner organisations' resources.
8. The strong involvement of partner organisations in the implementation of academic programs.

Weaknesses of the Institution:

1. The absence of clearly defined and measurable indicators for assessing the effectiveness of implementing strategic objectives.
2. An insufficient level of cooperation among structural units (including departments/chairs).
3. An incomplete understanding of the quality assurance system among stakeholders, together with its partial implementation.
4. The lack, in recent years, of cooperation and experience exchange with sector-specific vocational education institutions, including the absence of comparative analysis of academic programs.
5. The absence of systematic planning for the professional development and training of academic staff.

6. The lack of mechanisms and incentive measures to promote the research activities of academic staff and students.
7. Limited experience in participating in international programs and project-based cooperation initiatives.
8. Restricted mechanisms for ensuring transparency and accountability.

Main recommendations:

Data-Driven Management

- Clarify and formalise the College's mission, placing explicit emphasis on its railway and technical-vocational profile.
- Develop and implement the College's Strategic Plan and its Action Plan/Timeline, involving internal and external stakeholders, and clearly defining strategic goals, responsible persons, timelines, and measurable quantitative and qualitative indicators to assess expected outcomes.
- Align the planning and reporting processes of the College's management and structural units with the institution's strategic priorities, ensuring full coherence with long-term development objectives. Strengthen the analytical component of reports by ensuring evidence-based data, comparative analysis, and an integrated assessment of results achieved.
- Develop and introduce alternative funding mechanisms, including participation in grant programs and the provision of short-term fee-based courses, to diversify financial flows.
- Consider merging and consolidating departments, particularly where academic programs are closely related, to enhance interdepartmental cooperation and ensure more efficient use of resources.
- Conduct an in-depth systematic analysis of factors influencing the College's performance, including an evaluation of the effectiveness of existing academic programs and the feasibility of introducing new ones.
- Ensure the continuity and sustainability of the internal quality assurance system, particularly through regular professional development and capacity-building for the quality assurance officer.
- Diversify and further develop data collection mechanisms to enable more objective and comprehensive analysis.
- Establish cooperation with quality assurance officers at other educational institutions to benchmark and adopt good practices in the field.

Credible Awarding of Qualifications

- Consider the feasibility of introducing work-based learning modalities.
- Study labor market demands in other technical fields to explore opportunities to launch new specialisations and diversify vocational education programs.
- Deliver general education subjects in a professional context by linking the natural and exact sciences to practical examples from relevant professional fields (including the railway sector). Additionally, modernise foreign-language teaching methodologies through greater use of didactic and audio materials, as well as contemporary technologies.
- Develop and implement clear assessment criteria for laboratory work, internships, and final assessments, ensuring objective evaluation of students' knowledge and competences.
- Conduct a comparative analysis of academic programmes with similar institutions in the Russian Federation to ensure curricular modernisation, familiarise students and faculty with professional innovations and international good practice, and introduce new teaching methods and approaches into the educational process.
- Introduce a mentorship system that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of novice lecturers and mentors, with a focus on the continuous improvement of teaching methodologies.
- Explore opportunities for the digitalisation of the library to ensure more efficient management and utilisation of library resources.
- Continue efforts to improve laboratory facilities and the overall learning environment.

Long-Term Development

- Expand the geographical reach of student recruitment by visiting not only educational institutions in Gyumri but also those in adjacent communities, thereby increasing the number of applicants.
- Consider establishing an official website in at least two languages (with Armenian as mandatory), ensuring comprehensive coverage of institutional activities and the publication of key documents.
- Implement targeted measures to enhance the visibility and promotion of the College's activities and academic programs among stakeholders.
- Explore the possibility of offering short-term courses and professional training programs to create additional revenue streams.

- Foster broader engagement with diverse segments of society by expanding partnerships beyond the railway sector.
- Define research priorities aligned with the technical college's specific profile and the needs of sectoral employers.
- Introduce mechanisms to encourage and incentivise faculty engagement in research.

Armen Harutyunyan, Chair of Expert Panel / 29.04.2025

DESCRIPTION OF EXTERNAL REVIEW

COMPOSITION OF EXPERT PANEL

The following expert panel conducted an external evaluation of Gyumri State Technical College's institutional capacity.

- **Armen Harutyunyan** – Vice-Rector for Development, Yerevan State Institute of Theatre and Cinematography, Head of the Expert Panel.
- **Anna Hayrapetyan** – Lecturer and Head of Chair, Kotayk Regional State College, Member of the Expert Panel.
- **Elina Shamkhalova** – Accreditation Process Coordinator, Eurasia International University, Member of the Expert Panel.
- **Albert Tadevosyan** – Second-year student, Department of Finance, Armenian State University of Economics, Student Member of the Expert Panel.

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

The work of the Expert Panel was coordinated by Anahit Terteryan, Specialist at the Institutional and Program Accreditation Department of the ANQA.

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 an ANQA application on 01.02.2024, including the application form, copies of the license, and the respective appendices.

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

After deciding to accept the application, ANQA and the College signed an agreement. The activity timetable was prepared and approved.

Self-evaluation

Given that the educational institution is undergoing its first accreditation process and is in the initial stages of establishing a culture of quality assurance, ANQA has conducted online workshops with accredited VET institutions. The workshops aimed to prepare colleges for the organisational stages of the accreditation process. During the workshops, the interpretations of the institutional accreditation criteria and standards, the electronic questionnaire to be completed for institutional accreditation, and the features of self-evaluation and SWOT analysis were presented. The educational institution

conducted a SWOT analysis and discussed it with ANQA employees. During the implementation of the self-evaluation, current discussions were organized by the ANQA to clarify the issues.

The self-evaluation of Gyumri State Technical College was submitted on August 08, 2025. The self-evaluation was conducted by the college's staff, including administrative, teaching, and support staff.

Preparatory phase

The Expert Panel, having reviewed the VET's self-evaluation report and the accompanying package of documents, conducted a preliminary evaluation in accordance with the prescribed format. As part of this process, the Panel prepared a list of additional documents requiring further examination and identified key issues and questions, indicating the respective structural units or target groups to be addressed. Subsequently, the Expert Panel consolidated the preliminary assessment results and developed a detailed plan and schedule for the site visit.

Preparatory visit

Before the site visit, a preparatory online visit to the college was carried out on 05.12.2025. 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 site visit schedule was introduced and agreed upon with the college. Additionally, the meeting participants discussed and mutually agreed on decisions regarding the technical, organisational, and information aspects of the site visit, as well as the behaviour and ethical norms of the participants.

Site visit

The expert panel site visit took place from December 9-11, 2025. During the week preceding the site visit, the expert panel members and the coordinator visited the college, observed its infrastructure and resources, 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 college's strengths and weaknesses against the standards, clarify the questions to be asked of the target groups, and discuss the meeting procedures and next steps.

The site visit began and ended with meetings with the College's director. All participants in the meetings were randomly selected from a pre-provided list. All scheduled meetings were held. During the visit, the expert panel reviewed documents.

The expert panel reached its conclusion on the criteria through discussions and analyses by all members, always applying the principle of consensus.

Expert panel report

With the ANQA coordinator, the expert panel members prepared a preliminary version of the expert report, which the experts reviewed and agreed to. The preliminary report was provided to the college on April 04, 2025. The college did not submit any comments or objections to the preliminary report. Upon receipt of the college's written confirmation, the expert panel prepared the final version of the report.

Anahit Terteryan

Coordinator of the Expert Panel

29.04.2025

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

CRITERION	CONCLUSION
<i>I. Mission and Purposes</i>	Satisfactory
<i>II. Governance and Administration</i>	Satisfactory
<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>	Unsatisfactory
<i>IX. External Relations and Internationalization</i>	Satisfactory
<i>X. Internal Quality Assurance System</i>	Unsatisfactory