

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



**EXPERT PANEL REPORT
INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION OF
THE COLLEGE OF “NORTHERN UNIVERSITY” LLC**

Yerevan – 2025

INTRODUCTION

The institutional accreditation of the College of “Northern University” LLC (hereinafter referred 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 College.

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 the cooperation between the institution and employers, as well as its impact on the content of education.

The report hereby 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 College of Northern University LLC was established in 1996. Initially, the College operated under a licence issued to the Alaverdi branch of Northern University in the Lori region. Since 2011, a license to implement educational activities has also been granted to the Yerevan main campus of Northern University.

The College is currently undergoing the first cycle of institutional accreditation.

Development Directions and Academic Programs

The College delivers academic programs at Level 5 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Since 1996, it has offered programs in Nursing and Dental Technology. As of 2024, the College has expanded its academic portfolio by introducing programmes in Preschool Education, Accounting, and Law, offered in both full-time and part-time (distance) modes of study.

The institution currently enrolls 109 students.

The faculty comprises 41 lecturers, including 23 full-time and 18 part-time. The average age of the academic staff is 49.

Graduate tracer studies indicate that, as of 2022–2023, 28% of the 32 graduates were employed, of whom 13% were working in their field of qualification and 15% outside it. In addition, 19% continued their education at higher education institutions, 13% were conscripted into military service, and the remaining graduates were unemployed.

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION

The expertise of the College of “Northern University” LLC institutional capacities was carried out by 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. The evaluation was conducted according to 10 institutional accreditation criteria set by the RA Government Decree N 959-Ն, dated June 30, 2011.

During the evaluation process, the expert panel considered that the College is a mid-level vocational educational institution with a defined mission and that it is undergoing institutional accreditation for the first time.

The College’s mission emphasises the preparation of qualified and competitive specialists. The College has highlighted the diversification and expansion of its academic programs, based on available resources and labor market analysis. However, the development and implementation of the strategic program reveal methodological gaps, particularly in stakeholder involvement, the absence of measurable outcomes, and a lack of coherence between the strategic program, reporting, and analytical reviews.

Governance of the Northern University College is implemented through a multi-layered model involving the University and the Governing Council; however, strategic management processes lack clearly articulated linkages, measurable indicators, and active stakeholder participation. The lack of coherence among the College’s financial, strategic, and operational plans, together with the limited use of data-driven, research-based approaches, constrains management effectiveness. At the same time, the College’s operation within the University structure creates opportunities for joint implementation of certain functions and shared use of resources.

The College's internal quality assurance system is largely aligned with the University’s Quality Assurance Department and is predominantly focused on institution-wide processes, without a distinct analysis of the College’s specific characteristics. Although some activities are in place to identify the needs of students, academic staff, and employers, and some improvement actions have been initiated, the mechanisms for data collection, analysis, and evidence-based decision-making remain unsystematic. The quality assurance toolkit has not yet been fully tested at the College level, and the results are rarely translated into concrete improvement actions. In addition, stakeholder involvement in the self-evaluation and internal quality assurance processes is highly limited. Nevertheless, practical steps to improve resources have had a positive impact on the College, and measures have also been initiated to revise the tools used to identify student needs.

Based on the above, the expert panel concludes that although the College has developed a Strategic Plan and taken steps to establish an internal quality assurance system, substantial improvements are still required in data-driven management.

The College of Northern University demonstrates initiative in introducing new specialisations, conducting comparative analyses, and studying international experience. Academic programs have been enriched with practical components; however, their full and systematic implementation remains incomplete. Despite academic staff's involvement in certain professional discussions and the development of assessment criteria, mechanisms for managing and monitoring the academic process remain incomplete. There is a need for a clearer definition and alignment of teaching methods, assessment criteria, and requirements for independent student work.

In recent years, the College has taken steps to strengthen, develop, and evaluate its academic staff. Most lecturers hold relevant professional qualifications, and processes for professional development and performance evaluation have been partially established. The College places particular emphasis on involving practitioners from the labor market in the teaching process, and tangible results have been observed. Nevertheless, inconsistencies remain between the subjects taught and lecturers' professional qualifications, and processes for analysing and utilising the outcomes of classroom observations are not in place. While the College is taking steps to attract young professionals, a clearly defined mentoring policy for early-career lecturers has not yet been established.

The College prioritizes improving infrastructure and enhancing resources, as evidenced by classroom renovations, upgraded technical equipment, and expanded library facilities. Shared use of resources with the University contributes to cost optimisation and broadens opportunities for students. However, the absence of certain laboratories and accessibility infrastructure (e.g. ramps) somewhat hinders the comprehensive development of the learning environment. The College effectively utilises employers' resources to support the development of students' practical competencies. At the same time, a systematic approach to acquiring professional literature, conducting needs assessments, and ensuring financial sustainability has not yet been established.

Taking the above into consideration, the expert panel finds that the College of Northern University generally ensures the credible award of qualifications.

The College is actively recruiting students through information channels, outreach visits, and social media platforms. As a result of these efforts and the introduction of new academic programmes, student enrolment has increased. The identification of students' educational needs, the provision of academic advising, and the availability of career guidance and support mechanisms contribute positively to the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. At the same time, the high attrition rate among international students, insufficient foreign language proficiency, and limited development of the research component present certain challenges. The Student Council's passivity in protecting students' rights and identifying student needs is also noticeable.

The College recognizes the importance of developing its research potential and highlights relevant objectives in its strategic documents. The involvement of experienced university staff among the teaching personnel represents an important resource for strengthening research capacity. However,

the integration of the research component into academic programs and the learning process remains weak, and a clear policy and methodological framework are lacking. The development of students' research skills is largely confined to descriptive tasks, with insufficient analytical depth. Therefore, there is a need to enhance the planning of research-oriented activities and to take concrete steps to strengthen the research component within academic programs.

The College has taken steps to strengthen its engagement with society and enhance public transparency through social media platforms and the University's website. Information about institutional activities is largely descriptive and lacks qualitative analysis. Engagement with the public is predominantly delivered through awareness-raising and educational activities; however, these activities are not systematically planned. At the same time, there is clear potential to improve information accessibility and communication effectiveness, particularly through the development of professional video materials and cooperation with school students. The accountability system still requires improvement, and a planned, coherent policy on societal responsibility is needed.

Internationalisation has been identified as an important strategic direction in the Strategic Plan; however, among the outlined objectives, only the development of international cooperation is at an early stage of implementation. Although there are initiatives to apply for international programs and attract international students, these have not yet produced tangible outcomes. The College benefits from opportunities provided by the University, particularly in staff mobility, foreign language instruction, and access to employer networks, which support the College's development. Nevertheless, a more systematic and goal-oriented policy is required to expand international partnerships and to improve and assess foreign language competencies. Obstacles remain in attracting international students and in implementing double-degree programs, prompting the College to revise the relevant strategic objective.

Based on the above, the expert panel concludes that the College is making considerable efforts and implementing various processes to support institutional development; however, significant work remains to be done in this area.

Strengths of the Institution:

- The introduction of new specialisations, following consultations with employers, aimed at expanding the educational offer and increasing students' opportunities for professional choice.
- Effective cooperation with employers focused on organising student internships and developing labor-market-relevant competencies.
- The availability of human and material-technical resources enabled through joint operation with the University.
- The initiative to showcase successful graduate trajectories, thereby enhancing the visibility of the College's educational outcomes and supporting students' career guidance.

- Established applicant recruitment mechanisms to ensure a stable student intake and the potential to deliver academic programs with the involvement of international students in the international education market.
- The involvement of practitioners actively engaged in the labor market in the teaching and learning processes.
- The application of diverse teaching and learning methodologies within the educational process.
- A broad network of external partnerships and the College's initiatives in the field of internationalisation, also leveraging the University's institutional capacity.

Weaknesses of the Institution:

- The lack of alignment between the Strategic Plan and the plans of structural units.
- The absence of targeted strategic financial planning at the College level, as well as insufficient articulation of the College's specificities in financial management and resource allocation.
- Underdeveloped quality assurance mechanisms, particularly the absence of a College-specific methodology and clearly defined evaluation indicators.
- An underdeveloped data-driven management system characterised by insufficient collection and use of comprehensive institutional data.
- Limited stakeholder involvement in strategic planning and decision-making processes.
- Insufficiently articulated systematic processes for monitoring and continuous improvement of academic programs.
- Limited diversification of funding sources.
- Insufficient integration of a research component into student assignments, as well as limited development of students' research and analytical competencies.
- The non-systematic nature of research activities, with inadequately defined expectations, objectives, and processes.

Main recommendations:

Data-Driven Management

- Clarify the College's mission by emphasizing the distinctive features of its academic programs and the competitive advantages of its graduates.
- For the effective implementation of the Strategic Plan, define clear and measurable performance indicators and regulate ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes, ensuring continuous assessment of progress and consistent achievement of strategic objectives.
- Promote the involvement of internal and external stakeholders in decision-making by ensuring their participation in the Governing Board, strategic planning, and quality assurance activities.
- Introduce the PDCA cycle across all levels of College governance, encompassing all structural units and ensuring continuous improvement.

- Ensure coherence between planning and reporting processes, based on measurable indicators, clearly defined evaluation mechanisms, and systematic analysis of results.
- Develop a data-driven management system by regularly collecting, analyzing, and utilizing institutional data, making it a core tool for strategic decision-making.
- Develop an Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) methodology tailored to the College, considering its educational specificities, student profile, and the content of academic programs.
- To enhance the effectiveness of the IQA system, define clear performance indicators and measurable expected outcomes to evaluate system effectiveness.
- Considering the specific characteristics of the College's students, teaching staff, and employers, review and refine survey instruments, ensure their regular administration, and broaden stakeholder participation in the survey processes.

Credible Awarding of Qualifications

- Regularly conduct labor market needs analyses and integrate the findings into the design of academic programs and the planning of elective courses, to enhance graduate employability and competitiveness.
- Integrate benchmarking results into academic programs by engaging academic staff and those responsible for professional educational programs, ensuring the application of international best practices and the continuous updating of teaching and learning content.
- Define and introduce minimum requirements for practical assignments within academic programs, ensuring the systematic development of students' practical skills and the alignment of learning outcomes with national and international labor market requirements.
- Establish assignment banks for all specialisations to support the gradual development of students' competencies.
- Clarify student assessment criteria and feedback mechanisms to ensure the transparency, consistency, and effectiveness of assessment practices.
- Analyse the reports of final attestation committees and use the findings as a basis for academic program improvement, ensuring the continuous enhancement of educational quality.
- Introduce a comprehensive monitoring system for academic programs to ensure their continuous improvement, enabling early identification of challenges and the implementation of targeted improvement actions.
- Clarify the mechanisms for evaluating academic staff and based on the results, for their professional development and career progression.

- Introduce mentoring mechanisms for early-career academic staff and plan experience-sharing activities aimed at identifying, disseminating, and institutionalising best practices.
- Define clear criteria and mechanisms for rewarding academic staff, with the aim of supporting motivation, professional growth, and career advancement.
- Take steps to establish, upgrade, or expand access to laboratories required for academic programs, including through increased use of employer resources, to enhance opportunities for students' practical training.
- Take steps to attract alternative funding mechanisms to ensure financial sustainability and expand opportunities for resource development.
- Collect and analyse data on financial expenditure, calculate the minimum required resources, and use the results to improve the effectiveness of financial planning and resource management.

Long-Term Development

- Introduce separate mechanisms for identifying the educational needs of local and international students of the College, considering the specific characteristics of the respective specialisations.
- Develop and implement a clear policy to promote research activities across the College's academic programs, with a focus on supporting and strengthening the teaching and learning process.
- Incorporate research assignments into academic programs and professional modules, ensuring alignment with Level 5 of the National Qualifications Framework, and define clear criteria and requirements for their implementation and assessment.
- Further develop the process of studying international best practices related to the College's academic programs, with the aim of updating teaching and learning materials and modernising research activities.
- Review reporting formats by incorporating clear evaluation indicators and using the results of analyses as a basis for subsequent planning cycles.
- Develop a PR strategy to raise awareness of the College's activities, ensure efficient allocation of communication resources, and enhance cooperation with external stakeholders.
- Using the College's institutional capacity, plan and regularly implement knowledge-transfer activities for external stakeholders to fulfil social responsibility and increase public awareness of the College.
- Define specific steps and priorities within the College's strategic program related to external relations and internationalisation, aimed at promoting exchange of experience and localisation of best practices.
- Systematically organise foreign language courses for academic staff, administrative personnel, and students to enhance language competencies, thereby expanding the scope of international

cooperation, promoting mobility, and ensuring more effective integration of international students into the teaching and learning process.

Armenuhi Sargsyan, Chair of Expert Panel

20.05.2025

DESCRIPTION OF EXTERNAL REVIEW

COMPOSITION OF EXPERT PANEL

An external evaluation of the institutional capacities of the College of “Northern University” LLC was carried out by the following expert panel.

- **Armenuhi Sargsyan**, PhD in Physical and Mathematical Sciences, Associate Professor, Lecturer at Shirak State University, member of research projects, Head of the Expert Panel.
- **Gohar Mkrtchyan**, PhD in Philological Sciences, Associate Professor, Head of the Chair of Armenian Language and Foreign Languages at the Armenian Medical Institute, Head of the Center for Quality Assurance in Education, Member of the Expert Panel.
- **Anahit Arshakyan**, Paediatrician at Martuni Medical Centre, Deputy Director for Academic Affairs at Martuni State Medical College, Member of the Expert Panel.
- **Angelina Tonoyan**, student of the “Organisation of Tourism Services with Advanced Foreign Language Proficiency” academic program at Kotayk Regional State College, Student Member of the Expert Panel.

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

The works of the expert panel were coordinated by Meri Barseghyan, a specialist at the Policy Development Department of the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation.

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 application to ANQA, 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 the application was accepted, an agreement was signed between ANQA and the College. The timetable of activities was prepared and approved.

Self-evaluation

Based on ANQA observations, the revised institutional self-evaluation of the College’s institutional capacities was submitted to ANQA on 3 February 2025. The self-evaluation was conducted in collaboration with the institution’s management, administrative staff, academic staff, academic support staff, and students.

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 visit to the college was conducted on February 28, 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 March 12-14, 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 reviewed 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 relative to the standards, clarify the questions to be asked of the target groups, and discuss the meeting procedure and next steps.

The site visit began and concluded 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.

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

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

Expert panel report

The members of the Expert Panel, together with the ANQA Coordinator, prepared the preliminary version of the Expert Panel Report, which was reviewed and agreed upon by the experts. The draft report was provided to the College on April 30, 2025. On May 14, the college submitted its agreement with the preliminary version of the expert panel report. The Expert Panel subsequently finalised the report, which was approved by the Panel.

Meri Barsegyan

Coordinator of the Expert Panel/ 20.05.2025

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