

**"NATIONAL CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE"  
FOUNDATION**



**EXPERT PANEL REPORT  
VANADZOR STATE MEDICAL COLLEGE**

**Yerevan – 2023**

## INTRODUCTION

The institutional accreditation of the Vanadzor State Medical College (hereinafter referred to as VSMC, TLI, College) was carried out based on the application submitted by the institution. The process of institutional accreditation is organised and coordinated by "National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance" foundation (hereinafter referred to as ANQA), guided by the Statute on State Accreditation of Tertiary Level Institutions and their Academic Programmes in the Republic of Armenia approved by the RA Government Decree N 978-N of June 30, 2011 and by the RA Government Decree N 959 on the Approval of the Accreditation Criteria for Tertiary Education of June 30, 2011.

The external review was carried out by the independent expert panel consisting of four local experts, formed in accordance with the requirements set by the Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel of "National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance" foundation.

The institutional accreditation is aimed not only at external evaluation of quality assurance but also at continuous enhancement of the management quality and academic programmes of the institution. Special emphasis was placed on the cooperation between the institution and employers and its impact on the implementation of the education process.

The herby report comprises the results of the evaluation of the institutional capacities of the TLI according to the State Accreditation Criteria and Standards.

## SUMMARY OF EVALUATION

### EXPERT PANEL EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES ACCORDING TO THE RA ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

The external review of the Vanadzor State Medical College was carried out by an independent expert panel formed in accordance with the requirements set forth in the Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel. The evaluation was conducted according to the 10 criteria of institutional accreditation approved by the RA Government Decree N 959-N of June 30, 2011. Aligned with its mission, the Vanadzor State Medical College, implements the secondary vocational academic programmes (APs) "Nursing", "Midwifery", "Dental Technicanm", "Medical Cosmetology", "Pharmacy", which are based on primary and secondary education. The APs are in alignment with the state academic standards and the level 5 descriptors of the RA National Qualifications Framework (hereinafter referred to as the "RA NQF" ).

The VSMC's management is quite transparent, enabling stakeholders' participation in decision-making. Almost all employees of the VSMC are not only informed about the institution's activities and goals, but also participate by being included and working in various councils. One of the peculiarities of the VSMC is the Pedagogical Council's detailed minutes, which serves as a unique chronicle for tracking the institution's activities.

The VSMC has an accountability system. However, not all reports have analytical nature, which can influence accurate decision-making. Since 2022, the VSMC has implemented various monitoring mechanisms to address this gap in planning implementation, enabling management to gather information from different sources.

Documentation encompasses nearly all processes of the institution. The governance structure is clear. The VSMC's activity is carried out on the basis of long-term and short-term planning. To monitor the strategy implementation, the governing bodies plan to introduce KPIs.

By the end of 2022, the VSMC undertook some activities to introduce a quality assurance system, creating a functional quality assurance system and introducing new mechanisms for the evaluation of the strategy implementation.

The governing bodies attach importance to the quality assurance system, which contributes to the implementation of quality assurance processes.

The VSMC's professions are demanded in the regional health sector, leading to extensive connections with employers who participate in discussions organized in various formats and are included in the governing council and the final attestation committees.

The VSMC is guided by the state academic standards during the AP implementation. However, there are no developed AP specifications and outcomes, which would have contributed to the increased effectiveness of the outcome-based learning. As a result of class observations and the study of the submitted documents, it was affirmed that many student-centered teaching and learning methods have been introduced. Moreover, diagnostic and summative assessment methods are used. Some teachers also implement the formative assessment method. The internships and practical classes in the regional medical institutions, pharmacies and cosmetology centres gives students the opportunity to apply the acquired skills in real working environments

and become recognizable to future employers. Evaluating all that positively, the expert panel considers that the use of checklists in the educational process can stimulate students' independent work and facilitate the improvement of acquired practical capacities. The external review revealed that the students' practical skills in some professions are also checked during the final attestation examinations through the completion of practical assignments and performance of manipulations. However, it was considered necessary to disseminate this best practice to all professions.

Attaching importance to the strengthening of the teaching staff's potential, the VSMC regularly conducts training sessions. The trainees transfer the acquired knowledge to other teachers of the institution. For this purpose, the VSMC organises open classes, Pedagogical Council hearing to acknowledge and promote the dissemination of best practices. Most of the teacher trainings focus on methodology. There is a lack of professional training sessions. This does not apply to the healthcare sector teachers undergoing professional training. The VSMC has certain mechanisms for evaluating the teaching staff's work, needs, and incentivisation. In addition, the VSMC has difficulties in attracting young specialists.

The VSMC's management staff pays great attention to the enhancement of the educational environment and resource provision for effective implementation of APs. The modernization of classrooms and laboratories not only increases the effectiveness of the educational process, but also prepares students for the professional environment. The VSMC's cabinet laboratories are full of with observational objects, moulages and equipment necessary for the study of modules and subjects. However, there is a need to update and supplement the materials and tools in the professional cabinets related to the APs "Dental Technican" and "Pharmacy". Besides its own resources, the VSMC has provided students with opportunities to use the resources of partner organisations. The VSMC provides Internet access, enabling teachers to organise the educational process with the latest technologies. As mentioned above, one of the VSMC's unique features is a polyclinic or a Family Medical Centre. That allows to combine the educational process with the real working environment. Students and teachers registered at the Centre also receive free medical care.

The created educational environment enables the VSMC to award credible qualifications and prepare qualified staff for medical institutions.

There are mechanisms for students' admission and recruitment. Students can apply to the administrative staff at any time. Consulting services are in place. Services promoting student careers are provided. There are evaluation mechanisms for students' educational, consulting and other services.

The VSMC highlights the need to involve students and teachers in research activities. However, the research policy is yet to be defined. The VSMC has some mechanisms connecting research activities and the educational process. However, they are not general in nature and not all student assignments include a research component.

While evaluating the VSMC's activity, the expert panel took into consideration an important peculiarity, the Family Medical Centre affiliated with the VSMC, which contributes to the development of student capacities, the replenishment of the resources, and the increase in societal responsibility through the provision of medical services to the society.

The VSMC shares information about its activities through Facebook page, online Q&A sessions, and a close connection with the employer. According to the expert panel, the launch of the official website of the institution will also greatly contribute to that. For years, the VSMC has published the "Speghani" magazine to impart knowledge and values to society. However, it does not implement short-term programmes, while they could have contribute to raising awareness of health issues, especially in rural areas.

The VSMC attaches importance to the improvement of cooperation with local and international education institutions. The VSMC has high ambitions for internationalization. However, the institution has not developed a benchmarking policy and is still taking the first steps towards internationalization. The VSMC has established effective cooperation with employers in the region, which is important in terms of internships and employment of alumni. It is positive that the VSMC plans to increase the level of proficiency in foreign languages among employees and students.

The wide range of external relations and the steps towards internationalization contribute to the VSMC's development. The development of the research component will further enhance the institution's activity.

#### **The strengths of the institution**

1. The Strategic Plan taking into consideration the viewpoints of the stakeholders.
2. The effective accountability system.
3. The internal stakeholders' active participation in the activities of the collegial management bodies and the opportunity to influence decision-making.
4. Diverse and student-centered methods of teaching and learning, assignments forming practical capacities.
5. The Family Medical Centre affiliated with the VSMC, which offers the students to hone their practical skills.
6. The diverse and effective partnership relations, which allow the use of employer resources for teaching purposes.
7. The embedment of an inclusive quality assurance system, which creates the basis for the formation and dissemination of a quality culture.
8. Teacher training, which contributes to the development of the teaching staff's competencies.
9. Mechanisms for transferring knowledge to society.

#### **The weaknesses of the institution**

1. The absence of mapping the needs of the regional health sector, which may hinder the implementation of targeted activities.
2. The non-compliance of all short-term plans with the strategic plan, which may jeopardize the consistent implementation of the APs.
3. The non-analytical nature in some reports.

4. The absence of the use of checklists common in medical practice, which can disrupt the full formation of capacities and skills.
5. The absence of benchmarking against comparable programmes of recognized colleges in the field.
6. The teachers' and students' low proficiency in foreign languages, which can hinder the effective implementation of the internationalization processes.
7. The absence of short-term programmes for external stakeholders.
8. The lack of professional training for the teaching staff.
9. The lack of mechanisms connecting education and research, which can hinder the development of students' analytical thinking.
10. The absence of coordination of the mechanisms for the internal quality assurance system, which may lead to the failure of the planned steps in the quality assurance.

## **Main Recommendations**

### **Mission and Purpose**

1. Map the regional health sector needs, aligning them with the VSMC's strategic priorities.

### **Governance and Administration**

2. Align short-term planning with strategic goals and objectives.
3. Improve reports, ensuring an analytical component.
4. Enhance the mechanisms for evaluating external and internal factors affecting the VSMC's activity.

### **Academic Programmes**

5. Form specifications for all APs, conducting mapping aligned with the expected outcomes of the APs.
6. Use checklist in the study process.
7. Implement enhancements based on the results of the AP monitoring.
8. Conduct benchmarking against comparable APs to introduce best practices and modernize the programmes.

### **Students**

9. Introduce mechanisms that develop students' analytical skills.

### **Faculty and Staff**

10. Help teachers engage in professional trainings.
11. Take steps to encourage young specialists and involve them in the teaching process.

### **Research and Development**

12. Develop and introduce mechanisms for the link between research activity and learning, specifying ambitions and directions in the research field.
13. Introduce mechanisms to involve and encourage students' and teachers' research activities.
14. Conduct benchmarking against comparable colleges in to explore and localize the best international research practices.

### **Infrastructure and Resources**

15. Introduce mechanisms for for raising alternative financial resources.

**Societal Responsibility**

16. Organise short-term courses, highlighting the regional needs.

17. Introduce mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of information provision, access, transparency and feedback.

**External Relations and Internationalization**

18. Set realistic goals and objectives in internationalization, clearly evaluating the VSMC's capabilities and resources.

19. Broaden mechanisms that increase the level of proficiency in foreign languages among professors and students.

**Internal Quality Assurance**

20. Coordinate quality assurance mechanisms, regulating the periodicity of their implementation.

21. Create a database, matching it with the introduced KPIs.



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**Lilit Zakaryan**

**Chair of the expert panel**

January 12, 2024

## DISCRIPTION OF EXTERNAL REVIEW

### COMPOSITION OF EXPERT PANEL

The external evaluation of the institutional capacities of the Vanadzor State Medical College was carried out by the following members of the expert panel:

1. **Lilit Zakaryan**, director at the Quality Assessment and Assurance Center of the Armenian National Agrarian University, chair of the expert panel.
2. **Meri Sargsyan**, vice director of Academic Affairs of Yerevan State Basic Medical College, member of the the expert panel.
3. **Lilit Abelyan**, head of Internal Quality Assurance Center of the Kotayk Regional State College, member of the the expert panel.
4. **Edita Kasinyan**, a second-year student at the Faculty of Food Product Technologies of the Armenian National Agrarian University, student member of the the expert panel.

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

The works of the expert panel were coordinated by **Liana Alaverdyan**, assistant to ANQA's director.

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

### PROCESS OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW

On March 16, 2023, the VSMC applied for state institutional accreditation, submitting to ANQA the filled application form, copies of the license and orders.

The ANQA's Secretariat studied the data presented in the application form and the documents attached.

After the decision on the acceptance of the application, ANQA and the VSMC signed an agreement. The schedule of activities was prepared and approved.

#### **Self-evaluation**

Considering that the VSMC is undergoing institutional accreditation for the first time and is in the initial stage of the formation of the quality assurance culture, ANQA has conducted online workshops with the institutions in the accreditation process. The workshops aimed to prepare the institutions for the organisational stages of the accreditation process. During the workshops, the interpretations of the institutional accreditation criteria and standards, the electronic questionnaire for the accreditation application, and the peculiarities of self-evaluation



and SWOT analysis were presented. The institution carried out a SWOT analysis, which was discussed with ANQA's specialists.

The institution submitted the self-evaluation of the institutional capacities and the package of documents within the schedule set by ANQA. The coordinator studied the report in terms of its compliance with technical requirements presented by ANQA. On May 10, 2023, the self-evaluation was submitted to ANQA.

### **Preparatory Phase**

After the submission of the self-evaluation report and the attached documents, ANQA's coordinator studied the package to reveal its compliance to the requirements presented by ANQA.

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 VSMC and was confirmed by the order of ANQA's Director.

To prepare the expert panel members and ensure the effectiveness of the activities, training on the following topics was conducted:

1. the main functions of the expert panel's members;
2. the ethics and techniques of holding meetings and doing inquiries;
3. the definition of the specifics of the VET sector and interpretation of accreditation criteria according to the sector.
4. the preliminary evaluation as a stage for the preparation of the expert panel report, the main requirements for the report.

Having reviewed the self-evaluation report and documents attached, the expert panel conducted the preliminary evaluation according to the format, preparing the lists of questions and objectives for different departments and target groups, as well as additional documents for further study. Then the expert panel summarized the results of the preliminary evaluation and set the schedule of the site visit.

Following ANQA's Manual for External Review, the schedule included intended close and open meetings with all the target groups, study of document, parallel meetings, etc. The members of the expert panel also had "professional talks" with the managers, teachers and students of the APs. Before the "professional talks", the experts studied the student assignments and conducted class observations to understand the extent to which these assignments are aimed at achieving the expected outcomes.

### **Preparatory Visit**

On November 16, 2023, an online meeting took place with the management staff of VSMC. The head of ANQA's Institutional Programme Accreditation Division, the coordinator and the chair 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 VSMC's management staff. Additionally, discussions were made and mutually agreed decisions

were reached on the technical, organisational, and informational aspects of the site visit, along with the conduct and ethical norms of the meeting participants.

### **Site Visit**

The site visit took place between October 31 - November 3, 2023. The site visit started and ended with meetings with the ASC's management staff.

During the site visit, all members of the expert panel and the coordinator visited the VSMC, observed the infrastructure and resources, conducted class observations. Then the experts and the coordinator had a close meeting. The meeting aimed to bring out the strengths and weaknesses of the institution based on the criteria, clarify questions for the target groups, discuss the meeting procedures and further steps.

The site visit started and ended with meetings with the ASC's management staff. To clarify the issues, the focus group meetings took place. The participants, including teachers, students and alumni, were selected from a pre-provided list, based on the principle of representativeness. All scheduled meetings were held. During the site visit, the expert panel also studied the documents. At the end of each working day, the expert panel held close meetings to discuss the results of the expert evaluation. At the end of the site visit, the main results were summarized.

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

### **Expert Panel Report**

The members of the expert panel and the ANQA coordinator prepared a preliminary version of the expert panel report.

After approval by the members of the expert panel, the preliminary report was provided to the institution on December 26, 2023. The institution did not submit any observations on the preliminary report. The expert panel prepared the final version of the report, which was approved by the panel members on January 12, 2024.



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**Liana Alaverdyan**

**Coordinator of the expert panel**

January 12, 2024

## EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

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



**Lilit Zakaryan**  
**Chair of the expert panel**

January 12, 2024