“NATIONAL CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE” FOUNDATION

EXPERT PANEL REPORT
INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION OF
VANADZOR STATE UNIVERSITY AFTER HOVHANNES TUMANYAN

Yerevan – 2025

INTRODUCTION

Institutional accreditation of the Vanadzor State University after Hovhannes Tumanyan (hereinafter VSU or TLI) was carried out according to the institution's application.

The institutional accreditation process is coordinated and implemented by the "National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance" Foundation (ANQA). Whilst carrying out its operations, ANQA was guided by the regulation on "State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs" set by the RA Government decree N978 of June 30, 2011, as well as by decree N959-Ն of June 30, 2011, on "Approving the RA Standards for Professional Education Accreditation".

The expert panel, consisting of four local and one international expert and formed in accordance with the ANQA Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel, provided expertise.

Institutional accreditation is aimed at the external evaluation of quality assurance and the continuous improvement of the quality of the institution's management and educational programs. Hence, there were two important issues for local and international expert panel members:

To carry out an expertise of institutional capacities in line with the RA standards for state accreditation,

To evaluate the institution's quality, compliance with international developments, and integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The report contains the results of the expertise on TLI's institutional capacity according to the RA criteria for professional education accreditation and the peer review of the international expert from the perspective of integration into the EHEA.

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SUMMARY OF EVALUATION

EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

The external review of Vanadzor State University was conducted by an expert panel formed according to the requirements of the ANQA Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel. The evaluation was carried out according to the ten criteria set by the RA Government on 30 June 2011 N 959Ա decree.

When conducting the evaluation, the expert panel considered that Vanadzor State University's mission is "to become a center in the region for educational and scientific activities and the promotion of innovative ideas, with the main goal of preparing qualified and competitive specialists ready for the changing demands and challenges of the labor market." The university is in its third accreditation cycle; it was accredited twice for four years, in 2015 and 2021. Following the previous accreditation, based on expert recommendations, the university developed the "Vanadzor State University Follow-up Plan for 2021-2025." The VSU Strategic Plan for 2021-2025 and its implementation action plan were approved in the same year. After the previous accreditation, the TLI began using indicators to assess the results of implementing strategic goals and conducted mid-term reviews. The TLI implemented work to improve the APs and the educational environment, regulated several processes, increased financial stability, provided targeted funds for research activities, etc. At the same time, some important recommendations outlined in the plan, such as the collection of information on the effectiveness of management processes, the analysis and application of this information, the introduction of effective frameworks for evaluating their implementation, the financial planning and execution of the university, taking into account the requirements of quality assurance processes, the continuation of professional development for QA personnel, and others, have not been implemented.

Since the previous accreditation, Vanadzor State University has significantly updated its academic programmes. The intended learning outcomes of academic programmes have been reviewed to ensure consistency with the RA National and Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks. The university emphasizes the continuous improvement of educational processes by introducing approaches to program benchmarking and modernizing teaching methods, which has increased the practical component of the academic programmes.

However, fully aligning academic programmes with labor market demands remains a challenge. Specifically, the university has not yet conducted a comprehensive study of the labor market, which could clarify how well the current programs meet regional and sectoral needs. This gap is partially filled by employer lecturers, who provide direct feedback from the sector and help the university adjust programs to focus on applied, practical skills.

The university has taken important steps regarding faculty development by defining clear criteria for selecting lecturers and reviewing position descriptions, emphasizing alignment with program outcomes. Involving employer lecturers plays an essential role in strengthening internal capacity. However, there is still a lack of training programmes in the context of faculty professional development. Implementing continuous professional development programs for faculty members aimed at applying modern teaching methods is essential.

Regarding infrastructure and resource development, the university has made significant efforts to modernize its material and technical base. Through Erasmus+ programs, the university has supplemented its resources and strengthened cooperation with partner organizations. However, library resources and laboratories, particularly for certain academic programmes, have not yet been sufficiently modernized. This could affect the effectiveness of teaching and learning and the accessibility of program outcomes. The expert panel notes that the steps taken by the university, including the revision of academic programmes, the implementation of steps in line with the needs of the faculty, and the work done to improve infrastructure, generally contribute to the credible award of qualifications.

Since the previous accreditation, the university has clarified its mission and purposes, emphasizing its role as a regional educational, scientific, and innovative center. Stakeholder involvement has reassessed how well the mission and objectives align with regional demands. It is positive that the university's internal stakeholders and employers share its development directions. The expert group believes linking the university's strategic goals and resource allocation is necessary to achieve the defined outcomes. Clarifying measurable progress indicators is also important for evaluating the implementation of strategic goals and their continuous enhancement.

Since the previous accreditation, VSU has implemented reforms in its management system, including structural changes aimed at improving the efficiency of university management. However, the incomplete involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process has led to staff's incomplete acceptance of changes. The university has introduced mechanisms for internal and external stakeholders to participate in decision-making, including involving students and faculty in the composition of councils and working groups. However, the initiative of internal stakeholders in the needs assessment process remains low, which may limit the study of their issues for decision-making purposes.

The university has carried out short-term, mid-term, and long-term planning based on the strategic plan. However, the planning approaches still do not fully ensure alignment with the university's mission and purposes. In many cases, clear, measurable indicators for the outcomes of actions have not been established, which limits the ability to assess the plans. The expert panel notes that developing a data-driven decision-making culture and ensuring stakeholders' participation in the management processes are necessary.

The expert panel emphasizes one of VSU's strategic goals—improving the quality assurance system. It notes that the completion of the documents has created a documentary basis that regulates and describes the university's processes. However, the group highlights that process improvement should be based on analysis and needs so it cannot only strengthen the documentary base but also ensure its application and contribute to achieving the goals set in the strategic program for developing the quality assurance system. The absence of a unified system for collecting data necessary for decision-making makes it difficult to assess the university's activities' efficiency fully.

Defining clear objectives and performance evaluation criteria by management bodies will help the quality assurance system respond quickly to the university's needs and increase the validity of decision-making.

The expert panel considers improving the methodology of surveys and focus groups important, as the current approaches often do not provide an accurate evaluation picture. Clarifying the objectives of surveys and selecting target groups are necessary to ensure that the collected data

impacts improvement plans. Managers should also be provided with detailed data to help with decision-making and to review data sources and periodicity.

VSU actively uses its website and social media platforms to ensure transparency, but limited access to quality assurance analytics limits stakeholder awareness. In this regard, the university can more effectively use digital platforms to increase stakeholder awareness and support the implementation of quality assurance processes.

The university emphasizes the needs of students, striving to improve the learning environment and create conditions that support the satisfaction of students' needs. Since the previous accreditation, the university has made improvements in student services and the organization of internships. The expert group believes that the university should involve students more intensively in all stages of the educational process, including program development, selection of teaching methods, and the formation of quality assurance systems. This will strengthen the student-centred approach and enhance the credibility of qualifications.

The university has made some progress in promoting research activities. However, considering the goals set by the university in this direction, research funding remains insufficient, which may limit the university's ability to transform into a center for promoting science-based education and innovation. The university should focus more clearly on developing research directions, including the most important areas that can impact regional and sectoral developments. The formation of scientific groups and the wider involvement of students in research programmes can be the first steps in developing this direction.

The VSU plays an important role in the region by cooperating with schools, employers, and public organizations. The university carries out various activities to raise public awareness and ensure the transparency of educational services. However, feedback mechanisms are not yet fully established, limiting the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the university's activities. Analysis of academic programme outcomes and graduate employment is also lacking, which could provide greater confidence in public accountability. The university needs to implement clear feedback mechanisms and regularly assess the impact of public activities to ensure broader societal involvement.

The university is actively involved in international programs, particularly within the Erasmus+ framework, which has helped promote student and staff mobility. Expanding cooperation with international partners and jointly implementing educational programs are among the university's strengths. However, the university still lacks systematic mechanisms to sustain the outcomes of internationalization and make them influential on the quality of academic programmes. In this context, research project implementation through international partnerships remains low. VSU needs to focus on building long-term research collaborations and creating mechanisms to analyze internationalization outcomes, ensuring their impact on the university's development directions.

Strengths of the Institution

1. Modernization of academic programmes and the addition of a practical component.
2. Involvement of lecturers with practical experience in teaching and thesis management processes.
3. Expansion of services provided to students and implementation of consultations.
4. Implementation of capacity-building programs and development of infrastructure through international collaborations.
5. Promotion of research activities and development of lecturers' research capabilities.

6. Existence of mechanisms for the interconnection of learning and research.
7. Ensuring transparency of the university's activities through the website and social platforms.

Weaknesses of the Institution:

1. Lack of comprehensive study of labor market demands.
2. Lack of data necessary for managerial decision-making.
3. Insufficient financial resources for the implementation of research objectives.
4. Weak horizontal collaboration between management bodies.
5. Insufficient involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process.
6. Incomplete quality assurance tools and mechanisms and lack of qualitative analysis.

Main recommendations:

Mission and Purposes

1. Review the university's financial resource allocation policy to ensure the provision of necessary funds for achieving set goals and effective resource management.
2. Clarify and improve the progress evaluation indicators by including quantitative and qualitative measurable indicators, which will contribute to the effective ongoing monitoring of the strategic plan and the clarification of development directions**.**

Governance and Administration

3. Clarify the cooperation between management bodies by combining the principles of sole and collegial governance to ensure an effective decision-making process.
4. Promote the initiative and involvement of the university's internal stakeholders in the decision-making process related to matters that concern them.
5. Define the scope of factors influencing the university's activities and regularly collect data on them for reliable managerial decision-making information.
6. Link short-term and long-term planning, providing the necessary human and financial resources for implementation.
7. Implement continuous monitoring of plans and reports based on appropriate evaluation indicators.

Academic programmes

8. Implement a clear policy for selecting teaching methods to ensure the interconnection of "outcomes–teaching methods–assessment" across all academic programmes.
9. Strengthen interdisciplinary connections by developing cooperation between departments, designing joint courses and projects, and ensuring close integration of theoretical and practical components in curricula.
10. Promote the use of IT technologies by integrating statistical analysis and modelling software into professional courses and organising faculty training to develop IT skills.
11. Expand the systematic use of benchmarking by transforming the results of international comparisons into practical improvements, creating summary reports that will be used for targeted reviews of quality assurance processes.
12. Clarify assessment criteria by developing unified approaches, ensuring diversity in assessment methods, and linking them to the intended learning outcomes.
13. Implement improvements in academic programmes based on reliable data from all stakeholders, summarising and analysing data related to the learning process and thesis works.

Students

14. Explore the possibilities of expanding the scope of preparatory courses.
15. Develop a data analysis system based on the results of cooperation with employers and alumni and periodic database updates.
16. Reorganize and activate the alumni base by regularly organising professional development events and networking meetings between alumni and students for experience exchange.
17. Regulate the support mechanisms provided to students for involvement in research work and expand their awareness and engagement activities.

Faculty and staff

18. Implement a multi-component evaluation system for faculty members, including student surveys, class observations, professional progress, research activities, and other engagement factors, ensuring the completeness and objectivity of the evaluation process.
19. Regulate the mentoring process for novice faculty members by defining responsibilities, establishing measurable performance indicators, and providing support tools for mentors.
20. Develop mechanisms to ensure faculty stability by creating a faculty reserve, including measures to optimise teaching workloads and promote the development of young professionals.
21. Organize professional development courses for faculty members using internal resources and external collaboration networks.
22. Review and improve the evaluation mechanisms for administrative staff and use the evaluation results to develop staff development programs.

Research and Development

23. Strengthen cooperation with employers through co-supervision of research projects and thematic proposals.
24. Ensure opportunities for joint research between students and faculty members, encouraging international publications.
25. Organize regular training courses to develop and enhance the research skills of young faculty members and students.
26. Continuously promote the activities of scientific groups by providing technical and material support and ensuring international collaboration.
27. Develop and implement a clear policy for commercialising research results, with effective mechanisms to achieve the strategic goal of diversifying budgetary income.

Infrastructure and Resources

28. Assess the university's available resources to identify those needed to effectively implement academic programmes and allocate funds for their balanced development.
29. Take steps to replenish professional literature and ensure access to online library resources for students and lecturers.
30. Implement long-term financial planning for revenues and expenses to continuously improve and develop the educational environment.
31. Introduce necessary mechanisms and indicators to evaluate the efficiency of financial expenditures.
32. Continuously expand the opportunities for engaging alternative financial sources to ensure the university's financial stability.

Societal Responsibility

33. Assess the effectiveness of feedback with society and incorporate the gathered data into the planning and improvement of future processes.
34. Adopt an open science policy to ensure the accessibility of the university's scientific results for stakeholders in the region and beyond.

External Relations and Internationalization

35. Evaluate the performance of the infrastructure responsible for external relations and internationalization to enhance the effectiveness of managing internationalization processes.
36. Assess the foreign language proficiency of internal stakeholders and, based on the results, implement regular activities to improve language skills.

Internal Quality Assurance System

37. Review the university's quality assurance policy by setting clear objectives for the system and defining effectiveness evaluation indicators.
38. Plan the activities of the quality assurance system according to the defined performance indicators.
39. Clarify the methodology, mechanisms, and frequency of data collection to ensure reliable data for all areas of the university's activities and improve the effectiveness of managerial decision-making.
40. Allocate resources for the professional development of quality assurance personnel.
41. Review the self-evaluation processes, grounding them in quantitative and qualitative analyses.
42. Expand feedback mechanisms with internal and external stakeholders to raise awareness of quality assurance processes and increase transparency.

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Anushavan Makaryan
Head of the expert panel
Date: 30.01.2025

PEER-REVIEW FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EDUCATION INSTITUTION'S INTEGRATION INTO EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

Vanadzor State University emphasizes modernizing academic programmes, aligning them with labor market demands and European standards. The university implements internal and external evaluation mechanisms to ensure continuous improvement of academic programmes. VSU has an internationalization policy, which includes the internationalization of education and science, the development of international cooperation, and the strengthening of its international ranking. The TLI successfully applies Erasmus+ programs, forming partnerships with several universities and contributing to the professional development of students and staff. However, despite some successes, there are shortcomings in scientific research collaboration and developing long-term projects with international partners.

The transition to student-centred learning is particularly important, as it is considered a priority within the EHEA. Establishing the EMI Center at VSU and the courses conducted under the SMARTI program have promoted the development of students' autonomy and creativity. However, implementing the student-centred approach still requires additional steps, including broader student involvement in the design and assessment phases of the educational process. In this regard, it is suggested that training courses be organized for all lecturers to ensure the effective application of student-centred methods.

The university's quality assurance processes partially comply with the European Quality Assurance Standards and Guidelines (ESG) requirements. The TLI needs to increase awareness of the ESG principles and improve its quality assurance systems with greater stakeholder involvement. A more integrated approach is required to enhance the effectiveness of quality assurance processes, which will contribute to achieving the university's strategic objectives.

Regarding local cooperation, VSU maintains active connections with schools and employers in the region, particularly enhancing the link between education and the labor market. However, the lack of feedback mechanisms hinders the comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of these initiatives. From this perspective, it is recommended that the university introduce clear mechanisms to analyse these activities' impact and support their improvement. VSU greatly benefits from international collaborations, but there is a need to develop long-term research partnerships and promote the creation of scientific groups based on the university's strengths. These processes require both the reallocation of internal resources and the improvement of the internationalization strategy, focusing on developing innovative programs and projects. These actions by VSU can contribute to the comprehensive improvement of the university's educational, scientific, and management systems, ensuring its maximum integration into the EHEA.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Development of Internationalization**

Students should be able to apply for mobility programs throughout the educational process. Individual counselling on organising the educational process after returning from a mobility program is necessary so that students clearly understand the progression of their mobility experience.

- **Strengthening Scientific Collaboration**

VSU should focus on its scientific strengths to develop project-based collaborations with international partners. The next step could be participation in international conferences and joint research projects.

- **Improvement of Feedback Mechanisms**

Implementing feedback mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of open-door events is essential. The QA center should analyze the results, which will serve as a basis for improvements for the university leadership.

- **Strengthening Local and International Cooperation**

Deepening connections with local partners and extending international agreements can ensure stable cooperation. VSU can further develop exchange programs for staff and students and expand mobility opportunities.

- **Development of Language Skills**

The level of foreign language proficiency among the university's students and staff should be raised, which will help expand opportunities for international collaboration. The implementation of EMI courses in all academic programmes should be continuous.

- **Strengthening Quality Assurance Systems**

The ESG principles should become essential to the university’s policy and quality assurance processes. Through courses and regular reviews, the university should ensure the awareness and identification of stakeholders' needs.

DESCRIPTION OF EXTERNAL REVIEW

The external review of VSU's institutional capacities was conducted by the following expert panel[1].

1. **Anushavan Makaryan**- Candidate of Physical and Mathematical Sciences, Associate Professor, Acting Director of the Ijevan Branch of Yerevan State University, Chair of the Expert Panel.
2. **Gegham Karoyan-** Candidate of Technical Sciences, Associate Professor, Deputy Director for Academic Affairs of the Institute of Information and Telecommunication Technologies and Electronics of the National Polytechnic University of Armenia, member of the expert panel.
3. **Mare Khachatryan–** Candidate of Economic Sciences, Associate Professor at the Department of "Finance" of the Armenian State University of Economics, member of the expert panel.
4. **Magdalena Lib-** Deputy Head of the Department of Legal Affairs and Quality Management in Teaching and Learning at the Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, international member of the expert panel.
5. **Zaruhi Hakobyan-** 3rd year student of the "Information Security" specialty at the National Polytechnic University of Armenia, student member of the expert panel.

The composition of the expert panel was agreed upon with the University and was appointed by the ANQA director.

Meri Barsegyan, a specialist at the Policy Development and Implementation Division of ANQA, coordinated the expert panel's work. Vardanush Baghdasaryan provided the translation. All expert panel members signed confidentiality commitments and conflict-of-interest declarations.

PROCESS OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW

Application for state accreditation

For institutional accreditation, VSU applied to ANQA by submitting the application form, copies of the license, and the appendices. The ANQA secretariat checked the data in the application form and the supporting documents.

After deciding to accept the application request, ANQA and TLI signed a bilateral agreement. The timetable of activities was also prepared and approved.

Self-evaluation

The ANQA coordinator reviewed the self-evaluation report to verify its compliance with ANQA requirements. The self-evaluation was returned to the institution due to non-compliance with the established requirements. After the issues were corrected, the institution submitted a revised self-evaluation, which complied with the established unified format and had the appropriate bases and the required attachments in the format. The self-evaluation, the accompanying document package, and the university's completed electronic questionnaire were then provided to the expert panel, the composition of which had been pre-approved by the university and confirmed by an order from the ANQA director.

Preparatory phase

[1] APPENDIX 1.CVS OF EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS

After reviewing the university's self-evaluation and the accompanying document package, the expert panel conducted a preliminary evaluation by preparing additional documents for further study, issues, and questions, specifying the relevant departments or target groups. Then, the expert panel summarized the preliminary evaluation results and created a plan schedule for the site visit.[2].

According to the ANQA manual on expertise, the intended meetings with all the target groups, closed-door and open meetings, document observation, etc., were included in the time schedule.

Preparatory Visit

On October 6, 2024, a meeting was held with the TLI's management staff. Throughout the visit, the plan-schedule was agreed upon, and discussions and mutual decisions were reached regarding organizational, technical, and informative questions, as well as the conduct and norms of ethics of meeting participants. The conditions for the focus group meetings and the expert panel's work were discussed.

Site visit

The site visit took place from October 7-10, 2024. The work of site visit started with a closed meeting, the purpose of which was to discuss and agree on the assessment framework with the international expert, the issues to be studied during the visit, the strengths and weaknesses of the TLI per criteria, the procedure of the focus group meetings, and clarify the next steps. All the expert panel members attended the visit, including the ANQA coordinator and the interpreter. The site visit started with a meeting of the head of the TLI and ended with a meeting with the management staff of the institution. All scheduled meetings were held. During the planned visit, the expert panel also conducted a study of documents[3] and a review of resources[4].

During the expert panel's closed meeting at the end of each working day of the visit, the intermediate assessment results were presented. At the end of the visit, the panel summarised the main results in a closed discussion. The evaluation was carried out within the framework of State Criteria and Standards of Accreditation and ANQA procedures, following which the assessment has two levels– **satisfactory and unsatisfactory.**

Expert panel report

The expert panel prepared the preliminary version of the expert panel report based on the electronic questionnaire completed by the university, the review of the self-evaluation, the documents attached to it, and the class observations during the site visit because of regularly organised discussions. Based on several findings of the discussions, the expert panel and ANQA coordinator prepared the preliminary expert panel report. The international expert prepared a separate peer review. The documents were translated and handed over to the expert panel. The peer review is fully included in the report. After the expert panel members approved it, the preliminary version of the report was provided to the TLI. The university submitted its observations on the expert preliminary version of the report on January 15, 2025. On January 22, 2025, the university's leadership and the

[2] APPENDIX 2.SCHEDULE OF SITE VISIT
[3] APPENDIX 3. LIST OF DOCUMENTS OBSERVED
[4] APPENDIX 4. RESOURCES OBSERVED

expert panel members met at the ANQA. After discussing the observations, the expert panel prepared the report's final version, which all panel members approved.

Meri Barsegyan
Expert panel coordinator

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30.01.2025

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA
BRIEF INFORMATION ABOUT THE EDUCATION INSTITUTION

History: Vanadzor State University has a 50-year history. It is the legal successor of the Kirovakan (later Vanadzor) State Pedagogical Institute. The university's establishment initially aimed at providing pedagogical staff in the northeastern region of Armenia. In its first year of operation, the Institute provided only part-time studies, and the existing mode of study was introduced in 1970. In 1989, the Stepanakert branch of the Institute was organized and operated for about three years.

Since 2001, it has been named after the great poet Hovhannes Tumanyan. From 2002-2014, the Institute operated as a state non-profit organization. In 2008, the Zorik Gevorgyan College (now the VSU Base College), which has been operating since 2002 by the decision of the RA Government, joined the VSU SNCO. In 2011, the VSU College was formed, which provides secondary vocational education.

Education: The university has introduced a three-tier system of higher professional education. The first admissions to Bachelor's and Master's programmes were made in 2008 and to Postgraduate programs in 2006.

The educational process is currently organized into 25 specialities with Bachelor's educational programs and 15 with Master's educational programs. In the distance learning system, 20 Bachelor's educational programs and 1 Master's educational program are introduced. The credit system was introduced at the University in 2007.

The university has three faculties: Social Sciences, Humanities, and Natural Sciences. Eight professional chairs organize the educational process.

Research: VSU emphasizes the planning and implementation of fundamental and applied research. The university aims to become a catalyst center for generating scientific ideas and transferring scientific achievements and innovations in the region.

The implementation, development, and connection of scientific research activities with learning are enshrined in the VSU's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan and the 2023-2025 Strategy for the Development of the Science Sector.

Internationalization: Internationalization is one of the university's strategic priorities, aimed at developing high-quality specialists and research by modern requirements through effective cooperation with leading universities and international organizations. It also focuses on creating new opportunities for international mobility of the university's students, administrative staff, and faculty and enhancing its competitiveness at national and international levels.

Quality Assurance: The improvement of the internal quality assurance system is set as a goal in the university's 2021-2025 strategic plan. Key issues have been highlighted to achieve this goal, such as improving the quality assurance policy, enhancing quality assurance mechanisms and tools, improving stakeholder participation mechanisms, and improving quality assurance mechanisms for developing public cooperation.

Source: *sources for the identification of facts in the above mentioned fields are the documents provided by the Institution (e.g. self-evaluation report, strategic plan, action plan, plans of the departments, concept papers, etc.)*

I. MISSION AND PURPOSES

CRITERION: The policies and procedures of the institution are in accordance with the institution's mission, which is in line with ANQF.

Findings

1.1 The institution has a clear, well-articulated mission that represents the Institution's purposes and goals and is in accordance with National Qualifications Framework (hereafter NQF).

Vanadzor State University is guided by its 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, which was developed while considering the recommendations provided by the expert panel during the 2019 institutional accreditation to clarify the VSU's mission and prepare a strategic plan for the coming years, emphasizing the characteristics of the institution and regional development. The institution's mission is "to become a center in the region that carries out educational and scientific activities and promotes the transfer of innovative ideas, the main goal of which is to prepare qualified and competitive specialists ready for the changing demands and challenges of the labor market."

To achieve this mission, the Strategic Plan outlines five main objectives:

- ensuring the process of training highly qualified and competitive specialists,
- becoming a center for the generation of scientific ideas and the transfer of scientific achievements and innovations in the region,
- improving the university's management system,
- expanding the university's internationalization process,
- enhancing the quality assurance system.

Each objective is associated with specific tasks, activities, and steps. An analysis of the university's issues and their alignment with the objectives shows that these cover the main directions of the university's development, focusing on improving educational, scientific, and management processes. However, a study of the university's budget shows that not all goals have been adequately funded. For instance, it became clear from expert meetings that internal and external stakeholders prioritize the university's mission of providing research-based education. However, the allocated financial resources for this mission account for only 1.35% of the budget (for 2024).

The Strategic Plan also includes the university's vision, values, situational analysis, work on risk reduction, and progress evaluation indicators.

According to the expert panel's studies, the alignment of the VSU's policies and activities with the national qualifications framework of Armenia is substantiated in that the university conducts its educational activities at levels 4-8 of the NQF. Considering that the university's mission is to prepare qualified and competitive specialists ready for the changing demands of the labor market, it became clear from the expert analysis that the university has not conducted a comprehensive study of the labor market or defined academic programme directions based on it. Nevertheless, expert discussions revealed that the university prepares specialists with the necessary competencies for the region (especially pedagogues), and graduates often continue their professional activities in regional organizations.

1.2 The mission statement, goals and objectives of the Institution reflects the needs of the internal and external stakeholders.

In its 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, the TLI states that "the goal of the new strategy is to create a system that will be focused on meeting the needs of internal and external stakeholders and will be capable of facing external and internal challenges through the services provided in all areas of activity. This will allow students to receive high-quality education, while employers will have access to qualified specialists."

The working group for developing the strategic plan included the university's rector, the vice-rector for scientific work, representatives from four academic departments, and an expert from the Department of Scientific Research, Innovations, and Collaboration, specialising in international cooperation and grant promotion. It is important to note that the working group did not include representatives from external stakeholders or students. On the other hand, expert studies revealed that employers provided suggestions regarding different directions of the SP after developing its initial draft.

Expert studies have shown that the mechanisms for identifying stakeholders' needs are surveys, their involvement in academic programme development, and review groups.

Expert studies revealed that the university's internal and external stakeholders share similar views on its development, emphasizing its role in addressing the regional labor market's needs. Since the previous accreditation, external stakeholders have been more involved as lecturers and internship supervisors, which has enabled the university to receive external feedback from sector representatives (schools, partner organizations, universities). In this way, employer representatives have presented proposals to the university regarding improving academic programmes, the direction of internships, and the implementation of interdisciplinary research.

1.3 The Institution has set mechanisms and procedures to evaluate the achievement of its mission and goals and further improve them.

The VSU emphasizes the importance of creating a monitoring committee to implement its 2021-2025 strategic plan and follow-up plans to evaluate and enhance the achievement of its mission and purposes. This committee oversees the effective implementation of the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan and the 2021-2025 Follow-up Plan. The committee includes the university rector, the head of the Quality Assurance Center, the vice-rectors for educational and scientific affairs, the deans of the faculties of social and natural sciences, and the head of the Educational Reform and Retraining Center. However, this committee does not include representatives from the academic staff and students.

The committee has developed and implemented forms for departments' and subdivisions' annual work plans and reports and established a timeline for submitting them. According to these forms, the annual reports prepared by various subdivisions are discussed in relevant bodies (department meetings, faculty councils, scientific councils). However, these reports provide evaluations on the implementation of individual activities from the Strategic Plan (SP), and it is unclear to what extent

they contribute to achieving the corresponding objectives of the SP. These reports are combined into the university's annual report, which the rector presents to the board of trustees. However, as the expert panel's analysis of these reports shows, they are weakly correlated with the goals of the SP and mainly include a description of the activities carried out within the framework of the functions of the departments.

The university uses key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the implementation of its mission and objectives and their outcomes. Annual reports gather data on the following areas: admissions and composition, educational process, resources and management, infrastructure, science and research, external relations, and international cooperation. However, the summary of these data does not demonstrate their connection to the SP's objectives and their achievement.

The 2021-2025 Action Plan for implementing the SP outlines the actions, steps to achieve them, required resources, outcomes, responsible parties, timelines, risks, and impact evaluation indicators. Expert studies have shown that the amounts of financial allocations from the budget are unclear, and indicators for assessing progress are sometimes not measurable. For example, indicators include the possible increase in the number of applicants, the presence of students and young researchers involved in research programs and grants, the order of student and staff mobility, etc.

Considerations

The expert panel emphasizes the importance of the steps taken after the previous accreditation to clarify the university's mission, focus on becoming a center for scientific activity, transfer innovative ideas, and expand its internationalization processes. These efforts provide an opportunity to gain insight into the university's future development directions. It is positive that these ideas are also acceptable to external and internal stakeholders, who share the university's vision for development and the set goals. In this context, the expert panel believes that it is essential to clearly define research directions aimed at the development of the region, which will help implement the university's mission and align the university's potential with the needs of Vanadzor City and the region, as well as the demands of the labor market.

The university's strategic plan is consistent with its mission, but the distribution of budget resources hinders the full implementation of all goals. As a result, insufficient funding for research-based education may limit the university's potential to become a scientific center in the region.

The expert panel positively assesses the development of two essential documents: the Action Plan for implementing the Strategic Plan and the follow-up plan, which was formed based on the recommendations of the previous accreditation expert panel. However, the expert panel also believes that merging these two documents could lead to more targeted progress toward achieving the strategic plan's objectives. While the university has defined actions, steps to achieve them, resources, outcomes, responsible parties, timelines, risks, and impact assessment indicators, the expert panel is concerned that the financial allocations in the budget are not specified, and the evaluation indicators are not always measurable. This lack of clarity makes it difficult to assess the university's progress, identify existing issues, and plan future improvements.

Creating a monitoring committee to implement the strategic and improvement action plans is crucial for the university’s mission and purposes and for assessing outcomes. However, the reports produced by this committee still do not evaluate how well the university's activities align with the strategic plan's objectives. Moreover, the absence of student and academic staff representation in the

committee's work may limit its ability to comprehensively assess the strategic plan's implementation. The expert panel believes that the university's collected data, summarized in the key performance indicators documents, will eventually allow for their connection to the strategic plan's objectives, challenges, and measures to address them. The expert panel also suggests that clarifying progress evaluation indicators and defining measurable quantitative and qualitative indicators will allow for continuous monitoring of the strategic plan's implementation, providing a more complete picture of the university's activities and strategic progress.

Summary:

Considering that after the previous accreditation, the university has clarified its mission, the activities of the university align with the established mission, and stakeholders' perceptions match the university's significance and mission in the region, the university has made efforts to implement tools for evaluating the progress of its strategic plan, and there are key assessment indicators in place, the expert group finds that the university meets the requirements of Criterion 1.

Conclusion*:*

The compliance of VSU institutional capacities with the requirements of Criterion 1 is **satisfactory.**

II. GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

CRITERION: The institution's system of governance, administrative structures and their activities are efficient and are aimed at the accomplishment of mission and goals of the institution preserving ethical norms of governance.

Findings

2.1. The Institution's system of governance ensures structured decision-making process, in accordance with defined ethical rules and has efficient provision of human, material and financial resources to accomplish its educational and other purposes.

Improvement of the management system of VSU is one of the goals of the University's 2021-2025 strategic plan. From the perspective of improving the management system, the university considered it essential to change the structure and align it with the 2021-2025 strategy of the TLI, as well as reforms in the management toolkit, financial and economic policy, human resources management system, and the logistical basis of the management system. In May 2020, the University Board of Trustees approved the new structure of VSU, which is significantly different from the previous structure: 5 faculties were replaced by 3, and 23 department centres by 14, including a college and a gymnasium.

The expert visit revealed that the structural changes were based on previous accreditation recommendations, the goal of improving management efficiency, and the trend of reducing administrative staff expenses due to limited financial conditions. However, the reductions made were not universally accepted by the staff, as they were implemented without discussions with all

stakeholders and without presenting a well-founded analysis of the expected risks of the previous structure. [5]The changes were mainly evaluated negatively in the study of the management system's effectiveness conducted by the Quality Assurance Center. The expert visit showed that the changes are currently more perceivable for the stakeholders. However, collaboration between departments and horizontal connections remain weak. It should be noted that often, very diverse processes are carried out by a single department. [6]For example, the Department of Research, Innovation, and Cooperation combines functions related to research activities, innovation projects, information dissemination, public relations, university-school connections, and promoting inter-university and international cooperation.

VSU is governed by the legislation of the Republic of Armenia and the Charter of the "Vanadzor H. Tumanyan State University" Foundation. The university's governance is carried out through individual and collegial management principles, with the involvement of the founder, the authorized body, the University's Board of Trustees, the Academic Council, and the Rector.

According to the Charter, the university's governance bodies are the Board of Trustees and the Rector. The Academic Council is not considered a governing body and is not listed in the organizational structure of VSU, presented on the university's website. It is regarded as a "planning, coordinating, and regulating collegial body," but it makes decisions implemented by the Rector's order. If there are no procedural violations, the Rector is obliged to ensure the implementation of those decisions.

The Rector's Office is an advisory body to the Rector, which discusses issues related to the University's activities during the intervals between the meetings of the councils, monitors the implementation of the councils' decisions, and makes decisions. The powers and responsibilities of the governing bodies (Board of Trustees and Rector) and the election procedure are defined by the VSU Charter. The Board of Trustees operates according to the work regulations it has approved. The expert meetings revealed that the activities of the Board of Trustees are not primarily focused on defining academic programme directions or introducing new academic programmes. The Board of Trustees emphasizes ensuring stability in the University's areas of activity, increasing the number of students, and addressing financial challenges.

The university's divisions operate according to approved charters. Job descriptions have been developed, outlining each position's roles, functions, rights, responsibilities, and subordination. Division heads review job descriptions as necessary upon the Rector's instruction in collaboration with the Human Resources Management Department.

The university's ethics code, approved in 2017, does not define ethical rules for management staff but includes general rules for the ethical behaviour of faculty and students. If necessary, an Ethics Committee may be established with members from the faculty, administrative staff, and students. The site visit revealed that establishing an Ethics Committee has not been deemed necessary at the university.

For financial management, VSU has developed a financial policy to efficiently manage finances, ensure financial stability, diversify and increase revenue sources, and optimise expenses and investments. An economic commission operates alongside the Rector, which analyses the University's financial situation and makes decisions regarding budget allocation. The University's structure also

[5] Reformulated as a result of discussions with the university.
[6] Reformulated as a result of discussions with the university.

includes a financial resource management department, which collects and summarizes procurement information on goods, services, and works required for organizing departmental activities four times a year.

The financial policy developed for managing the University's finances was approved in October 2023 and applied in the 2024 budget based on the performance of the previous year's budget, the departments' identified needs, and an analysis of potential revenues.

In the 2024 budget, the main expenditure areas of the University are as follows: salaries-79%, staff incentives-1.03%, research promotion fund-1.35%, and others. Thus, in the 2024 budget, resources are allocated for the main operational areas, with approximately 3% of the annual expenses dedicated to a reserve fund. The University regularly undergoes financial audits, and the results are presented to the Board of Trustees and published on the VSU website.

The expert analysis revealed that most administrative positions in the University's structure are occupied, and the departments are adequately supplied with material resources and equipment. The expert visit also indicated that due to a shortage of human resources in the region, it is difficult for the University to attract young, qualified new administrative staff from the external environment. As a result, the University mainly focuses on fostering internal staff growth by organizing training programs.

2.2. The Institution's system of governance gives an opportunity to students and the teaching staff to take part in decision making procedures.

According to the University's charter, 25% of the members of the Board of Trustees are representatives of the academic staff and students. The expert study revealed that the candidates for membership in the Board of Trustees from the academic staff are nominated by the University's structural divisions. The candidates are selected by the Academic Council and presented to the authorized body. For student representatives, the candidates for the Board of Trustees are nominated by the student councils of the faculties. The University's Student Council selects and presents the nominated candidates to the authorized body. According to the University's charter and the regulations of the Academic Council, 25% of the members of the Academic Council are students and faculty members. Students are nominated by the student councils of the respective faculties, and the University's Student Council carries out the selection. The departments nominate faculty members, and elections are held in the faculty's Academic Councils. According to the faculty charters, the faculty's Academic Councils also include 25% elected representatives of students and faculty.

During the site visit, it became clear that the university also views participation in the work of various working groups and committees operating under the Academic Council as a mechanism for internal stakeholder participation in management and access to information for internal circles. VSU staff and students can access the draft decisions of the Academic Council through the University's internal network and submit their suggestions three days before the Academic Council meeting.

The expert study and meetings revealed that internal stakeholders are not proactive in making proposals or raising issues. However, there are some examples of identifying needs; for example, in the past three years, they have raised and improved the evaluation system in the Academic Council, organized training courses in foreign languages, and acquired easels.

2.3. The Institution formulates and carries out short-term, mid-term and long term planning consistent with its mission and goals as well as has appropriate mechanisms for the implementation and monitoring of those plans.

In the previous accreditation framework, the University received recommendations on implementing long-term, mid-term, and short-term planning systems.

The University is guided by two primary strategic documents: the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, for which an action plan for the 2021-2025 period has been developed, and the 2021-2025 Follow-up Plan, created based on the recommendations in the 2019 accreditation expert report. According to the university's observations, these should be the foundation for the departments' short-term and long-term plans. At the same time, the University does not primarily implement mid-term planning.

The mentioned long-term plans have similar structures, including actions, steps, resources, outcomes, responsibilities, time frames, and risks. Upon reviewing the plans, it became clear that, in many cases, the responsible parties and deadlines are not clearly defined. Almost all departments of the University could be listed as responsible for executing actions, and the timeline for completing the action could be the entire program duration. The financial resources allocated for these processes are also not specified. The University states that it is ready to allocate financial resources from the budget but does not clarify the planned amount of funding.

The faculties and departments of VSU develop their strategies and short-term annual action plans. Other structural divisions of the University create annual work plans. The expert study revealed no uniform approach to planning and accountability processes at the University. First, the strategies of different faculties have been developed for various periods (e.g., the Faculty of Natural Sciences for 2022-2025, the Faculty of Social Sciences for 2022-2027, and the Faculty of Humanities for 2023-2025). The formats of the strategies vary, and the timelines are either unclear or completely missing.

It should also be noted that the vice-rectors and faculties' annual reports do not reflect the degree of achievement of the strategic goals and expected outcomes outlined in the plans for their respective sectors. The same issue is present in the planning and reporting of other divisions. Divisions often list tasks arising from their functional scope as plan items, but these are not connected to strategic planning.

A committee was established to monitor the implementation of the University's Strategic Plan and improvement action plans, which introduced formats for annual work plans and strategic action plan performance reports of the University's structural divisions and a schedule for submitting reports. From the study of the reports, it became clear that they are mainly not analytical. From the site visit, it became clear that the commission studies comply with the annual work plans and the SP action plan submitted by the subdivisions twice a year during its sessions and their implementation in the reports.

2.4. The Institution carried out examination of facts affecting its activities and draws on reliable findings during the decision-making process.

The previous accreditation expert panel provided recommendations on implementing mechanisms for studying the factors affecting the university's activities and using the collected information in future decision-making processes.

The university has not identified a clear list of external and internal factors that affect its activities and are subject to study. According to the university's observations, they are mainly determined based on the university's key performance indicators (KPIs) based on comparisons over the years. As internal factors, KPIs are used to assess the movement of applicants, student body composition, staff, graduates, academic progress, budget, space, material and technical base, educational process, science and research, external relations, and international cooperation. Expert studies revealed that it was possible to save funds and allocate scholarships based on budget analysis, while salary levels were increased based on salary indicator analysis.

The university notes that external factors include regional poverty indicators, the relatively low salaries of some specialists (especially pedagogues), the constant complexity of work, internal emigration trends, and the polarization of professions in the labor market. Nevertheless, considering regional poverty as an external factor, the university has raised tuition fees twice by 30% and 15%.

The university also notes that it considers the relatively low salaries of some specialists (especially pedagogues) and the constant complexity of their work. At the same time, expert studies revealed that a new master's program with a qualification in pedagogy has been introduced at the university.

It should be noted that the sources and mechanisms for collecting information regarding the factors affecting the university's operations are unclear, nor how they can be applied. During meetings with the expert panel, it became clear that the university's management does not set specific tasks for the quality assurance system regarding data collection in particular areas. Furthermore, the university has not defined what type of data analysis will be used to evaluate its work's effectiveness.

2.5. The management of the policies and the processes is based on the quality management principle (plan-do-check-act /PDCA/).

The "Quality Assurance Policy of VSU" manual, published in 2018, considers the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle as one of the fundamental principles of the university's operations.

Expert studies revealed that VSU applies the PDCA cycle in the following way: The planning phase is described as the process of developing and reviewing documents (policies, regulations, procedures, etc.) with the participation of internal stakeholders. The development and review of documents are carried out in working groups associated with the Scientific Council and the Rector or in groups formed by the Rector's directive. The documents are made accessible to the departments through the internal network to present proposed changes.

The implementation phase is not considered the execution of planned processes according to the developed procedures but rather when "the Rector, Vice-Rectors, and responsible departments, within their authority, continuously monitor the development of processes according to expected outcomes." During this phase, the reasons for change are feedback from stakeholders and discrepancies between achieved and expected outcomes.

In the evaluation phase, the results are compared with the indicators in the action plan of the University's 2021-2025 strategic plan. Stakeholders' satisfaction and new needs (from surveys, focus group discussions, and document analysis results) are considered. The causes of issues are mainly discussed within the framework of Commissions.

According to the university, discussions on the causes of deficiencies and SWOT analyses provide an opportunity to implement changes and improvements in the improvement phase. The expert visit

revealed that several documents have been reviewed at the university using this quality assurance approach, including:

- The procedure for organizing and discussing class observations,
- The procedure for assessing students' knowledge and handling appeals to results,
- The procedure for improving and retraining the qualification of the academic staff,
- The procedure for improving the qualifications of the academic and administrative staff,
- The criteria for the academic staff workload, etc.

The PDCA principle also applies to documents regulating academic programmes' development, implementation, and review. This principle is also the foundation of VSU's implementation of its 2021-2025 strategic plan.

2.6. The Institution has evaluation mechanisms in place ensuring data collection, analyses and application of the data on the effectiveness of the academic programmes and other processes.

Information regarding academic programmes is collected by the departments of VSU and the University's Quality Assurance Center.

Expert studies revealed that the department's program evaluations are carried out using the university's procedures for developing, implementing, monitoring, and assessing academic programmes and organising internal audits. Another mechanism used for data collection and program effectiveness assessment is the self-evaluation of academic programmes, which is carried out in accordance with program accreditation standards and criteria in a format developed by ANQA.

The University's Quality Assurance Center regularly conducts a comprehensive evaluation of academic programmes based on the satisfaction and needs of external and internal stakeholders. The head of the Quality Assurance Center presents the analyses and recommendations based on stakeholders' opinions at the Academic Council meetings.

The University's Quality Assurance Department also studies the effectiveness of management processes and teaching and administrative staff satisfaction. The results are discussed with the rector, vice-rectors, and department heads. These studies use online surveys, questionnaires, SWOT analyses, focus group discussions, and interviews.

The expert visit revealed that, according to sectorally responsible persons, the university's management is provided with survey analysis. However, the subsequent steps following these analyses are not yet visible. The university has not yet set a goal to study the effectiveness of the data collection and analysis mechanisms.

2.7. There are objective mechanisms in place evaluating the quality of quantitative and qualitative information on the academic programmes and qualification awarded.

In 2024, the university introduced the "VSU Official Website and Social Media Management Policy," which defines the objectives for using online tools and the relationships between the university's subdivisions. The university aims to ensure transparency and public visibility of its processes through its official website, social media platforms, Telegram channel, and Telegram bot.

The website provides access to key official VSU documents and complete information about academic programmes (including curricula, course syllabi, course descriptions, course methodology packages, and brief course descriptions).

However, specific analyses and publications on the quality evaluation of academic programmes and qualifications offered are unavailable on the website. Information publications are evaluated by monitoring the number of visits to the website, the number of inquiries, and the number of followers on social media platforms.

Considerations:

The expert panel positively assesses that the university has taken steps to improve its organizational structure and clarify its functions based on the recommendations received from the previous accreditation process. However, these structural reforms were implemented earlier than the issues related to them were clearly defined in the strategic plan. An analysis of the alignment between the university's strategic goals and objectives and the newly established structure would help the university to improve its current structure, clarify the responsibilities for implementing strategic actions, and support the planned work of the departments.

The implemented structural changes have reduced positions and saved financial resources, reallocated in the budget and used for salary increases. The expert panel believes that, without precise data, these changes have hindered the development of horizontal connections, led to the implementation of very diverse processes by a single department, and caused a mismatch between staff's administrative capabilities and their positions. In certain areas, positive changes observed over the years have increased trust in the management system, which still requires growth to improve its effectiveness.

The expert panel believes that the university needs to analyze the functions of its governing bodies, considering that the Board of Trustees is required to meet at least once a year. At the same time, for the rest of the time, the rector effectively leads the university’s operations across all areas (scientific, educational, production, economic, financial, international, etc.). The expert panel emphasizes that the Scientific Council, which is not a governing body, has the authority to make decisions that the rector must implement. It is necessary to study this approach's effectiveness, examine the Scientific Council's functional scope, and consider that it is missing as a department in the university’s structure. Clarifying the functions and including the Scientific Council as a governing body in the organizational structure would clarify the councils' operations and authority.

The expert panel believes that analysing and clarifying the scope of the governing bodies' activities would allow for a combination of unilateral and collegial governance principles at the university.

It is positive that the university's departments operating under the new structure have approved charters and developed position passports, which help regulate processes and implement a division of labour. It is also positive that the university's leadership has set a goal to decentralize management. The structure and regulations define vertical subordination, but horizontal ties are still weak, hindering cooperation and the exchange of experience.

VSU will conduct an effectiveness analysis of the financial policy, which will be implemented in 2023 by the end of 2024. However, some issues are already apparent: the distribution of resources among areas has been made based on the budget’s limited possibilities rather than necessity. The 3% reserve fund cannot provide the financial stability the university needs. Diversifying income through

entrepreneurial activities does not ensure significant stability if the primary financial income comes from student tuition fees.

The expert panel positively assesses that the administrative positions are filled at the university. However, there is still an issue with renewing the administrative staff and developing managerial experience. The expert panel believes the university should implement mechanisms and create conditions to attract qualified specialists from the external environment and internal promotions.

From a legal standpoint, the expert panel notes that VSU has created conditions for professors and students to participate in decision-making related to their areas. However, it is also evident that they are passive in identifying and raising issues. The expert panel believes that the university should focus on factors hindering the management system's effectiveness, investigate the reasons for stakeholders' lack of initiative, and involve them in the decision-making process. This would increase their level of trust and contribute to participatory decision-making.

Regarding long-term and short-term planning, the expert panel believes that the university needs to develop a unified approach to planning and accountability processes to ensure the structural and content consistency of strategic programs, action plans, and reports. A standardized methodology would reduce planning issues and ensure the alignment of actions across faculties and departments. A deep analysis of the causes of existing shortcomings and proposing solutions based on them would not only improve the effectiveness of the accountability system but also clarify the feasibility of the steps taken by the university to achieve its strategic goals.

The expert panel finds that department plans should directly stem from the strategies to improve the effectiveness of planning and accountability processes, and the reports should reflect the university's actual achievements and existing challenges. To enhance the management system's effectiveness, the expert panel suggests that the factors affecting the university's operations should be more comprehensive, with transparent sources and mechanisms for collecting information on them and their applications. Furthermore, the university's quality assurance system should receive specific data collection tasks from management for certain areas, which should later serve as the basis for decision-making and ensure the university's long-term development.

The expert panel emphasizes that the university needs to clarify its understanding of the PDCA principle and its phases. Consistent application of the PDCA cycle in evaluation and improvement processes, as well as its full implementation, will contribute to the stable operation of the management system and a clearer alignment of strategic issues and departmental activities.

The expert panel positively assesses self-evaluation implementation as a mechanism for gathering and evaluating information regarding academic programmes. To enhance the effectiveness of self-evaluation, it is necessary to ensure the active involvement of students and external stakeholders in the analysis process and present them for external expert evaluation. These steps will help ensure a more objective and substantiated understanding of program quality.

The expert panel positively assesses that the university has regulated the work related to the official website and social media, aiming to ensure the transparency and publicity of the processes conducted. It is acceptable that conclusions can be drawn about stakeholders' interests through monitoring website visits and the number of followers on social media. The expert panel believes that the university should consistently collect, analyse, and disseminate quantitative and qualitative

information regarding the quality of academic programmes and qualifications awarded. Additionally, it should assess the effectiveness of the mechanisms selected for dissemination.

Summary:

Considering the changes made at the university since the previous accreditation has not led to the full implementation of the objectives set by the university regarding its management system, the expert panel finds that the university has not effectively integrated the principles of individual and collegial governance. The distribution of human resources and the allocation of functions according to research and development goals are not well-founded, mid-term planning is unclear, and the connection between short-term and strategic plans is weak. There is also a lack of in-depth studies of factors influencing the university's activities, the PDCA phase has not yet been embedded into all administrative and management processes, and the mechanisms for gathering, analyzing, and applying information are insufficient. As a result, the expert panel concludes that VSU does not meet the requirements of criterion 2.

Conclusion:

The compliance of VSU institutional capacities with the requirements of Criterion 2 is **unsatisfactory.**

III. ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES

CRITERION: The programmes are in concord with the Institution's mission, form part of institutional planning and promote mobility and internationalization.

Findings

3.1 The academic programmes are in line with Institution's mission, they correspond to the state academic standards and are thoroughly described according to the intended learning outcomes of the qualification awarded.

VSU organises the educational process in the bachelor's program in 25 specialities within the regular education system and in the master's program in 15 specialities. The part-time learning system includes 20 undergraduate and one master's program. These programs cover a wide range of fields, from education to services. In its mission, VSU has not clarified the professional fields of the offered programs but only mentions the preparation of " competitive and qualified specialists. " The university is guided by several regulatory documents, including the procedure for the approval of curricula (2017), the procedure for developing, implementing, and reviewing implemented curricula (2018), and the strategy for the development and implementation of curricula (2018). Since the previous accreditation, the academic programmes at VSU have been significantly revised. The following components in all revised academic programmes have been outlined: general humanities and social-economic, general mathematics and natural sciences, general professional courses, and specialised professional courses.

The number of credits assigned to these components and the corresponding classroom load for each credit have been clarified. In the undergraduate study plans, one credit corresponds to 14

classroom hours, while in the master's program plans, it corresponds to 10-12 hours. The deans of faculties organise the selection of elective courses.

For the APs, a study guide and course catalogue based on the credit system have been developed, and for all courses included in the study plan, subject syllabi, brief descriptions, and educational-methodical packages (EMP) have been developed. These include course outcomes, assessment procedures, assignments, exam questionnaires, required literature, and more. It should also be noted that the syllabi for the academic programmes define the program's goals, potential job opportunities for graduates, professional activity areas, resources- both human and material and expected outcomes."

The expert report from the previous accreditation recommended organizing external (and, if possible, international) evaluation of the academic programmes. The university has planned to implement this consultation in its follow-up plan, but it mainly intends to conduct evaluations internally and with the involvement of employers. The university has conducted a self-evaluation and analysis of the academic programmes. Still, different approaches have been applied in different programs, and there are no specific examples of improvements based on these processes.

In all APs, a professional foreign language course has been added, and the number of credits for foreign language courses has also increased. At the same time, assignments and assessments given to students within courses have been directly linked to the number of credits for that course. However, during the site visit, it became clear that, for example, in the Physical Education and Sports Training program, which grants a teaching qualification, students find it necessary to become familiar with more sports than those included in the academic programme to avoid obstacles when teaching in schools later.

From the professional meetings, it became clear that when developing academic programmes granting a pedagogical qualification, the State Standards for General Education requirements are also considered, and changes to these standards are incorporated into the VSU's academic programmes. Expert studies revealed that during the review processes, VSU has emphasised the alignment of its programs with similar programs and has utilised the document "Policy and Procedure for Conducting Comparative Analysis of Best Practices (Benchmarking)" (developed in 2018 and modified in January 2024), which outlines the forms, actions, steps, and expected outcomes of benchmarking.

The study of the academic programmes showed that the "Actuarial and Financial Mathematics" program was developed by comparing it with Dublin College, resulting in introducing a Life Insurance course aligned with current market demands. The number of information, analytical, and programming courses has significantly increased, for example, skills in artificial intelligence applications. However, the expert panel's visit, including class observations and professional meetings, showed that not all courses apply these approaches yet, which is sometimes due to the lack of advanced technological skills among some lecturers."

From the professional discussions, it became clear that the university has often attempted to address the gap in certain skill formations through elective courses, and the curricula are flexible enough to change up to 10% of the courses before the end of the term. It should be noted that the Actuarial and Financial Mathematics program lecturers adjust their topics to avoid repetition and coordinate the study of similar topics or their practical components within the framework of other courses involving computer programs.

From the professional meetings, it became clear that there was a case where a student went on an internship at an insurance company to study the insurance sector but only gained theoretical knowledge after completing the practical experience in the following semester of study. At the same time, it should be mentioned that the balance between the delivery of theoretical material and practical exercises in courses is left to the instructor's discretion.

For the "History" program at VSU, as best practice, the programs of Yerevan State Pedagogical University (the only pedagogical university in the country), University of Iasi in Romania (with which VSU has a cooperation agreement), and Kazan Federal University in Russia (whose "History" program curriculum is like VSU's "History" program) were considered. The curricula, educational outcomes (only with Yerevan State Pedagogical University), teaching methods, and assessment systems were subjected to comparative analysis. However, the analysis lacked the extraction of good practices or recommendations for improvement.

From the perspective of developing practical skills, organising internships is a key component of the academic programmes. The university has signed contracts for the organisation of internships across all academic programmes and regularly considers expanding the scope of these internships. The institution provides various internship programs, depending on the specifics of the organisation hosting the internship. Internships have clear control mechanisms that include the joint participation of university and employer leaders. In case of unsatisfactory grades or student dissatisfaction, internship locations are changed, as happened at the AFM, when, based on student suggestions, internship locations were changed, including banks and insurance companies. The study of the academic programmes revealed that, when developing study plans, the university considers the timing of internships and schedules them before the final projects. Internship locations are often also linked to the themes of the final projects, allowing students to carry out the practical components and data analysis of their final work in the employer's environment.

3.2 The Institution has a policy that promotes alignment between teaching and learning approaches and the intended learning outcomes of academic programmes, which ensures student-centred learning.

In the expert report from the previous accreditation, the university was provided with consultations on aligning teaching methods with the achievement of learning outcomes, enriching teaching with information technologies to meet current demands, and modernising teaching methods across all VSU programs. At the VSU Scientific Council meeting on February 29, 2024, the continuous review and expansion of teaching and learning methods to form professional learning outcomes were discussed. Several provisions were adopted for implementation, including Bloom's and Tuning's approaches to knowledge formation and assessment processes.

Since the previous accreditation, teaching methods and required resources have been added to the course descriptions. The study of the academic programmes revealed that these descriptions are sometimes very general and do not fully express the requirements necessary to achieve the learning outcomes. For example, all possible resources are listed, such as libraries, reading rooms, furnished classrooms, technologically equipped classrooms, computers, textbooks, study guides, audio lectures, e-learning platforms, etc. While teaching and learning methods are described in the curricula, no clear

selection policy exists. Lecturers choose teaching methods themselves, depending on the specifics of the subject.

The study of the academic programmes also revealed that in some courses, the connection between "Outcome-Teaching method- Assessment" is unclear, as applicable methods are listed without distinguishing between them.

The professional meetings clarified that students could conduct sessions on specific topics in the employers' environment, allowing for a deeper understanding of the material and developing professional skills. For instance, some banking, insurance, and financial sector courses are held in banks and other financial institutions in the Actuarial and Financial Mathematics program.

In programs that grant a teaching qualification, special attention is given to the teaching methods of professional subjects. During the site visit, it became clear that in the history academic programme, theoretical parts and practical activities are distinguished within the framework of the history teaching methodology course. In theoretical classes, examples from school practice are discussed, and students are introduced to teaching technologies. During practical classes, students prepare lessons and present them to their peers, who act as students. Later, the group discusses the lesson structure and provides feedback.

From the analysis of assignments and class observations, it became clear that students are given tasks that include situational problems, tests, and individual and group work. To develop students' research and analytical skills, the History academic programme at VSU includes tasks such as analyzing facts, case studies, and comparative studies of historical sources. Students perform financial analyses and investment portfolio management tasks in the Actuarial and Financial Mathematics programs. In contrast, in the Psychology program, students conduct psychological diagnostic tests and surveys, apply observation methods, and analyze results.

Regarding the use of information technology in professional assignments, the expert panel noted that students in their academic programmes also study IT applications, including the MS Office package. The professional meetings clarified that these programs are not always applied when carrying out assignments within professional subjects. It should be noted that in the Psychology program, students use electronic statistical analysis tools to analyze survey responses.

3.3 The Institution has policy on students' assessment according to the learning outcomes and promotes academic integrity.

Based on the consultations from the previous accreditation, the university analysed the existing assessment system and changed the assessment regulations and forms. The expert study revealed that in 2022, VSU approved the "VSU Student Knowledge Verification, Assessment, and Record-Keeping Regulations," revised four times by December 2023. The assessment system has become multi-component, including ongoing checks, exams, and group and individual assignments. The passing threshold has been reduced from 50 points to 40. Attendance control has been removed from the assessment system. However, the expert visit revealed that some lecturers still prioritize controlling student participation, emphasizing the importance of fully comprehending the course material.

The analysis of assignments showed that they are structured in increasing complexity, which allows for the gradual development of students' professional and research skills. Lecturers provide feedback to ensure student progress. Assignments include individual and group formats to develop

analytical, research, and creative skills. For example, in the History AP, students perform comparative analyses of historical facts and study data sources. At the same time, in the Actuarial and Financial Mathematics program, the assessment includes financial analyses, investment portfolio management tasks, and insurance calculations. The instructors select the methods of assessing ongoing assignments.

The professional meetings clarified that the university's assessment criteria are still unclear. This is particularly the case for co-teaching lecturers, as collaboration between lecturers is limited, and the requirements are not discussed in advance, with each lecturer applying their assessment methods. The method of conducting ongoing exams is chosen by the department's decision (before the start of the academic year). It can be written, oral, or test-based, depending on the lecturer's reasoned proposal. Courses are summarised according to the organisation of the final assessment.

1. For courses with 4 or more credits, there are 2 ongoing exams, with a maximum of 40 points.
2. For courses that end with a final exam, there are 2 ongoing assessments (for courses with fewer than 4 credits, with a maximum total of 40 points).

The results of the online student satisfaction surveys show that students' average rating of the assessment's objectivity in 2023 was 3.1 points (on a 5-point scale).

In 2024, a new "Academic Integrity Code" was approved, replacing the 2015 version, which sets the principles of academic integrity. However, there are no specific penalties for violations. Written exams are conducted with special notebooks and final exams are recorded. In cases of plagiarism, the work is returned to students for revision. Since the previous accreditation, the evaluation of internships has also been improved. It is now conducted simultaneously by the university and the supervisor at the internship place. The internship evaluation is carried out through a multi-component system, including the knowledge applied during the internship, acquired competencies, skills, and attendance, as well as participation in the internship defense.

For awarding qualifications, VSU adheres to the Graduate Final Certification Regulations, which define the conditions for distributing, supervising, and organising final thesis topics and master's theses. In the Actuarial and Financial Mathematics program, the topics for final theses are often based on employer requirements, ensuring alignment with labor market needs.

Both faculty members and employers supervise the final thesis at VSU. A co-supervision model is applied when the theses include both theoretical research and practical components. However, the definition of supervision hours is still not effectively regulated, as the allotted hours are shared rather than doubled.

From the analysis of final theses, it became clear that their topics do not repeat. Professional meetings revealed that most of the final theses are related to history in the History program. In the final thesis, students only have a part where they present the teaching methodology. However, the study showed that testing the practical part in schools and reflecting on its results is not mandatory. For their research, students sometimes conduct surveys in schools to gather data.

To encourage the research component of final theses, students in art-related fields (Fine Arts) present the final canvas and provide an analysis of it. The results of the final work and master's thesis defense are evaluated as "excellent," "good," "satisfactory," or "unsatisfactory" using the points of the evaluation scale adopted at the University, with numerical and letter equivalents.

From the site visit, it became clear that the procedure for appealing grades was reviewed in 2024, and students are aware of their right to appeal. However, such cases are relatively rare. Through surveys, students assess the objectivity of the evaluation process for term papers, final theses, and

master's theses on a 0–5-point scale. For example, in the case of students from the Faculty of Humanities, the evaluation of objectivity is as follows: the objectivity of the evaluation of term papers was rated on average 2.8 points, the evaluation of final theses 3.3 points, and the evaluation of thesis 3.5 points.

3.4 The programmes of the Institution are contextually coherent with other relevant programs and promote the mobility of students and staff.

At VSU, benchmarking has been carried out to improve academic programmes. The academic programmes for the AFM specialisation have been developed considering the experience of Dublin College and the studies of similar programs at Yerevan State University, Armenian State Pedagogical University, and Russian State Humanitarian University. As a result, new courses were introduced, assessment criteria were changed, assignments were updated, and teaching approaches were modified. For example, "Actuarial Mathematics" now includes a component on life insurance, an elective course "Differential Equations in Economics" was introduced, and practical classes have become more student-centred, involving discussions, student-led lessons, professional games, and case analyses.

The VSU Humanities Faculty's "History" program has undergone benchmarking with the "History" academic programme from the Faculty of History and Social Sciences at the Armenian State Pedagogical University (ASPU), which includes departments for Armenian History and its Teaching Methodology and World History and its Teaching Methodology. The University of Iasi in Romania was chosen due to its collaboration agreement with VPU. Kazan Federal University was preferred among Russian universities, considering its "History" program curriculum closely aligns with VSU's. The comparative analysis of the academic programmes and their components concluded that VSU's program is flexible and comparable with ASPU, Kazan Federal University, and the University of Iasi, providing mobility opportunities for students and academic staff.

The study of academic programmes and professional meetings revealed that elective courses are mandatory in all academic divisions of the curricula, supporting student mobility by allowing credits earned through academic mobility programs abroad to be transferred, accounting for the credits allotted to these courses. There have been no mobility cases with ASPU and Kazan Federal University. Still, between 2022 and 2024, there were 2 student mobility cases and 1 academic staff exchange with the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iasi, Romania. According to the data provided by the university, from 2019 to 2024, 18 students and 10 staff members participated in mobility programs. During this period, the university hosted 9 visiting professors, who also conducted courses for VSU students and academic staff.

3.5 The Institution adopts policies ensuring academic programmeme monitoring, evaluation of effectiveness and enhancement.

At VSU, there are internal audit procedures for organising the professional academic programme, adopted on 27.02.2015, procedures for developing and implementing academic programmes, and a strategy for reviewing implemented programs, designed in 2018. Following the observations of the previous expert report, the processes for continuous monitoring and auditing of academic programmes

have been revised, with a four-year cycle for bachelor's degree programs and a two-year cycle for master's degree programs.

After the previous accreditation, VSU introduced the requirement for self-evaluation of academic programmes, which is carried out by the departments with the support of the University's Quality Assurance Center (QAC). This self-evaluation is conducted according to the accreditation criteria for professional educational programs approved by the Government of Armenia and follows the ANQA self-evaluation format.

The expert meetings revealed that departments and faculty councils regularly discuss subjects' content, and the practice of sending external opinions of partner universities through external feedback is being applied. For instance, the academic programme in AFM was sent for review to Goris State University. As a result of constant monitoring and audits of the academic programmes, changes were made in new curricula, such as changes in the credits of elective courses, increased hours for practical and seminar classes, and the introduction of new courses.

From professional meetings, it became clear that great attention is paid to employers' demands, which are also expressed in academic programmes and specifications of individual subjects. For example, in Psychology AP, situational problems and psychological analysis methods were added to the assignments because of employers' feedback.

Employers are also actively involved in final certification committees, supervise graduation projects, and conduct courses through which the university aims to identify the needs of the academic programmes. While the university has not comprehensively analysed the committee's reports, based on employers' suggestions, research topics have been proposed for practical research based on specific organisations, and the locations for internships have been expanded.

Considerations:

The expert panel positively evaluates the efforts of VSU in improving the structure and content of academic programmes. Clarifying the expected learning outcomes of professional educational programs and aligning them with the characteristics of the national qualification's framework is essential for the university's mission. However, the lack of clarification of the professional areas of the programs in the mission complicates the complete coordination and alignment of the university's strategic goals and educational program development directions with the development directions of the region. VSU has made progress in clarifying the content of academic programmes and ensuring structural coherence. Nevertheless, the expert panel believes that introducing a unified approach to distributing practical and theoretical components is essential for achieving the full attainment of the academic programme outcomes.

In improving academic programmes, the university has taken significant steps towards applying comparative analyses to align the programs with international standards. However, benchmarking results are often not translated into practical solutions or specific improvement proposals, which would allow the university to enhance its academic programmes based on international best practices and prepare graduates for the global labor market.

The expert panel believes that flexibility in academic programmes and adding elective components are commendable. Still, the time mismatch between theoretical and practical knowledge in the teaching process may disrupt the overall effectiveness of student learning. According to the expert panel's evaluation, VSU has made progress in modernising teaching methods, mainly by

diversifying teaching methods based on previous accreditation consultations and clarifying the resources needed for interactive teaching. It is positive that, in some cases, the integration of practical and theoretical components in the educational process is ensured, such as organising professional courses with employers. However, in certain classes, the "Outcome-Teaching Method-Assessment" link is unclear, but it could help the university monitor the continuous evaluation of students' educational outcomes and professional preparedness.

The formats of the tasks implemented and some developments in interdisciplinary connections are positive. Still, the limited cooperation between departments hinders the integration of curricula and the development of comprehensive professional skills. The university's efforts to develop information technology skills are essential, but their broader application in implementing tasks in professional subjects would enhance the development of students' practical abilities.

Student assessments of teaching methods indicate a lack of modernisation in teaching and student-centred approaches. In most cases, students are passive listeners to the topics presented by the lecturer, which diminishes student engagement and the effectiveness of feedback. The expert panel emphasises the importance of using more diverse and interactive teaching methods to stimulate students' analytical and creative abilities.

VSU has changed the assessment system by implementing a multi-component approach and strengthening assessment mechanisms. However, the lack of clarity in assessment criteria, especially when involving multiple lecturers, leads to inconsistent application of assessment standards. Frequent changes in assessment processes make it challenging for lecturers and students to adapt to these changes. The introduction of a multi-faceted system for evaluating practical work is positive, as it allows for assessing all components of the practice and students' acquisition of skills, providing appropriate feedback.

It is also positive that the topics of final projects are linked to internship locations, allowing students to carry out the practical part of their research by analysing data from specific organisations. The expert panel believes that applying this approach to all academic programmes, considering the potential career paths of graduates, will make the final projects more applicable and provide an opportunity to conduct research based on employers' needs.

Regarding the university's efforts for continuous improvement and ensuring alignment of academic programmes, the expert panel notes that VSU has effectively implemented benchmarking in certain programs, such as the "Actuarial and Financial Mathematics" program, using international best practices. These programs' content improvements are evident and enhance students' professional preparedness. However, the lack of comprehensive analysis of benchmarking results and the extraction of best practices limits its broader application in other academic programmes. The expert panel believes that the university's increased focus on aligning academic programmes will lead to broader cooperation with international partners and the promotion of mobility programs, which will expand students' experiences and contribute to the professional development of faculty members.

Since the previous accreditation, VSU has implemented mechanisms for continuous monitoring and self-evaluation of academic programmes, contributing to their modernisation. However, improving academic programmes is not always data-driven, and summary analyses do not provide a sufficient basis for identifying improvement directions. Analysing the results of regular meetings with employers and reviewing the reports of final certification committees will enable the university to respond to the changing demands of the labor market.

Summary:

Considering that the university has taken steps to improve the APs since the previous accreditation, including conducting benchmarking, adding elective courses based on labor market demands, developing educational methodology packages for all classes, using diverse teaching methods by faculty, improving the assessment system by incorporating multi-component approaches and clarifying their components, involving employers in students' final projects based on requirements, and implementing mechanisms for the review and evaluation of academic programmes, the expert panel concludes that VSU meets the requirements of criterion 3.

Conclusion:

The compliance of VSU institutional capacities with the requirements of Criterion 3 is **satisfactory.**

IV. STUDENTS

CRITERION: The Institution provides support services to students, ensuring a productive learning environment

Findings

4.1. The Institution has set mechanisms for promoting students' recruitment, selection and admission procedures.

Vanadzor State University has established clear student recruitment, selection, and admission mechanisms. Applicants are admitted according to the procedure established by Government Decision No. 597-N of the Republic of Armenia, which regulates admission to full-time bachelor's and continuous, integrated academic programmes in state and private higher educational institutions. Since 2022, the Assessment and Testing Center has also organised admission to bachelor's programs with part-time learning through unified exams. Admission is carried out through internal university exams for specific fields of study, such as physical education, fine arts, and music academic programmes. Admission to the master's program is based on the average quality assessment of the bachelor's level in the relevant field. In contrast, applicants from other universities and fields must pass specialised entrance exams. Admission to the master's program is organised based on the average qualitative assessment at the bachelor's level when continuing education in the same speciality. In contrast, applicants from other universities and specialities must pass specialised entrance exams for the master's program.

To guide applicants in their career orientation and recruitment, the university regularly organises events such as "Open Doors Day" and "Career Fair." In addition, the university organises visits to schools, where the university's educational opportunities are presented. An expert visit revealed that 30-40% of the students from the Vanadzor State University-affiliated school continue their education at Vanadzor State University.

During the site visit, it was also found that students actively participate in the "Open Doors Day" and "Career Fair" events, where they present the university's opportunities to prospective students. Every academic year, from October to May, the university organises free preparatory courses for applicants on subjects related to the entrance exams to support them. About 50% of the course

participants later continue their education at Vanadzor State University. A study of the number of students over the past five years showed that the number of students has remained relatively stable. Currently, 1,668 students are studying at the university.

During the site visit, it became clear that the university has not evaluated the effectiveness of its student selection and recruitment mechanisms. The reasons for student expulsions from the university are low academic performance (59.60%), failure to meet contractual obligations (28.40%), unexcused absences (10.80%), and inability to defend their thesis (1.20%). The expulsion rate fluctuates between 1-2%, with the reinstatement rate ranging from 1-4%. The site visit revealed that expulsions due to academic performance have decreased in recent years, thanks to the recommendations provided by the university.

4.2. The Institution has policies and procedures for assessing student educational needs.

At Vanadzor State University, the Quality Assurance Center conducts surveys, focus group meetings, and meetings with students to identify students' educational needs. The study of students' needs and the results are regularly presented at the university's Scientific Council, discussed in the Rector's office, and the Student Council. During the expert visit, it was revealed that, for instance, the Student Council, after receiving feedback from students in the Fine Arts Department about the outdated equipment, raised the issue at the Scientific Council, resulting in the update of easels and cabinets.

The University's Quality Assurance Center conducts surveys to assess the quality of courses, the teaching process, the university's resource base, and educational services. Expert studies have shown that thanks to the mechanisms used, issues related to replenishing the resource base have been raised, after which the university has taken steps to improve classrooms and replenish and update technical equipment.

Expert studies also showed that course instructors are essential in meeting students' needs. For example, based on students' demands, after discussions with course instructors, faculty members organised advisory meetings before exams, which helped students prepare for the exams. The expert visit also revealed that the Assessment Procedure was reviewed to identify needs. After this revision, students' attendance no longer affects their grading, while their participation and activity are now emphasised.

4.3. The Institution provides opportunities for extra-curricular activities and advising services aimed at supporting effective student learning

Vanadzor State University provides additional opportunities for additional classes and consultations for students. In anticipation of exam periods, lecturers set up special consultation hours, during which students can discuss their questions individually or in a group format and receive information about the assessment criteria. These consultations aim to help students overcome academic challenges and improve their educational progress. The expert visit revealed that faculty members are always willing to assist students and provide guidance outside the scheduled consultation hours.

In addition to exam-related consultations, the university regularly organises supplementary courses on various topics based on student demand. For example, a course on media literacy was organised to develop students' skills in media and information technologies. The expert study revealed that no additional classes are currently offered that align with the directions of academic programmes.

4.4. There are precise regulations and schedules for students to turn to the administrative staff for additional support and guidance.

At Vanadzor State University, the rector and administrative staff members have designated special hours to support and guide students. The expert visit revealed that students can also approach the administrative staff with their concerns outside the designated hours and receive the necessary assistance.

Students can also contact administrative staff online through social networks and the university website. This option is widely used by part-time students who often use online tools to address their issues. The site visit revealed that students mainly address problems at the deans' offices. Students who have studied through exchange programs have also approached the dean's office regarding matters related to credit equivalency.

4.5. The Institution has student career support services.

The Alumni Affairs Coordinator at Vanadzor State University provides career support for students. The university maintains databases of alumni and employers. Job fairs are organised regularly, allowing students to explore labor market opportunities and receive guidance for their professional careers.

The site visit revealed that an alumni club was also established at the university after the previous accreditation. The club was designed to maintain connections with alumni and facilitate the exchange of experiences between students and graduates. However, the expert visit showed that the club is not yet very active, and the number of alumni involved is still small.

The Student Council organises meetings and lectures with experienced guest experts, introducing students to industry innovations and career opportunities. Guest lecturers include industry experts who participate in the graduation committees and the development of academic programmes. These experts not only teach at the university but also offer job opportunities to students.

An analysis of alumni employment data shows that according to 2023-2024 statistics, 34.62% of graduates have secured employment before completing their bachelor's degree, and 23.08% of graduates work in their field of study. In the full-time master's program, there are courses with 100% employment rates; overall, about 60% of master's students are employed.

4.6. The Institution promotes student involvement in research activities.

The university values student involvement in scientific research activities and takes steps to support them in this regard. The Student Scientific Society (SSS) operates at the university, regularly organising scientific and cultural events across all faculties to engage students in the research process starting their first year. Every year, SSS organises conferences where students from Vanadzor State

University and participants from other universities present their reports. Between 2019 and 2024, 198 students from all university faculties participated in these SSS conferences.

The university also organises conferences for young scientists involving students from VSU and other universities. Students can present their scientific work and have it published in the university's conference proceedings.

During the site visit, it was found that the university informs students about the opportunities to engage in scientific research activities. However, most students lack sufficient interest in participating in these processes. Despite the university's support, students do not have specific coordinators to whom they can turn in questions related to scientific research. The expert visit revealed that, when necessary, faculty members assist students by providing information on applicable formats and helping them find relevant professional literature.

The university provides 20,000 AMD as an incentive for student article publication. However, the expert visit revealed that most students are unaware of the incentive mechanisms.

The university has a journal, "Magistros," for student publications. Its operations are governed by the "Magistros" journal publishing regulations. All issues of the "Magistros" and SSS conference proceedings are available on the university website.

The expert study revealed that over the past two years, there has been a noticeable decrease in the number of co-authored articles with lecturers (from 19 to 7) and in the number of articles published in the SSS conference proceedings (from 58 to 30). According to the university, this decline is due to the stricter requirements regarding the data studied, with an increased emphasis on the conclusions drawn.

4.7. The Institution has a unique body which is responsible for the protection of students' rights.

At TLI, the Student Council is responsible for protecting students' rights. It serves as the university's student self-governance and elects a representative body. The expert study revealed that the Student Council has an annual plan for activities and events, which includes orientation programs and excursions, added in response to students' suggestions. The Student Council has a budget through which the annual events are planned.

Representatives of the Student Council are involved in the university's governance bodies, including the Board of Trustees, the Scientific Council, Faculty Scientific Councils, and various committees within the Scientific Council. Expert studies revealed that issues related to resource replenishment were raised through an appeal to the Student Council, which resulted in the studios being equipped with easels and drawing materials purchased.

The expert study also revealed that students are more likely to approach their course instructors when dealing with their concerns. At the same time, the Student Council primarily focuses on organising university events and disseminating information.

4.8. The Institution has set mechanisms for evaluating and ensuring the quality of educational, consultancy and other student services.

The university's Quality Assurance Center regularly surveys students and alumni to assess the quality of academic programmes and services. The expert visit revealed that four years ago, student-coordinator groups consisting of 7-10 members were formed to ensure student participation in these surveys and discussions. These groups are involved in the information dissemination process, helping to ensure student participation and feedback collection.

Students are given questionnaires to express their opinions on courses and the services offered. However, the expert visit found that the usage of questionnaires remains very low, at around 15%.[7]

The expert study also revealed that changes have been made because of student satisfaction assessments, such as expanding the scope of internship locations and revising study materials. Additionally, specific academic programmes have been reviewed, and students have been allowed to assess the effectiveness of the materials presented by lecturers and the teaching process.

Considerations:

The expert panel positively assesses Vanadzor State University's efforts to improve student recruitment, selection, and admission, which have led to a stable inflow of applicants. The preparatory subject courses organised by the university also contribute to increased interest among applicants, promoting the admission process and helping to maintain student enrolment numbers. However, the lack of regular assessments of the effectiveness of these admission processes limits the university's ability to improve its recruitment strategy systematically.

The expert panel believes that the surveys and focus group meetings used to assess students' needs contribute to the continuous improvement of the educational environment. The additional sessions and consultations provided by the university enhance students' progress. Individual or group consultations with lecturers before exam periods significantly support students. However, the scope of thematic additional classes needs to be expanded to respond to students' diverse needs, including the implementation of professional supplementary courses, such as those aimed at improving foreign language proficiency.

The expert panel positively evaluates the support provided to students by the administrative staff, including online options, which allow students to receive prompt responses to their concerns.

From the expert panel's perspective, the presence of databases of alumni and employers is crucial for studying labor market demands and career guidance. However, the university does not employ a systematic approach to analysing the data in these databases, which limits the justification of decisions made. The regular organisation of job fairs allows students to familiarise themselves with the demands of their field and directly connect with employers. The availability of an analysis of the effectiveness of such events would allow for an assessment of their actual impact on students' employment rates and enable the planning of future activities accordingly.

Despite the creation of the alumni club, its lack of active engagement and the small number of involved alumni indicate that the potential of this structure has not been fully utilised. Activating the club and organising regular events could improve the connection between students and alumni, promoting experience exchange and professional growth.

Vanadzor State University emphasises developing students' research potential by creating various platforms and opportunities. The Student Scientific Society (SSS) activities and the conferences it organises reflect the university's efforts to involve students in the research process. However, despite

[7] Reformulated as a result of discussions with the university.

the encouragement provided by the university for publishing articles, the lack of awareness among most students and the absence of specific coordinators limit opportunities for expanding student participation.

Providing support in searching for professional literature and research methods is an important step, which could be further improved by creating a formal advisory system in research. Given the experience in organising scientific events, the university could further develop its student involvement policy by expanding the research component in the educational process. Implementing a well-defined structural and incentive system would enhance student interest and contribute to developing their scientific potential.

The Student Council plays a key role in the university's governance processes, ensuring the protection of student rights and participation. However, its primary focus on organising events limits fully realising the Council's functions. It is necessary to expand initiatives aimed at protecting students' rights. Surveys conducted by the Quality Assurance Center provide an opportunity to understand students' satisfaction levels. However, the low participation rate in these surveys limits the representativeness of the collected data. There is a need to encourage greater student participation and increase awareness so the university can understand students' needs and implement continuous environmental improvements.

Summary:

Considering that the university continuously improves the educational environment based on student needs, has effective mechanisms for student recruitment and admission, provides support and counselling through faculty members, allows students to approach administrative staff with concerns freely, offers career preparation programs for students, has mechanisms for involving students in research activities. The Student Council is willing to support identifying student needs, along with certain mechanisms for evaluating services provided to students; the expert panel concludes that the university meets the requirements of criterion 4.

Conclusion:

The compliance of VSU institutional capacities with the requirements of Criterion 4 is **satisfactory.**

V. FACULTY AND STAFF

CRITERION: The Institution has a highly qualified teaching and support staffs to achieve the set goals for academic programmes and institution's mission.

Findings

5.1. The Institution has policies and procedures promoting recruitment of a highly qualified teaching and supporting staff to provide academic programmes.

The Vanadzor State University, in its 2021-2025 SP, emphasises the professional growth of the academic staff, particularly by promoting activities that support professional development training, improving the certification processes, enhancing the evaluation systems for academic staff and auxiliary personnel, and refining mechanisms for ensuring the stability of academic staff and the

succession system. VSU is guided by the Regulations on the Competitive Selection and Appointment of Academic Staff (the latter was adopted in 2017 and revised 3 times, the last in 2024) to form the academic staff. According to these regulations, the following academic staff positions are defined: professor, associate professor, senior lecturer, lecturer, and assistant professor. This describes the criteria for appointment of positions, the competitive selection of candidates, and the procedure and terms for appointment to academic staff positions.

It was revealed during the site visit that the documents of the competition candidates are reviewed by a competition commission attached to the academic council or faculty council and simultaneously sent for discussion to the relevant department. Based on the department's decision, the head of the department may suggest that a candidate participating in the competition for the first time conduct a trial lecture or practical session. Based on this, the department's conclusion and the candidate's other documents are submitted to the relevant competition commission. The competition commission then presents its findings about the candidates to the scientific council. The VSU Scientific Council organises the selection of lecturers, while the selection for the positions of associate professors, senior lecturers, and assistants is conducted by the relevant faculty's scientific council. A work contract is signed with the selected candidate for the specified term of the position.

Academic staff positions are also filled by renewing the employment contract based on a positive assessment of scientific-pedagogical activity results after the previous agreement's expiration. This renewal can be done for up to 5 years. Document reviews showed that VSU's academic staff includes 182 full-time employees (133 were selected through competition) and 77 part-time staff.

VSU also has a procedure for selecting and appointing administrative, academic support, and administrative-economic positions, which was approved in 2019. A competition commission also carries out this process, one member of which represents the human resources department. In the second stage, depending on the position requirements, a test and/or verification of knowledge, skills, and abilities is conducted according to the criteria specified in the job description. If the candidate achieves at least 50% of the tasks in the second stage, they are considered successful. The third stage is an interview prepared, conducted, and overseen by the commission chairperson. Expert research revealed that VSU has had official job descriptions for lecturers, associate professors, assistants, and lecturers since 2018. These documents outline these positions' organisational and managerial tasks, professional activities, rights, duties, responsibilities, work knowledge, and skills. However, the study of these documents does not clearly distinguish between the responsibilities of lecturers and assistants.

5.2 The requirements for qualifications of teaching staff per academic programme are comprehensively stated.

Based on the observations of the previous expert report, the relevant departments of the university have worked on defining the requirements for the professional qualifications of the academic staff in the academic programmes. In the context of institutional accreditation, a review of the academic programmes revealed that the 16th point of the "History" program's curriculum outlines the "requirements for the academic staff of the AP," which include professional abilities, skills, and general competencies. The requirements in other academic programmes are more general.

Expert studies showed that bachelor's degree programs are taught by instructors with basic education relevant to their courses. When selecting specialists to teach specialised subjects, the

university places importance on the presence of an academic degree (or academic title, honorary title in the arts, etc.) and/or relevant work experience in the corresponding field.

After studying the documents, it became clear that points 6 and 7 of the position passports define each category's basic and additional knowledge, abilities, and work functions according to organisational, managerial, and professional activities, rights, and responsibilities.

5.3 The Institution has well-established policies and procedures for the periodic evaluation of the teaching staff.

Based on the recommendations from the previous accreditation consultations, the university has diversified the mechanisms for evaluating the faculty and staff. In this regard, VSU places importance on student surveys and class observations. Specifically, the university has a regulation for conducting the "Instructor through the Eyes of Students" survey, developed in 2015 and revised in 2019 and 2023. According to the regulation, the survey aims to assess the quality and effectiveness of the academic staff's teaching, identify errors and shortcomings, and correct them through appropriate mechanisms to enhance teaching quality and efficiency.

The expert visit revealed that the survey is conducted after the final exam for the respective subject, typically in the months following the clearing of any academic debts. The survey is conducted for invited lecturers after working at the university for at least one year. According to the survey form, students evaluate the lecturer's pedagogical professionalism, academic integrity, and adherence to ethical standards on a 1-5 scale. However, it remains unclear what criteria evaluate the lecturer's knowledge of the subject, respectful attitude, and eloquent speech. It is also uncertain how reliable and applicable these evaluations are for the further improvement of educational programs. The analysis of the surveys presents numerical data, but they often fail to reflect the complete picture of the teaching and learning process due to the lack of qualitative analysis.

Another evaluation procedure for lecturers at VSU is the class observations carried out within the departments. Since 2015, there has been a regulation for organising and discussing these observations, which was last revised in 2023. According to the regulation, class observations can be conducted by department heads, as well as by the rector, vice-rectors, and deans. The lecturer's professional, pedagogical, and methodological preparedness, organisational skills, ability to establish lecturer-student relations, and modern teaching methods and new technologies are evaluated during the observation. Shortcomings and positive aspects are identified, recommendations are made, and a conclusion is drawn. The results of the observations are also discussed in department meetings according to the regulations.

The expert study revealed that the discussions primarily focus on the effectiveness of the methods used and improving the assessment system. As a result, teaching methods have been reconsidered, changes have been made to the assessment methods, and subject methodological packages have been revised. Expert meetings also showed reciprocal classroom observations, considering the opportunities for exchanging experience in specialised subject areas.

5.4 The Institution promotes professional development for the teaching staff according to the needs outlined during regular evaluations (both internal and external).

The Centre for Educational Reforms and Training organised the work on improving the academic staff in collaboration with the relevant departments. VSU has established a procedure for upgrading the qualifications and training of faculty and staff, which was approved in January 2024. According to this procedure, the department, the Center, and the working group develop a qualification enhancement program based on a needs assessment. The total workload for the course is set at 72 hours, of which 36 hours are focused on professional development. After reviewing the proposed courses, the lecturer selects the course(s) they prefer and participates in the process.

To organise a professional qualification improvement or training course, an expert with a scientific background, scientific title, or extensive experience in the field is invited from another department. The course lasts 36 hours and is funded by the university's budget for staff qualification enhancement and training.

According to the schedule for qualification enhancement courses for 2024, the following courses were held at the university: "Methodology of Scientific Research," "Pedagogical-Psychological Competencies," "Project Management," "Moodle E-learning System Skills," and "Computer Skills 1,2." According to the self-analysis, 172 lecturers participated in the retraining programs. However, as seen from the list of courses, there is a noticeable gap in courses focused on specialised professional development.

The expert study revealed that the university's faculty members also have retraining opportunities through the Erasmus+ Capacity Building Programs.

5.5 The Institution ensures a permanent staff for the stable provision of the academic programmes.

The document review conducted by the expert panel indicates that VSU is aware of the challenges related to the sustainability of its academic staff and its academic programmes. Specifically, the university highlights issues such as the difficulties in recruiting staff due to its location away from the capital, the practice of a single lecturer teaching multiple courses, the risks involved in organising the teaching process due to the absence of a substitute lecturer for a specific course, and other related issues.

To improve the effective organisation of the academic staff's work and enhance sustainability, VSU has periodically reviewed, revised, and changed the workload standards for lecturers over the past three years. These changes are reflected in the ratio of classroom to non-classroom hours. According to the 2024 regulation for determining the academic workload standards, the following workload hours are set for five categories of academic staff: Professor - 700 hours, Associate Professor - 720 hours, Senior Lecturer - 740 hours, Lecturer - 760 hours, and Assistant -780 hours. According to the self-evaluation, the university's core academic staff comprises 7 professors, 70 associate professors, and 49 lecturers and assistants. Of the 126 core academic staff members, 102 hold scientific degrees and titles. The total number of academic staff is 249.

The expert visit revealed that the university also encourages including its graduates in the academic staff. Currently, 189 VSU graduates are working as lecturers at the university. The average age of the academic staff at VSU is 55.

From the perspective of ensuring the sustainability of the academic staff, VSU also emphasises the importance of its postgraduate school and its work with young and early-career lecturers. Between 2019 and 2023, the university enrolled 3 full-time and 8 part-time doctoral candidates and 47 applicants for postgraduate programs. At present, the university has 6 applicants and 2 doctoral students.

5.6 There are set policies and procedures for the staff promotion.

The competitive selection of VSU's academic staff and the gradual appointment of positions (Professor, Associate Professor, Senior Lecturer, Lecturer, Assistant) regulates the professional advancement of lecturers, with clearly defined requirements for the five categories of the academic staff.

In terms of the professional and pedagogical development of young and starting lecturers, VSU emphasises the importance of the "Mentorship Organization for Young Lecturers (Staff)," which was approved in 2018 and periodically reviewed (the most recent review in 2024). The regulation outlines the objectives and tasks of mentorship, the specifics of its implementation (requirements for mentors, timelines, compensation, documentation package), and the rights and responsibilities of both the mentor and the young lecturer. However, the regulation has not yet been fully implemented at the university. The expert visit revealed that under the guidance of department heads, more experienced lecturers support novice staff by discussing teaching methods and practices with them and conducting reciprocal class observations for knowledge and experience sharing.

VSU also considers the implementation of the reward system for scientific, educational, cultural, sports, and organisational work as an essential mechanism for the professional advancement of its staff. Specifically, the expert visit clarified that the university provides financial incentives for scientific work, including publications in high-ranking journals, obtaining academic degrees and titles, inventions, copyrights, and patents. In educational work, incentives are provided for the development of textbooks and educational-methodological works, as well as for the design and implementation of new academic programmes and retraining courses.

5.7 The Institution has necessary administrative and support staffs to achieve the strategic goals.

According to VSU's self-evaluation, the total number of teaching support, administrative, and economic staff is 117, with 30 teaching support staff. The "Regulation on the Selection and Appointment of Administrative, Teaching Support, and Administrative-Economic Positions " also conducts the appointment of administrative and teaching support staff positions at YSU through a competitive process. Additionally, position passports for administrative and teaching support staff are available.

Considerations:

The expert panel positively evaluates that VSU has developed the necessary policies and procedures for selecting qualified faculty and staff, ensuring that the university is staffed with the required personnel to implement academic programmes. The expert panel positively assesses that VSU

regularly reviews the procedures for the competitive selection of academic staff, contributing to the ongoing improvement of the process. The multi-stage nature of the competitive process guarantees the professional suitability of staff for achieving the outcomes of APs. However, the university needs to clarify the responsibilities of professors and assistants as defined in their position passports to improve the effectiveness of the teaching process.

The expert panel appreciates the university's efforts in defining the qualifications required for academic programme staff. In this context, it is essential to clarify the requirements for lecturers in all APs, which would allow for a comprehensive evaluation of the professional suitability of academic staff for these programs.

The panel emphasizes the importance of systematising periodic assessment processes for academic staff. While the university conducts student surveys and class observations, the lack of focus and qualitative analysis in these surveys reduces their effectiveness. Revising the questionnaires and including questions that address the real needs of students and lecturers will help the university identify teaching and learning issues and contribute to the professional development of academic staff.

However, the lack of specialised professional development courses limits the potential for specialists in specific fields to advance. Allocating resources for this purpose and establishing partnerships could help familiarize staff with contemporary demands in particular fields and integrate these into the teaching process.

The expert panel notes that the university is taking steps to review the standards for academic staff workload in line with its strategic goals. However, attracting top specialists requires additional measures, such as creating favourable conditions and introducing incentive systems. VSU also emphasises the professional growth of young academic staff. At the same time, the mentoring process requires a more structured approach and full implementation of the established regulations, which would contribute to the transfer of experience and the improvement of teaching methods.

Encouragement of alumni involvement is a positive step toward ensuring the stability of academic staff. Still, the doctoral school must strengthen its effectiveness in preparing young specialists. The group appreciates that the university encourages scientific activity. Continuing steps in this direction and expanding the network of academic staff involved in research are essential for achieving the university's research goals.

The university has the necessary administrative and teaching support staff, which allows it to implement its strategic goals. At the same time, it is essential to develop mechanisms for assessing staff needs and organising capacity-building programs effectively, improving the quality and attractiveness of the university's activities.

Summary:

Considering that the university has a qualified faculty for the implementation of its academic programmes and has involved faculty with practical experience, as well as having worked on clarifying the requirements for faculty in the course syllabi, the university has mechanisms for faculty evaluation and internal promotion procedures in place. Also, it has appropriate administrative and academic support staff, the expert panel assesses that the university mostly meets the requirements of criterion 5.

Conclusion:

The compliance of VSU institutional capacities with the requirements of Criterion 5 is **satisfactory.**

VI. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

CRITERION: The Institution ensures the implementation of research activity and the link of the research with teaching and learning.

Findings

6.1 The Institution has a clear strategy promoting its research interests and ambitions.

Expert studies revealed that Vanadzor State University considers science one of its primary areas for development, considering the demand for research-based knowledge in the labor market. Based on the previous evaluation, the university was recommended to clarify its research directions by developing and implementing an effective strategy for research activities. In 2023, the university's Scientific Council approved the "Strategy for the Development of Science at Vanadzor State University after H. Tumanyan for 2023-2025" (the strategy's completion timeline aligns with the completion of the Research Development Strategy), which outlines the priorities for science development at the university, including Armenian studies, life and health sciences, advanced effective technologies, information and communication technologies, including AI-based technologies, as well as fundamental and applied research aimed at solving key economic and societal challenges.

The strategy emphasizes planning and implementing fundamental and applied research and expanding international research activities through participation in conferences and joint programs. The university considers it essential to improve mechanisms for involving faculty and students in research activities, encourage interdisciplinary research, and develop knowledge-based innovative entrepreneurial activities. The university has introduced incentive measures for publishing articles, writing textbooks, and monographs to engage students and faculty in research. However, there are still no cases of entrepreneurial activities related to research at the university.

The expert visit showed that the university established scientific groups in biology, Armenian language, economics, and history after the previous accreditation. These groups consist of three to four members, one a student or a PhD candidate. In 2022, five scientific groups were formed, and in 2023 and 2024, four groups were formed. The formation of these groups allows for the submission of internal and international grant applications based on the research results. Funding is allocated for acquiring necessary materials, equipment, and resources for research, as well as for travel, article translation, and publication. The work of these scientific groups has been summarized through the publication of articles and analyses.

6.2 The Institution has a long-term strategy and med term and short-term programs that address its research interests and ambitions.

The VSU science development strategy specifies research directions and covers implementing the university's strategic program for 2023-2025, which can be considered mid-term planning. The university plans to implement the next strategy in the direction of science in conjunction with the Strategic Plan to ensure consistency of deadlines and goals.

Expert assessments revealed that after the previous accreditation, all departments at the university had developed both long-term and short-term research directions. Specifically, the research directions for 8 departments include 24 long-term and 50 short-term research areas. The university is still clarifying these directions; not all short-term research goals are clearly defined. Sometimes, short-term directions overlap with the specific professional niches of the faculty members.

The formation of scientific groups is also a step to support the development of departmental research directions. In recent years, the university has allocated funding for establishing and operating scientific groups to increase the visibility of the university's research directions, attracting grant programs, and having publications in internationally ranked journals.

In 2023, the university developed a formula for determining the effectiveness of departmental scientific activities, considering each faculty member's scientific work and the ranking of the journals in which their articles are published. During September and October, the formula is used to analyze the effectiveness of departmental research activities, and the results are presented at scientific council meetings. The analysis revealed that some articles published in international journals were in low-ranking or non-peer-reviewed journals. As a result, the university revised the "Incentive Regulations for the Employees of the Vanadzor State University Foundation for Scientific, Educational, Cultural, Sports, and Organizational Work," specifying that only articles published in high-ranking journals would be eligible for incentives.

6.3 The Institution ensures the implementation of research and its development through sound policies and procedures.

Research programs at Vanadzor State University are conducted within the framework of contractual (thematic) financing for scientific and scientific-technical activities, internal grants awarded to scientific groups, and personal initiatives from the faculty within the scope of departmental themes. The university’s research structures include the Natural Sciences Complex Research Laboratory, departments, and the Perspective Research Center named after S. Mergelyan, which is also part of the university’s structure.

Expert assessments revealed that from 2021-2023, the Natural Sciences Complex Laboratory at the university conducted a project titled "Characteristics of the Mechanisms for Obtaining Environmentally Clean Natural Materials and Dyes from Generative Organs of the Black Species of Tanturvani," which received thematic funding from the ESCS’s State Committee of Science. Additionally, the scientific group obtained a short-term patent for the invention. In 2024, the university submitted two applications for the "Grant Program for Promoting Scientific Efficiency-2025" competition organized by the State Committee of Science. Still, the results were not yet known during the expert visit.

Since 2022, the university’s budget has included a fund for Employee Incentives within the VSU Foundation for scientific, educational, cultural, sports, and organizational work. The university plans to provide financial incentives for scientific achievements and other accomplishments (such as dissertation defense, receiving academic titles, etc.), as well as for educational-methodological work like publishing textbooks and implementing academic programmes. According to the self-evaluation, the funding allocated for science in 2022 was 1.67% of the budget, 1.2% in 2023, and 1.35% is planned for 2024.

The VSU Scientific Groups' regulations require a member under 35 in each scientific group. The group should include either bachelor's or master's students or PhD candidates and applicants. A scholarship is provided to applicants (PhD candidates) who have worked at the university for the last two years and are under 36 years of age, as well as to VSU employees who are applicants or PhD candidates who also receive a 50% discount on tuition fees.

The previous accreditation expert report mentioned the lack of a commercialisation policy for the research being conducted at the university as a weakness. In response, the university established the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Development Center (SMART CAFFE) in 2022, which allows students and faculty to create and develop ideas, including those with a business orientation. Various meetings are held at SMART CAFFE, where new business ideas are discussed with students and worked on further. Two startup ideas were presented by students at the final competition for business ideas held in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 2023. However, there are still no concrete examples of commercialising scientific results at the university.

6.4 The Institution emphasizes internationalization of its research.

The internationalization of science is the second of the four main directions in VSU's 2024-2025 internationalization strategy, following the internationalization of education. According to this strategy, the university promotes the internationalization of research programs, encourages collaboration with international research centers at foreign universities, and supports joint research projects, doctoral and PhD programs, and the organization of international scientific conferences.

Currently, the university is not involved in any international research projects. Expert assessments revealed that between 2019 and 2024, 27 cooperation agreements were signed with foreign universities. Staff from foreign universities participate in international conferences organised by VSU, not only as presenters but also as members of the organising committees.

The university encourages international publications and participation in international scientific conferences to enhance the internationalisation of scientific results and improve their quality. According to the VSU Vice-Rector for Scientific Affairs report, in 2021, 33% of articles published by department staff were published in foreign journals. However, the expert review found that most of these articles were published in journals without an impact factor. Three faculty members had articles published in journals indexed in the Web of Science database. In 2023, of the 131 scientific works published by VSU's academic staff, 19.5% were published in international journals, and 12.5% were published in high-ranking journals included in the Scopus and Web of Science databases. Between 2019 and 2023, VSU faculty published 22 scientific papers in high-ranking journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, with 3 articles in 2021, 5 in 2022, and 11 in 2023.

The university organised a "Scientific Research Methodology" training course for 58 faculty members to increase publications in internationally peer-reviewed journals. Participants learned about key issues such as planning and carrying out scientific research, searching for high-ranking journals in Scopus and Web of Science databases, and preparing and submitting articles for publication. The course also covered principles for writing effective grant proposals.

Since 2022, the editorial boards of VSU's scientific journals have changed, and scientists from abroad have been included. Each editorial board now includes four scientists from the Russian Federation, allowing the university to publish foreign-language articles by sending them for peer

review by international editorial board members. All articles published in VSU's scientific journals are assigned a Digital Object Identifier (DOI), making the published materials more accessible. Additionally, since December 2023, under a contract with the e-Library scientific electronic library, VSU's journals-Humanities and Social Sciences and Natural and Exact Sciences-have been registered in the e-Library database. The university is currently working on including its journals in the РИНЦ (Russian Science Citation Index) system.

6.5 The Institution has well-established mechanisms for linking research with teaching.

In the previous accreditation expert report, Vanadzor State University was recommended to improve the mechanisms connecting research activities with the educational process.

In the university's strategic development plan, the goal was set to ensure the unity of the educational and scientific processes, and two specific actions were planned for 2022-2025 to achieve this:

- Ensure student participation in research programs and grants.
- Create the foundation for applying the results of scientific research in the educational process.

As a result of implementing the mentioned measures, the involvement of students and young researchers in scientific research programs and grants and the presence of projects for applying scientific research results in the educational process were expected as the outcomes. To address these objectives, VSU has introduced courses within the curriculum's framework of departmental research directions. Specifically, 49 mandatory and elective courses have been incorporated into 16 academic programmes. For example, the academic programme "Armenian Language and Literature" now includes courses like "Mathematical Linguistics," "Onomastics," and "Toponymy." In the "Software Engineering" program, courses such as "Modern Languages of Artificial Intelligence" and "Natural Language Processing" have been added.

The master's curriculum now includes a course titled "Methodology of Scientific Research." In it, students learn how to plan and conduct scientific research and write effective grant proposals.

The expert panel's review of course papers and theses revealed that topics are selected in alignment with the departments' research directions. Additionally, there has been an increase in independent assignments, with students being given tasks that focus on developing analytical skills. During the expert visit, it became clear that in some cases, students conduct their theses and analytical work under joint supervision, with one of the supervisors being an employer.

Another key focus is student involvement in scientific research and co-authoring articles with faculty members. Faculty members have co-authored 79 articles within their research themes with students and supervised over 200 student presentations at the university's Student Scientific Society conferences. One of the articles, co-authored with a master's student, has been published in a journal indexed in the Scopus database. From 2021 to 2024, five master's and three bachelor's students have been involved in the university's scientific groups. This is another result of the university's efforts to ensure the integration of scientific and educational processes.

Considerations:

The expert panel positively evaluates VSU's established research strategy, which aligns with the university's scientific interests and aspirations. The strategy covers fundamental and applied research, encourages strengthening the link between science and business, and fosters the development of knowledge-based entrepreneurial structures, contributing to the continuous growth of the university's scientific potential and financial independence. The university places special emphasis on the development of international cooperation. The strategic plan includes goals for participation in conferences, the implementation of joint projects, and the involvement of faculty in international research groups. Despite some progress, the university is still not engaged in international research projects, which remains one of the key areas for further development.

Creating and financing scientific groups are important for the university's research activities. These groups have contributed to increased publications in international journals and an expansion of research projects. Financial support covers the costs of research equipment, materials, translation, and publication, enhancing the research's quality and effectiveness.

In the framework of encouraging scientific activities, the university has revised criteria that promote faculty participation in research. Developing an effectiveness index for departments allows for identifying areas requiring improvement and ensures the systematisation of scientific work.

The university has taken steps towards commercializing scientific results, including the establishment of the SMART CAFFE center, which fosters the implementation of innovative ideas and business projects. However, the absence of concrete examples of commercialization calls for a more in-depth policy and allocation of resources.

VSU also prioritises the integration of educational and research processes. Research components have been incorporated into the curricula, and a model of co-supervised theses has been introduced, allowing students to apply their knowledge in real-world job markets. The involvement of employers in the formation of research topics and the implementation of research that aligns with the region's needs will strengthen the university's position as a regional research centre. The expert panel considers the co-supervised thesis approach a positive development, enabling students to apply their knowledge in the real job market. In this context, expanding this approach by aligning research topics with employers' needs and involving them in the research process is crucial, enabling regionally relevant studies and contributing to the university's commitment to becoming a regional research hub.

Summary:

Considering that the university has taken steps towards planning research activities since the previous accreditation, has defined research directions, implemented mechanisms to involve faculty and students in the institution's research activities, supports the publication efforts of faculty and students, encourages the publication of faculty research in international scientific databases, and has integrated a research component into assignments given to students, the expert panel concludes that VSU meets the requirements of criterion 6.

Conclusion:

The compliance of VSU institutional capacities with the requirements of Criterion 6 is **satisfactory.**

VII. INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES

CRITERION: The Institution has necessary resources to create learning environment and to effectively support the implementation of its stated mission and goals.

Findings

7.1 The Institution has an appropriate learning environment for the implementation of current academic programmemes.

The strategic objectives of VSU's 2021-2025 plan include ensuring the availability of academic programmes with modern material and technical resources and improving the educational environment. Within the university's bachelor AP structure, a specific section related to resources called "Resources and Forms of Academic Support," outlines the resources necessary to implement the programs successfully. Studies of academic programmes showed that some programs specifically describe the necessary resources. For example, the material and technical resources for implementing the "Biology" program include audiovisual cabinets, multimedia-equipped classrooms, computer labs with access to global search systems, specially equipped laboratories, and teaching-methodological offices.

On the other hand, some programs do not specify the complete set of necessary resources but only mention what is available at the university. For example, the "Fine Arts" program does not specify the list and description of required materials, easels, tools, workshops, and other educational resources.

In master's programs, apart from the prescribed literature, no additional requirements for educational resources are included. From the observation of resources, it became clear that VSU's academic and other processes are carried out in four buildings: two educational, one computer, and one administrative. For the teaching process, the first educational building has 22 classrooms, and the second has 21. There are 18 laboratories and specialized cabinets equipped with various levels of materials and equipment. Since the last accreditation, the classrooms have been renovated, some furnished with electronic boards, audiovisual devices, and computers. The university's internal network includes over 300 computers, including the equipment of university departments, and Wi-Fi is available in all buildings.

The university's departments, chairs, faculty, and student council are provided with offices and necessary equipment. However, according to the self-assessment, VSU considers laboratories' insufficient modernisation and outdated computer equipment's weaknesses.

One of the two large halls in the university buildings serves as a shooting range, and the other is a hall for aerobics and chess. Three gyms are rented for physical education and sports classes. There is no functioning food service facility on the university premises. An expert visit revealed that the design and budget work for a planned universal sports hall within the university territory has been completed.

An important component of the academic environment is the university library, which has 777 subscribers. The library has a reading room for 70 people, and three bookshelves house 139,714 books. About 3,000 of these books are part of a special collection of rare and antique books called the "Golden Fund." An expert visit revealed that starting from the 2020-2021 academic year, the library serves readers exclusively based on electronic orders. Since 2023, the university has started implementing

the KOHA library information system. As part of the actions outlined in the TLI's 2021-2025 follow-up plan, a local electronic library was created on the university website, which includes 11,235 e-books in Armenian and foreign languages across 53 specializations. There are 1,470 registered readers here.

During the site visit, it was noted that the library has accepted requests for new books from departments in the last two years but has not made any purchases yet. As a result, the primary source of new literature has been individual donations. The library management identifies the lack of Armenian-language literature, the almost total absence of new foreign-language literature, and inaccessibility to paid online library websites as the main issues. User satisfaction levels measure the effectiveness of its work.

The expert visit also revealed that international cooperation programs have significantly supplemented the university's resources (TEMPUS, ERASMUS, ERASMUS+, etc.). VSU has been able to improve its resources, particularly in terms of technical equipment. Most recently, under the Erasmus+ CONNECT project, VSU co-financed the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Development Center (SMART CAFFE) reconstruction, now equipped with modern technology and furnishings.

7.2 The Institution provides appropriate financial resources with necessary equipment and facilities as needed to achieve its mission and goals.

To promote efficient financial resource management, transparency, and accountability and to support strategic objectives, VSU implemented a financial policy in 2023. According to the policy, the distribution of the university's finances should start with strategic planning, following these steps:

1. Defining priorities,
2. Budget planning,
3. Resource allocation,
4. Monitoring results.

The strategic action plan for VSU's program implementation does not specify the financial resources allocated. However, the term "Budget" is used in some places without specifying the exact amount. The review of departmental work plans also showed that no financial resources are allocated for the actions outlined in them. The management of financial resources at the university is conducted annually, based on preparing the budget estimate, reviewing the actual performance of the previous year's budget, and the acquisition requests submitted by specific structural subdivisions for material resources. VSU allocates financial resources based on priorities that align with these identified needs.

The university's financial resources include state funding, tuition fees, and other paid services. The main sources of income from the state budget include compensation for tuition fees, scholarships, and funding for general education. Alternative financial inflows are generated from additional services (such as teacher retraining, accounting training courses, and application fees paid by applicants) and grant programs.

An analysis of the VSU budget revenues over the past five years by source shows that after a certain decline, there was an increase in income from tuition fees (3.7%) and grants (51%) in 2023 compared to 2022. Revenues from other sources have decreased. According to the rector's annual reports, the university's actual financial inflows grew from 839.5 million AMD in 2019 to 898.3 million AMD in 2022, but in 2023, they decreased by 23.6 million AMD. The significant increase in

the percentage of income from grants and retraining does not substantially impact the formation of the university's budget. For the 2024 budget estimate, 98.6% of expected income is projected from operational activities and only 1.39% from non-operational activities, such as retraining courses, entrepreneurial activities, etc. The main expenditure items in the 2024 budget are salaries (79%), staff incentives (1.03%), research promotion funds (1.35%), and leadership funds (0.11%). The "reserve fund" has increased and accounts for about 3% of total expenses.

The primary focus of the university's mission /teaching and learning/ receives the main part of the budget, including educational and auxiliary expenses, which account for up to 94%. A large portion of this is allocated to salaries and staff incentives. The amount allocated for salaries has varied over the years, but it has always remained a priority: in 2021, it was 80.4%; in 2022, it was 72.7%; and in 2023, it was 78.7%. Other expense categories are much smaller. For example, library expenses for the 2023 budget accounted for 0.03%, professional development costs for faculty were 0.02%, and expenses for acquiring educational equipment and materials amounted to 0.55%.

7.3 The Institution has a policy on financial distribution and capacity to sustain and ensure the integrity and continuity of the programmes offered at the Institution.

The income part of the university's budget draft is based on revenue calculations by the financial resource management department, primarily relying on student number forecasts. The expenditure basis is the purchase requests and reports submitted by departments and other relevant documents. The university's Academic Council discusses the budget draft, and if approved, it is submitted to the Board of Trustees for final approval.

According to VSU's financial policy, the distribution of financial resources is not directly linked to the goals and sustainability of APs. However, an attempt is made through actual expenditures to provide the necessary resources for a complete educational environment. The university also allocates a separate fund of 1 million AMD to faculties for operational expenses (which constitutes 0.11% of the university's annual expenses), mainly intended for tours, organizational work, and other activities.

Expert studies revealed that VSU has not yet approved the procedure for distributing and monitoring financial resources, nor have they established mechanisms or indicators to assess distribution effectiveness. However, certain processes have been implemented in this direction. For example, the financial resource management department presents the budget performance to the rector monthly and forecasts cash inflows and outflows for the upcoming two months.

The university's annual budget estimates and performance reports are available on the university website to ensure transparency in the use of financial resources.

An external audit is conducted at the end of each financial year according to Armenian regulations. The rector presents the audit conclusions to the University's Board of Trustees, and they are also published on the VSU website.

7.4 The Institution's resource base supports the implementation of Institution's academic programmemes and strategic plan, which promotes sustainability and continuous improvement of quality.

Expert studies revealed that efforts have recently been made to enhance the university's resource base. However, there is a lack of analysis regarding the outcomes and effectiveness of the investments made in financial and other resources. Specifically, the number of paid retraining courses for external stakeholders has increased, with ongoing classes such as accounting and teacher retraining sessions being conducted. The university's expansion into foundation activities provides various opportunities for attracting funds from external sources, but visible results are still limited.

From expert meetings, it became clear that the university plans to increase the inflow of financial resources by organizing courses aimed at developing entrepreneurial skills, utilizing laboratory equipment through paid services-especially in forensic processes-granting access to the shooting range, and offering other services.

Overall, the university has not yet fully implemented a clear allocation of resources according to strategic objectives. The basis for the expenditure part is the purchase requests and reports submitted by all departments, which are evaluated and approved by the Financial Resource Management Department. The annual budget estimates do not fully include the distribution of resources based on strategic goals or objectives. However, they provide the university the opportunity to implement educational and scientific programs and address ongoing issues.

7.5 The Institution has a sound policy and procedure to manage information and documentation.

Until 2021, documents accepted at the university were recorded and registered in manual registers. However, starting on November 1, 2021, the university implemented the "Mulberry Groupware 2.0" document management system, which ensures the storage of electronic versions of documents and allows for tracking their progress and compliance with implementation deadlines. The system is accessible to administrative leaders and heads of all departments.

The university has also introduced an electronic academic database, which facilitates work with statistical data about students. The Department of Educational Process Management manages this database, including information such as student files, grades, rotation results, internal transfers, etc.

The university's computers are connected to an internal network, which provides staff access to drafts of documents and reports, the rector's orders, the decisions of the Academic Council, and more.

However, the university has not yet analyzed the effectiveness of its information and documentation policies and procedures.

7.6 The Institution creates safe and secure environment through health and safety mechanisms taking into account the students with special needs.

The university has a medical point to meet the healthcare needs of internal stakeholders. First-year students must undergo a medical examination at polyclinics and present the results to the nurse. Expert studies revealed that starting from 2022, the university allocates budget funds for its employees' health insurance.

The university's area is separated from the surrounding environment, creating a closed space for students and staff, with access monitored by a checkpoint. Surveillance cameras are installed in the courtyard and inside the buildings and are monitored 24/7 by the administrative and economic

departments. A modern automatic fire alarm system has been implemented, constantly connected to the Ministry of Emergency Situations' SOS system, and evacuation plans are posted. The university's civil defence headquarters and the Lori region's emergency unit conduct training exercises with internal stakeholders to prepare for various rescue operations.

To ensure safety in the educational environment, informational safety posters are posted in the university's teaching laboratories, and safety logs are used, which students sign to confirm their awareness of safety regulations. Laboratory instructions also specify the sequence of permissible actions for students and their requirements and restrictions.

The previous accreditation report recommended " creating appropriate conditions for making the educational environment fully accessible for individuals with special needs." For students with mobility issues, all university buildings are equipped with ramps for access to the first floors.

The university also has a Psychological Support Center, where two psychologists work voluntarily.

7.7 The Institution has special mechanisms in place for the evaluation of the effectiveness, applicability and availability of resources given to the teaching staff and learners.

The analysis of online surveys conducted by the VSU Quality Assurance Center showed that resource evaluation questions primarily relate to the overall satisfaction of internal stakeholders with the available resources. The survey analysis mainly results in quantitative data summaries. The study of satisfaction with resource provision revealed that 62% of students and 65% of teaching staff are satisfied with the university's resources. The university evaluates student satisfaction with the overall equipment of laboratories, access to computers, software availability, etc. However, no specific and targeted additional studies or analyses are available to provide more substantial suggestions for improvement.

The expert visit revealed that problematic issues are discussed in focus groups with representatives of students and academic staff. As a result of these discussions, computer resources have been redistributed among classrooms, and necessary material resources and services are acquired by collecting applications four times a year. As a result, stakeholder satisfaction with resource provision has increased after the previous accreditation.

At the same time, there are no clearly defined and regulated mechanisms for evaluating the applicability, accessibility, and effectiveness of resources provided to teachers and students at VSU.[8]

Considerations:

The expert panel positively evaluates VSU's efforts to define the educational environment requirements for implementing academic programmes. Including resources in the APs will allow the university to more effectively analyze resource availability, assess whether the educational environment meets the requirements, and ensure that resources align with the needs of the academic programmes.

The university effectively utilises opportunities from international programs and partnerships to update and supplement academic programme resources. However, the current resources only meet

[8] Reformulated as a result of discussions with the university.

minimal requirements and require significant investment to achieve research priorities and the balanced development of academic programmes. It is also positive that the university recognises the importance of enriching its library. Acquiring modern professional literature and providing access to paid library networks is essential to address issues related to students and faculty's access to literature.

The university's 2023 financial policy outlines the distribution of funds by strategic planning, but these provisions have not yet been fully implemented. Actions often do not reflect the pathways to achieving strategic goals, and long-term planning is not in place. The expert panel believes that introducing a long-term financial planning system will improve the efficient allocation of resources and contribute to achieving the university's strategic objectives.

Diversifying financial resources is crucial for strengthening the university's sustainability. Additional services and involvement in grant programs will reduce dependence on the state and tuition fees.

The university needs to establish mechanisms and indicators for assessing the effectiveness of financial expenditures, enabling monitoring and improving financial management. Financial reports and audit results should be analyzed and used for future planning.

It is also positive that the university utilizes electronic systems for information dissemination and documentation, which enhances process efficiency.

VSU has made positive strides toward creating a safe and secure environment, paying special attention to healthcare and safety issues and ensuring safe laboratory conditions.

The resource satisfaction surveys conducted by the Quality Assurance Center would be more effective if the issues and causes could be isolated through analysis. Clarifying the surveys and tools will help obtain qualitative data, supporting decision-making to improve resources.

Summary:

Considering that the university's resources have improved since the previous accreditation, the created learning environment is sufficient to meet the minimum requirements set by the academic programmes; financial resources are allocated for the continuous improvement and development of infrastructure, and health and safety services are available. There is an internal document management system; the expert panel concludes that the university meets the requirements of criterion 7.

Conclusion:

The compliance of VSU institutional capacities with the requirements of Criterion 7 is **satisfactory.**

VIII. SOCIETAL RESPONSIBILITY

CRITERION: The Institution is accountable to the government and society for the education it offers and the resources it uses as well as for the research it conducts.

Findings

8.1. The Institution has clear policy on accountability.

VSU emphasizes societal responsibility in the "Societal Responsibility" subsection of its 2021-2025 Strategic Plan and envisages "regulating information accountability mechanisms, expanding and deepening the possibilities of using social networks to provide feedback, and improving mechanisms for transmitting information to the public."

The primary mechanism for accountability at VSU is the rector's annual report, which is based on the reports submitted by all departments. The report includes the following sections: management (human, financial, infrastructure), educational activities (resources, research activities, spiritual-cultural and patriotic activities, cooperation and internationalization, quality assurance and management, general education, and secondary vocational education). The Board of Trustees discusses the annual report of VSU, the financial report and the preliminary budget for the next year are also discussed.

A review of the reports revealed that they are poorly correlated with the Strategic Plan's goals. They mostly contain descriptions of annual ongoing activities, primarily presented with numerical data.

VSU also has internal accountability mechanisms in place, particularly the reports of individual departments, which are discussed in the meetings of the departments, faculty councils, and the university's scientific council, ensuring accountability and transparency to internal stakeholders."

8.2. The Institution ensures transparency of its procedures and processes and makes them publicly available.

The university ensures the transparency of its procedures and processes. It makes them accessible to the public through its official website and social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram. Moreover, to effectively implement activities in this area, VSU developed the " Regulation for Organizing the Work of the Official Website and Social Media Networks " in 2024.

The Department of Research, Innovation, and Cooperation organizes the university’s website and social media platforms. Its regulation (developed in 2021) defines its functions, areas of activity, competencies, and structure. The department comprises six employees: a head, a specialist in international relations and grant promotion, a coordinator for university-school cooperation, a journalist, a public relations specialist, and a computer graphics specialist.

Based on the expert recommendations from the previous accreditation, the university’s official website was revised, improving the possibility of trilingual information dissemination and accountability. The website review revealed that the university had posted its primary official documents, comprehensive information about educational programs, and the mandatory publication of the rector's annual and financial reports, budget estimates, performances, and audit results. It also publishes all the regulations and procedures approved by the scientific council. However, the Russian and English pages are still under development, and some information sections are not fully presented (e.g., academic programmes) or are only partially completed.

The site visit made clear that the university believes social networks are more effective and provide an opportunity for quick response, especially for distributing the necessary materials among applicants.

8.3. The Institution has sustainable feedback mechanisms for establishing contacts with society.

Information dissemination and the establishment of multifaceted public relations are among the functions of the Department of Research, Innovation, and Cooperation, which are also outlined in the job descriptions of the corresponding employees.

The university considers the possibility of feedback through its official website and the opportunities provided by social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Telegram), official emails, and mobile phone communication as mechanisms for ensuring feedback. Results and data are analyzed annually to assess social media's effectiveness. This includes an analysis of the website and the number of followers. The university's Facebook page has 10,106 followers, while its Instagram page has 1,670 followers.

Each academic year, VSU organizes an "Open Doors Day" event, where external stakeholders, particularly applicants, their parents, and teachers from regional schools, meet with university representatives and receive information on the issues that interest them.

During the previous accreditation, the expert panel recommended developing and implementing effective feedback mechanisms with stakeholders. Following the expert panel's recommendations, VSU has been organizing a "Career Fair" event since 2021 to guide schoolchildren in their professional choices and to recruit applicants. To evaluate the event's effectiveness, surveys were conducted with participating schools, which gave it high marks and deemed it necessary to organize the event regularly to provide information about professions.

8.4. The Institution has mechanisms that ensure knowledge /value/ transfer to the society.

VSU organizes free preparatory courses for admission exams in subjects (Armenian Language, English, Mathematics, and Armenian History) to transfer knowledge to the public. These courses are held annually from October and November until May.

VSU organizes training, qualification, and requalification courses for various target groups. The Center for Educational Reforms and Training coordinates these activities. Since 2021, with the endorsement of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports of Armenia, VSU has been organizing training courses for those wishing to obtain management rights (certificate) in preschool and general education institutions, for teachers subject to certification, teaching assistants, and pedagogical staff of higher education institutions.

The site visit revealed that the "Accounting" training course has been implemented at VSU for external stakeholders since 2022. According to the self-evaluation, the fourth group of trainees is being recruited. Since 2021, the Quality Assurance Center, through the IFES organization, has

organised a supplementary course called "Engaged Citizenship" for students. In 2023, VSU launched the "Civic Education Center" project in collaboration with the PH International organization. The goal of the initiative is to create a conducive environment for developing civic knowledge and social and technical skills among the youth in the region.

Within the framework of the university's Cultural Center, the "Biana" choir, the "Adelas" dance group, and a Literary Club organize cultural events, inviting representatives from partner schools and organizations.

Another mechanism for transferring knowledge (values) to the public is the publication of articles based on student conference materials and the results of master's theses on the official website. The expert visit revealed that the university has not yet evaluated the accessibility of these publications to stakeholders in the region and their application in meeting the region's needs. The effectiveness of applying mechanisms for transferring values to the public has not yet been assessed for all activities.

Considerations:

The expert panel positively evaluates VSU's established accountability framework, including internal and external accountability mechanisms. The rector's annual reports, which are based on departmental reports, play a crucial role in ensuring the transparency of the university's activities. However, the expert panel notes that the reports do not fully reflect the connection with the objectives of the SP, which may limit their practical applicability in strategic decision-making.

The expert panel evaluates positive VSU's efforts to ensure the transparency of its processes using the official website and social media platforms. The group also appreciates the university's approach to publishing information on documents and educational programs on its official website, as it allows external stakeholders to familiarize themselves with the university's activities and academic programmes. According to the expert panel, adding Russian and English pages to the website is also important to ensure access to information for international external stakeholders.

The expert panel positively evaluates the mechanisms for public relations established at VSU. In particular, the active use of social media and the "Career Fair" event effectively strengthened the ties between the university, applicants, and employers. However, the panel believes that assessing the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms and analyzing the needs of external stakeholders can contribute to improving the quality of events and expanding the university's public engagement.

To transfer knowledge to the public, VSU has implemented multidisciplinary events, including free courses and training programs. Cultural events organized by the Cultural Center also significantly contribute to the public's educational and cultural awareness. In this context, the panel especially appreciates the university's approach to ensuring the accessibility of the research results for external stakeholders.

However, the absence of a systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of the university's organized programs and publications could limit the potential for further improvement.

Summary:

Considering that the university has internal and external accountability mechanisms, ensures the transparency and accessibility of the processes and activities to the public, utilizes the official website and social media platforms to provide feedback to external stakeholders, and has mechanisms for transferring knowledge to the public, the expert panel finds that VSU meets the requirements of Criterion 8.

Conclusion

The compliance of VSU institutional capacities with the requirements of Criterion 8 is **satisfactory.**

IX. EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND INTERNATIONALIZATION

CRITERION: The Institution promotes experience exchange and enhancement through its sound external relations practices, thus promoting the internationalization of the Institution.

Findings

9.1 The Institution promotes its external relations through sound policies and procedures aimed at creating an environment conducive to experience exchange and enhancement and internationalization.

VSU considers internationalization a strategic development priority. The internationalization strategy for 2024-2025 sets the priorities, goals, and objectives of internationalization. The directions accepted for its development include the internationalization of education and science, the development of international cooperation, and the strengthening of international rankings. Since the previous accreditation, the university has taken steps towards achieving the objectives set for internationalisation development. Specifically, according to the Vice-Rector for Scientific Affairs report in 2023, the university currently has 11 Erasmus and 18 non-Erasmus partnerships with foreign educational institutions. By establishing a new collaboration with Tallinn University of Technology, the university aims to ensure mobility and the implementation of joint programs.

International cooperation has increased the number of foreign language courses and implemented specific courses taught in foreign languages. During the site visit, it was clarified that students can apply for international mobility in their second and third years of study, considering that they do not have a cumulative GPA in their first year and are preparing for graduation exams in their final year.

Since the previous accreditation, internationalization processes and inclusion in Erasmus+ programs have enabled the university to replenish its resources and develop its infrastructure. Expert studies revealed that the university places high importance on exchanging experiences within the framework of academic programmes. For this purpose, the university's APs are sent to universities in Armenia to obtain external feedback. Since the previous accreditation, there has been an increase in

the involvement of external stakeholders in forming APs and the engagement of faculty members from other universities as lecturers.

9.2 The Institution's external relations infrastructure ensures regulated process.

The Department of Research, Innovation, and Cooperation coordinates VSU's external relations and internationalization processes. Founded in 2020, it includes the functions of the previously operating Departments of Educational Reforms and External Relations, Media and Publishing, and the coordination and organization of postgraduate education. The department organizes events related to international mobility programs, international experience, and the university's external and internal promotion. It prepares messages, informational materials, articles, promotional videos, and press releases about the university's activities.

Within the scope of its functions, the department prepares an annual work plan, which presents planned events and meetings. To promote external relations and internationalization processes, the university has allocated a budget of 200,000 AMD for student and staff travel expenses to attend international scientific conferences and seminars. During the site visit, it became clear that travel expenses are mainly covered under the Erasmus+ programs for participants. In cases of additional need, the university administration tries to support faculty and students.

The department also employs a specialist in international relations and grant promotion. The expert visit revealed that the university has no international research grants. According to the university, insufficient language proficiency hinders faculty's low participation in grant programs.

9.3 The Institution effectively collaborates with local and international counterparts.

The university's directions for internationalization and establishing partnerships include Erasmus+ programs, collaborations with foreign universities, and implementing joint projects with local organizations.

The site visit revealed that from 2019 to 2024, VSU participated in 8 Erasmus+ programs. Two concluded in 2020, three are scheduled to finish in 2024, and three are ongoing. VSU has also become the coordinator of an Erasmus+ program for the first time: the DeSIRe program, which focuses on developing soft skills at universities in Armenia and Georgia to meet the demands of the 21st-century labor market.

From 2019 to 2024, VSU collaborated with 11 universities on mobility programs. These processes were conducted according to the "Regulations on Student, Administrative, and Faculty Mobility." Eighteen students and ten employees participated in these programs, and the university hosted nine lecturers on a mobility basis who conducted courses for VSU students and lecturers. The site visit revealed that the number of students participating in mobility programs had been mostly limited by language barriers, which the university is trying to overcome through revised curricula and additional foreign language courses. International collaborations have contributed to developing the university's representatives' skills and enabled the university to strengthen its resources through partnerships.

The university has internship agreements with organizations operating in the region, depending on the academic programme directions. In the case of programs that grant pedagogical qualifications, students complete their internships in schools. In contrast, opportunities for internships in more specialized fields (for example, in the History program) are less frequent.

Through cooperation with "Instigate Mobile," the university has opened the "Excellence Center," an educational technology platform that allows students to acquire relevant skills and knowledge in the IT field. The center's activities strengthen the university-labor market connection and resource development. The center also plans to implement joint grant programs.

The university collaborates with the Foundation for Science and Technology (FAST) within the framework of the "SciNova" program. As a result of this program, three VSU staff members have undergone training, contributing to developing research methodology among master's students, doctoral candidates, and applicants. Expert studies have shown that the research methodology course is currently included in the master's program curricula.

In collaboration with PH International, VSU has established the Civic Education Center to develop young people's civic knowledge and social and technical skills and encourage participation in public decision-making.

9.4 The Institution ensures internal stakeholders' appropriate level of a foreign language to enhance efficiency of internationalization.

Following the previous accreditation, the university emphasized improving foreign language proficiency. Vanadzor State University has taken important steps in recent years to enhance the foreign language proficiency of students and staff. The university is involved in the Erasmus+ SMARTI project, within which training programs in ESP ("English for Specific Purposes") and EMI ("English as a Medium of Instruction") have been conducted. In recent years, the number of people proficient in foreign languages at the university has increased. According to the university's job description, faculty and administrative staff are required to be able to communicate with colleagues in a foreign language (at least at a basic conversational level). The university organizes foreign language proficiency exams in a test format, and certificates are awarded.

To enhance students' language skills, the number of foreign language classes and credits has been increased by 30-40%, and new formats have been introduced, such as a short-term English course for the "Service" program, which is set to start in October. Additionally, foreign language proficiency tests are conducted, and certificates are awarded. Faculty members regularly organise film screenings and discussions in foreign languages collaboratively with students.

During the site visit, it became clear that these initiatives have been supported by faculty and students in improving their language proficiency. However, it should be noted that the university has not conducted a comprehensive assessment of the language proficiency of internal stakeholders. It is also important to mention that, to attract international students, the university does not offer academic programmes in foreign languages.

Considerations:

The expert panel positively evaluates the international programs implemented by the university in recent years and the established partnerships, noting that these efforts have contributed to the university's increased visibility and provided opportunities for students and faculty to engage in international programs.

The expert panel also assesses that the university values experience exchange and the inclusion of external feedback within its academic programmes. These processes could become more effective if they include the participation of international experts to align the APs with international best practices.

The expert panel emphasizes the importance of the university continuing to allocate resources to support the internationalization process. This will contribute to developing internationalization infrastructure, deepening international cooperation, and the continuous professional development of university representatives.

The expert panel observes that VSU's external relations and internationalization infrastructure is well-organized and regulated, ensuring a certain level of effectiveness. However, some areas require reforms and additional measures to achieve more sustainable and impactful outcomes. First, the university needs to assess structural changes to determine whether this new organizational model improves resource concentration and management efficiency or complicates management processes. Suppose it turns out that the complexity of management processes hinders the ability to respond quickly. In that case, it will be necessary to make certain adjustments to the management structure to increase the efficiency of external relations management.

The expert panel positively evaluates VSU's effective cooperation with local and international institutions and organizations, greatly contributing to the university's internationalization process. The university's involvement in Erasmus+ programs, international mobility programs, and various partnership projects has strengthened its international relations and contributed to developing students' and faculty's capabilities.

It is also commendable that in recent years, Vanadzor State University has taken consistent steps to improve its students' and staff's foreign language proficiency, which is crucial for effective participation in internationalization and international programs. The university's foreign language courses and steps taken within elective and supplementary courses to develop foreign language skills have improved internal stakeholders' language proficiency, creating opportunities for experience exchange and cooperation for university representatives.

Nevertheless, the expert panel believes that a comprehensive evaluation of internal stakeholders' foreign language proficiency is necessary to understand how much language abilities have improved across different stakeholder groups and identify areas needing attention to ensure further development. The expert panel also believes that implementing foreign language academic programmes by VSU would promote the engagement of international students and increase the university's attractiveness.

Summary:

Considering that after the previous accreditation, the university's involvement in international programs has increased, the university is proactive in participating in Erasmus+ capacity-building programs, collaborates with local universities to review academic programmes, has an extensive network of partners for organizing student internships, cooperates with partner international universities for the exchange of experiences, and implements language proficiency enhancement activities for faculty and students, the expert panel finds that VSU meets the requirements of Criterion 9.

Conclusion:

The compliance of VSU institutional capacities with the requirements of Criterion 9 is **satisfactory.**

X. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

CRITERION: The Institution has an internal quality assurance system, which promotes establishment of a quality culture and continuous improvement of all the processes of the Institution.

Findings

10.1 The Institution has quality assurance policies and procedures.

One of VSU's Quality Assurance Center (QAC) objectives is to improve the quality assurance system. According to this objective, the main mission of quality assurance is to ensure the continuous improvement of services provided by the university by delivering high-quality educational services to society. VSU's quality assurance concept is outlined in the 2022 Quality Assurance Manual, which is an updated version of the 2017 manual. The manual also includes the history of VSU's quality assurance system, vision, and mission.

According to the manual, the university's quality assurance policy is implemented based on the university's vision, mission, and sector strategy, as well as the regulations and procedures developed and coordinated by the university's management bodies and the Quality Assurance Center. Additionally, the university has a "VSU Quality Policy" designed in 2018, part of which is incorporated into the Quality Assurance Manual. The study of the manual revealed that the implementation of the internal quality assurance system's policy is the responsibility of the entire university staff. Still, specific responsibilities are not clearly defined in the Quality Assurance Manual.

The manual also outlines several quality assurance procedures, including the procedure for quality assurance audits, the procedure for organizing internal audits of academic programmes, the procedure for ongoing program monitoring, and the policy and procedure for benchmarking best practices in academic quality management.

From the site visit, it became clear that the university has no specific quality assurance plan. VSU follows the actions and steps outlined by the Quality Assurance Center, but it is still unclear which issues the system should focus on in the coming years or what areas need to be assessed. Expert studies revealed that the university's leadership does not set a clear requirement for data collection for the Quality Assurance Center. Additionally, some deans do not consider it necessary to conduct

analyses related to their faculties. A significant change noted by university representatives in recent years is the comprehensive data collection. Still, it is ineffective due to the lack of access to a unified electronic database and online survey platforms.

The meetings during the site visit found that the head of the Quality Assurance Center presented the results of surveys regarding student satisfaction, internship organisation, and the selection of elective courses to the university's Scientific Council, including the outcomes from consultations with advisors and lecturers.

In 2022, the Quality Assurance Center evaluated the management system and presented the results to the university rector. However, expert studies revealed no specific improvements based on quality assurance processes and the data collected.

The expert studies also revealed that no clear mechanisms are yet in place for evaluating the effectiveness of research and internationalization processes, which are emphasized in the university's strategy.

According to the manual, the university has transitioned from the quality assurance phase to the quality management phase, and the internal quality assurance system facilitates the development of a quality culture. This action has been defined as the main direction of the Quality Assurance Center's activities. The problems and functions of the quality management system are outlined, and a schematic of the quality management system, along with a list of its documents, has been developed. Nevertheless, the meetings during the site visit showed that stakeholders have different perceptions of the role of the quality assurance system.

10.2 The Institution allocates sufficient material, human and financial resources to manage internal quality assurance processes.

The university had allocated resources for quality assurance processes since 2009, when the Scientific Council formed the Quality Control Committee. In 2010, a separate unit, the Center for Education Quality Assurance (CEQA), was established under the authority of the Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs. Between 2011 and 2013, the CEQA was equipped with technical tools, computer programs, necessary literature, and equipment as part of a grant program by the World Bank. The Quality Assurance Center (QAC) was renamed, becoming an independent structural unit directly accountable to the university's rector.

The Quality Assurance Manual does not include a structural diagram of the university's functioning quality assurance system. However, it does present the functions of the QAC and the faculty-level quality assurance working groups.

Three positions were planned for the Quality Assurance Center, but three staff members occupied 2.5 positions during the site visit. Job descriptions have been developed for all center staff, including the head, the person responsible for educational quality audits, monitoring, and analysis, and a vacant market expert position. The expert visit revealed that the centre's staff had not undergone external training in organising and managing quality assurance processes.

From the resource observation, it became clear that the Quality Assurance Center has been provided with a separate office, necessary furniture, computers, and other technical equipment. The center procures the necessary material resources, with demand forms submitted every four months. The university's budget analysis showed that no specific financial resources are allocated for quality

assurance processes, aside from staff salaries. The expert visit revealed that due to limited financial resources, the university has not been able to establish a unified electronic database for data collection or an online platform for conducting surveys.

From the site visit, it turned out that in addition to the QAC staff, faculty members and student coordinators are also engaged in quality assurance activities. The center collaborates with deans, department heads, and lecturers on matters related to academic programmes. Although faculty working groups for quality assurance, as outlined in the manual, do not exist, each faculty has designated quality representatives who assist with disseminating quality assurance surveys and stakeholder involvement. The work of the faculty members and student coordinators is conducted voluntarily.

10.3 The internal and external stakeholders are involved in quality assurance processes.

The 2019 expert report on VSU's institutional accreditation recommended developing and implementing policies, mechanisms, and procedures that encourage the participation of external stakeholders in quality assurance (QA) processes. In 2022, a "Policy for Involving Internal and External Stakeholders in Quality Assurance Processes" was developed, which clearly defines the university's internal stakeholders (students, academic staff, academic support staff, administrative personnel) and external stakeholders (graduates, applicants, their parents, employers, social infrastructure organizations, and public organizations).

The policy outlines stakeholder participation in various activities, including governance bodies, self-evaluation groups, quality assurance committees, and process management committees. Expert studies showed that faculty and student participation in councils is ensured through their formation procedures. However, administrative staff are involved in various committees established by rector orders. For example, the institutional self-evaluation group did not include faculty members, students, or external stakeholders. Similarly, the Strategic Plan Implementation and Improvement Monitoring Committee includes only administrative staff members.

The expert visit revealed that the university's Quality Assurance Center had taken steps to ensure student participation in quality assurance processes. Students are represented in the university's governance bodies, where they participate in discussions on quality assurance issues and are involved, when necessary, in monitoring and revising academic programmes. Students also participate in the "Lecturer through the Eyes of the Student" survey, which aims to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of teaching. Additionally, student coordinators in faculties assist in organizing surveys. The analysis of student surveys revealed that the assessment system is a significant issue for students, as the assessment criteria are not clearly defined. Other issues students raise include content overlap, insufficient awareness of elective course options, and laboratories' material and technical adequacy. The expert visit revealed that surveys also identified concerns about the duration of internships, leading to increased hours allocated for internships.

The expert panel's analysis of the survey questionnaires showed that some questions were unclear and not always aligned with the quality assurance system's objectives. For example, in the questionnaires and focus group surveys aimed at identifying students' needs and assessing their satisfaction with education, questions such as "Can a course be both complex, useful, and interesting

at the same time?" and "Do you consider the subject to be interesting or not?" were included. Other questions were asked about the factors influencing the perceived interest in a course, such as its accessibility, clarity, the personal qualities of the lecturer, preferred teaching methods, and individual interests. Additionally, questions such as "What should the relationship between lecturers and students be like in terms of formal and informal communication?" were included in the surveys.

The study of the questionnaires revealed that the assessment scales used were not consistent. Some surveys used a 0-5 scale, while others used a 1-5 scale. As a result, the average ratings obtained in different cases are not comparable during analysis. Furthermore, the university has not evaluated the improvements made based on survey results.

The involvement of faculty members in developing, monitoring, and revising academic programmes is a significant part of VSU's quality assurance processes. Faculty members are represented in governance bodies and faculty working groups, and the Quality Assurance Center has developed satisfaction surveys for academic staff. However, the analysis of these surveys mainly provides quantitative data, with no inclusion of qualitative questions that could help identify the real issues faculty members face. For example, the surveys include a 7-point scale (1-5, where 1 is "poor", 5 is "excellent", 77 is "not necessary", and 99 is "unable to answer") to evaluate various aspects like student autonomy, discipline, research abilities, and the overall academic and ethical atmosphere at the university. At the same time, other parts of the same survey use different rating scales (positive, neutral, negative, not related/participated, unable to answer) to evaluate factors influencing the faculty's self-actualisation. The university considers workload, seminar participation, and class observation factors for faculty self-evaluation.

The leadership, administrative, and support staff are involved in the management process evaluations and needs assessment surveys organized by QAC every 2-3 years. In analyzing these surveys, the university has identified issues like the passive involvement of internal stakeholders and the lack of decisions based on reliable data.

Students use surveys to assess the effectiveness of courses and topics, aiming to assist faculty members in self-assessing their teaching. However, the expert visit revealed that only 15% of faculty members use the survey results to reflect on their teaching performance. Despite identifying various issues through surveys, the university has no clear plan or resource allocation to address them.[9]

Following recommendations from the previous institutional accreditation expert report, VSU has aimed to increase external stakeholder participation in quality assurance processes. Alumni are involved in evaluating their satisfaction with the educational process and monitoring, reviewing, and self-evaluating professional academic programmes. Alumni evaluate their professional knowledge, problem-solving abilities, skills in explaining relevant information, and IT application skills with an average self-evaluation score of 4.5 or higher, which the university considers a satisfactory indicator. However, like the internal survey analysis, the alumni survey results are summarised quantitatively, and no improvement directions or further steps are defined.

Employers, particularly those working with VSU graduates, are involved in developing, monitoring, revising, and self-evaluating academic programmes. They participate in online surveys every 2-3 years. Despite this, the university still identified the insufficient involvement of external stakeholders in the quality assurance process during its self-evaluation.

[9] Reformulated as a result of discussions with the university.

10.4 The internal quality assurance system is periodically reviewed.

In 2019, the University developed a Quality Assurance Self-Assessment and Review Regulation and Procedure. The internal quality assurance self-assessment and review aims to improve the quality assurance system, update the functions and procedures, enhance the quality assurance mechanisms, and identify and reduce the risks of internal quality assurance.

The document defines the sequence of the seven main steps of the quality assurance system's self-assessment and review, detailing the actions to be taken at each step and the phases of self-assessment. Necessary templates have also been developed, including those for self-assessment reports. The interim review of the quality assurance system is also planned, which can be conducted if justified without the self-assessment process. Expert studies have shown that improvements made using these tools have not yet been realised.

In the reports for 2020-2024, the sections related to ensuring report quality focus primarily on presenting the results of the studies conducted by the Quality Assurance Center (e.g., studies of external stakeholders' preferences, identification of internal stakeholders' needs, studies of expectations and satisfaction, etc.). Information about the revision of certain documents is also provided. For example, according to the 2021 report, the primary documents related to quality assurance were revised to align them with the university's 2021-2025 strategy. However, the specific changes made to these documents and what is expected from using the revised documents are not substantiated. Similarly, in 2022, the university's Quality Assurance Handbook was revised, but no analysis was conducted to identify what changes were necessary for this revision. It is worth noting that the "Quality Management System Regulation" has been in effect unchanged since 2015, and it was reaffirmed in 2024 without significant changes.[10]

10.5 The internal quality assurance system provides valid and sufficient grounds for the external quality assurance processes.

The university's self-evaluation, compiled in preparation for institutional re-accreditation, is primarily descriptive. It outlines the university's documents and processes without addressing their effectiveness or areas for development. Since 2021, the university's Quality Assurance Center has conducted an annual self-evaluation. Studies have shown that the analyses separate sections corresponding to the domains described by the 10 institutional accreditation standards; however, summaries and analyses of the information in line with the requirements of the standards have not been conducted. The self-evaluation presents the university's activities and their results in a report format. Some sections of the self-evaluation text repeat portions of the rector's annual reports on the university's activities, albeit in a more concise version.

For reaccreditation, VSU also completed the main part of the information required by the ANQA electronic questionnaire. The expert visit revealed that the university also collects the information required by the ANQA self-evaluation format in the period preceding accreditation.

The university's Quality Assurance Center conducts 12 surveys to gather information on student and faculty needs, staff, alumni, employer satisfaction, internship organisation effectiveness,

[10] Reformulated as a result of discussions with the university.

and several other processes. The Quality Assurance Center analyzes this data, some of which is presented in the university's self-evaluation report.

10.6. The internal quality assurance system ensures the transparency of the processes at the Institution providing valid and up to date information on their quality to the internal and external stakeholders.

The university ensures transparency and publicity of its educational and other processes through its official website, which contains official documents and complete information on academic programmes. The center prepares reports on the work carried out, which are included in the university's annual activity reports. One section of the rector's annual report, "Quality Assurance and Management," summarizes the quality assurance system's activities. The rector's annual and financial reports are mandatory postings on the university's website. During the site visit, quality assurance manuals, three self-evaluations, and the results of surveys conducted among graduates and employers were available on the VSU website.

Expert studies revealed that internal stakeholders are not always informed about the survey results and the improvements planned based on them.

Considerations:

The expert panel emphasizes one of the university's strategic objectives- improving the quality assurance system. The development of various documents has allowed the university to establish a documented basis that regulates and describes its processes. However, the expert panel believes improving these processes will be more effective if the revisions are based on analyses and needs assessments. This will strengthen the documentary basis and ensure its full implementation, contributing to achieving the quality objectives outlined in the strategic plan.

The panel emphasises that the governing bodies must define clear objectives and performance evaluation criteria for the quality assurance system to function effectively. This will help the system respond to the university's needs and improve the quality of decision-making. The university needs a systematic approach to identifying the needs of both internal and external stakeholders, which will allow the use of this data in improvement plans for various departments.

Improving the methodology of surveys and focus group discussions is especially important. The panel emphasizes clarifying survey objectives, aligning assessment scales, correctly selecting target groups, and qualitatively analyzing the collected data. Clarifying the data sources, establishing periodicity, and ensuring the implementation of the next steps based on the conclusions in cooperation with the departments are also necessary.

It is positive that the university's Quality Assurance Center is equipped with material resources; however, the panel also stresses the importance of allocating financial resources to develop human potential. This will allow specialists to enhance their skills and contribute to the system's effectiveness. The university could also explore the possibility of creating an electronic data repository and providing access to survey platforms, improving data management efficiency.

The panel positively assesses the university's efforts in regulating the processes of reviewing the quality assurance system, which has contributed to the modernisation of mechanisms and improvement of functions. However, it is important to analyze the necessity of changes and their

impact on the effectiveness of quality assurance processes by identifying existing issues and re-planning processes.

The university must also review the self-evaluation methodology, including the basis for assessing process effectiveness and highlighting existing issues. It is positive that the university actively uses its official website and social media platforms to ensure transparency and access to information. However, the limited availability of quality assurance analyses could hinder stakeholder awareness. The university could use these platforms more effectively to increase stakeholder awareness of quality assurance processes.

Summary:

Considering that the university's quality assurance system does not have a sufficient impact on improving the university's activities and development directions, the quality assurance processes are not planned, there are no indicators for evaluating the system's effectiveness, necessary data for decision-making are not collected through the system, the applied mechanisms do not contribute to the periodic and comprehensive identification of internal and external stakeholders' needs, the internal quality assurance system does not provide sufficient grounds for the external quality evaluation processes, and the system still does not contribute to ensuring the transparency of the university's activities, the expert group finds that VSU does not meet the requirements of Criterion 10.

Conclusion:

The compliance of VSU institutional capacities with the requirements of Criterion 10 is **unsatisfactory.**

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

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

Date: 30.01.2025

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Anushavan Makaryan
Head of the expert panel

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1.CVS OF EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS

Anushavan Makaryan - in 2001, he earned his PhD in Physical and Mathematical Sciences, and in 2006, he became an Associate Professor. From 1978-1983, he studied at the Faculty of Physics of Yerevan State University; from 1983-1986, he was a post-graduate student at the Institute of Radiophysics and Electronics of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia. From 1986 to 1988, he worked as a junior researcher at the Institute of Radiophysics and Electronics of the RA Academy of Sciences. Since 1988, he has worked in the Department of Optics of the Faculty of Physics of YSU. From 2011-2013, he worked as the head of the "Internal Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures" project at the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance, and from 2013-2019, he was the head of the Institutional and Program Expertise Department. Since 2011, he has been a certified expert panel member of Professional Education Quality Assurance in the RA. 2016- 2019 was a certified international expert in education of the State Accreditation Agency of the Russian Federation "Rosakkredagenstvo". From 2019 to 2024, he was the acting director of the YSU Ijevan branch.

Gegham Karoyan- in 2004, he graduated with a master's degree from the Faculty of Cybernetics of the State Engineering University of Armenia, and in 2006, he completed his postgraduate studies. In 2008, he was awarded the degree of candidate of technical sciences, and in 2013, he was awarded the scientific title of associate professor. Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Cybernetics, in charge of scientific works.From 2013-2022, docent of the "Electronic Techniques" chair, 2017-2019. 038 – Member of the Professional Council of Electrical Engineering (E09.01). In 2022, he worked as the "Electronics, Biomedical and Measuring Systems" Chair of the Institute of Information and Communication Technologies and Electronics. 2017 From November until now, Deputy Director of the Institute of Information and Communication Technologies and Electronics in the field of education. From 2022 until now, Associate Professor of the "Electronics, Biomedical and Measuring Systems" Chair.

Mare Khachatryan: In 2008, she graduated from Yerevan State University of Economics with a degree in “Customs Affairs”. In 2012, she completed postgraduate studies at the same university with a degree in “Finance and Accounting”. In 2018, she received the degree of Candidate of Economics. In 2020, she received the title of Associate Professor of Economics. Since 2013, she has worked as an associate professor at the ASUE Department of Finance. He is a member of the ASUE Ethics Committee and is actively involved in the benchmarking assessments and educational program reforms carried out by the university, especially in the field of corporate finance. He cooperates with several public and private sector structures to implement financial analyses and mentoring. From 2017 to the present, he has taught in various European countries within the framework of the Erasmus + program and participated in international conferences, seminars, forums, and trainings.

Magdalena Lib – In 2005, she graduated from the University of Passau with a degree in "Hispanism, Economics, and Sociology." In 2009, she graduated from the Faculty of Cultural Studies and Political Science of the University of Regensburg with a Master's degree. From 2007 to 2009, she worked as a research assistant at the same university. From 2009 to 2014, she worked at the Bayreuth Institute for Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance (ACQUIN). From 2014 to present she is Deputy Head of the Department of Legal Affairs and Quality Management in Teaching and Learning at the Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg. Since 2023, she additionally is a member of

the Quality Management Board of the University of Cologne. In 2023, she has been a member of the Institutional Accreditation Board of the College of Arts and Social Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University of Oman.

Zaruhi Hakobyan- A 3rd-year student of the National Polytechnic University of Armenia majoring in "Information Security". In 2024, she participated in the ANQA "Student Voice" project Student Expert Training Course.

APPENDIX 2. SCHEDULE OF SITE VISIT

	06.10.2024	**Start**	**End**	**Duration**
1	Closed expert panel meeting	10:00	13:00	180minutes
2	Departure from Yerevan to Vanadzor	13:00	15:00	120 minutes
3	VSU resource observation	16:00	18:00	120 minutes

	07.10.2024	**Start**	**End**	**Duration**
1	Meeting with the Rector of the University	09:30	10:30	60 minutes
2	Meeting with Vice-Rectors	10:40	11:30	50 minutes
3	Meeting with members of the self-evaluation group	11:40	12:30	50 minutes
4	Break, expert panel discussions	12:40	13:40	60 minutes
5	Meeting with the University Board of Trustees	13:50	14:50	60 minutes
6	Meeting with alumni	15:00	15:50	50minutes
7	Meeting with employers	16:00	17:00	60 minutes
8	Document review and closed expert panel meeting	17:10	18:30	80 minutes
	08.10.2024	**Start**	**End**	**Duration**
1	Meeting with deans	09:30	10:20	50 minutes
2	Class observations	10:30	11:40	70 minutes
3	Meeting with heads of departments and AP responsibles	12:00	13:00	60 minutes
4	Break, expert panel discussions	13:00	14:00	60 minutes
5	Meeting with faculty representatives (8-10 people)	14:10	15:10	60 minutes
6	Meeting with students (8-10 people)	15:20	16:20	60 minutes
7	Meeting with representatives of the Student Council and the Student Association	16:30	17:10	40 minutes

8	Document review and closed expert panel meeting			17:20	19:00	100 minutes
	09.10.2024			**Start**	**End**	**Duration**
1	Meeting with responsible/s of the AP "History."	Meeting with responsible/s of the AP "Psychology."	Meeting with responsible/s of the AP " Actuarial and Financial Mathematics."	09:30	10:30	60 minutes
2	Meeting with lecturers of the AP "History."	Meeting with lecturers of the AP "Psychology."	Meeting with lecturers of the AP " Actuarial and Financial Mathematics."	10:45	11:45	60 minutes
3	Meeting with students of the AP "History."	Meeting with students of the AP "Psychology."	Meeting with students of the AP " Actuarial and Financial Mathematics."	12:00	13:00	60 minutes
4	Break, expert panel discussions			13:10	14:10	60 minutes
5	Meeting with the heads of the departments (Educational Reforms and Training Center, Educational Process Management, Research, Innovations and Cooperation Departments, Library)			14:20	15:20	60 minutes
6	Meeting with heads of departments (Financial Resources Management, Administrative, Human Resources Management, General Departments, Information Technology, Cultural Centers)			15:30	16:20	50 minutes
7	Open Meeting			16:30	17:20	50 minutes
8	Document review and closed expert group meeting			17:30	18:30	60 minutes

	10.10.2024	**Start**	**End**	**Duration**
1	Meeting with the Quality Assurance Center staff	09:30	10:30	60 minutes
2	Document review and expert panel discussion	10:40	11:40	60 minutes

3	Meeting with the team selected by the expert panel	11:50	12:50	60 minutes
4	Break, expert panel discussions	13:00	14:00	60 minutes
5	Closed expert panel meeting	14:10	15:10	60 minutes
6	Meeting with the university management	15:30	16:00	30 minutes
7	Return from Vanadzor to Yerevan	17:00	19:00	120 minutes

APPENDIX 3. LIST OF DOCUMENTS OBSERVED

N	Name of the document	Criteria
1.	Evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategic plan	1
2.	Previous Strategic Plan of the University	1
3.	Rector's reports for the last three years	2
4.	Plans and reports of departments	2
5.	Code of Ethics	2
6.	Schedules, agendas, and decisions of the Academic Council meetings for 2021-2024	2
7.	Analyses by the Financial and Economic Committee	2
8.	Job descriptions	2
9.	Preliminary budget (for the last three years)	2
10.	Budget (for the last three years)	2
11.	Lists of committees attached to the Academic Council and rector	2
12.	The concept for the expansion of entrepreneurial activities	2
13.	Foundations of grants constituting 1.4% of the university's budgetary income	2
14.	Accreditation packages for new programs	3
15.	Registers (one for each course)	3
16.	Updated practice logs, registers	3
17.	Studies on the implementation of academic programme objectives and securing the final outcomes at the course level	3
18.	Format and results of active participation of all potential stakeholders in the process of developing, accrediting, and implementing new programs	3
19.	Results of the 2018 strategy for developing and implementing new programs	3

20.	Results of the comparative analysis of programs (for newly implemented programs)	3
21.	Evaluation methods and indicators certifying the achievements of programs	3
22.	Examples of course methodological packages, evaluation forms, and criteria	3
23.	Examples of independent works	3
24.	Document certifying the differences and similarities in subject and credit requirements for courses studied abroad under the Erasmus+ program during a specific semester	3
25.	External evaluation of the results of the ongoing monitoring and auditing of programs	3
26.	Labor market demand analyses	3
27.	Analysis of student needs by the Student Council	4
28.	Questionnaires for conducting focus groups with students	4
29.	Data on student applications through the website	4
30.	Alumni database	4
31.	Grounds for Incentivizing Research Activities	4
32.	Student Council plan, reports	4
33.	Staff list with salaries	5
34.	The average age of the faculty	5
35.	Announcements for faculty competitions	5
36.	Total number of faculty members	5
37.	Composition of the competitive commission for the faculty of the department	5
38.	Protocols of the competitive commission attached to the Academic Council	5
39.	Protocols of the Faculty Competitive Commission	5
40.	Completed questionnaires for "The Lecturer through the Eyes of the Student."	5
41.	Completed results of class observations	5
42.	Faculty training plans, training packages	5
43.	Number of defended doctoral theses/candidates in the last five years	5
44.	Number of alumni working at the university	5
45.	Number and list of administrative staff	5

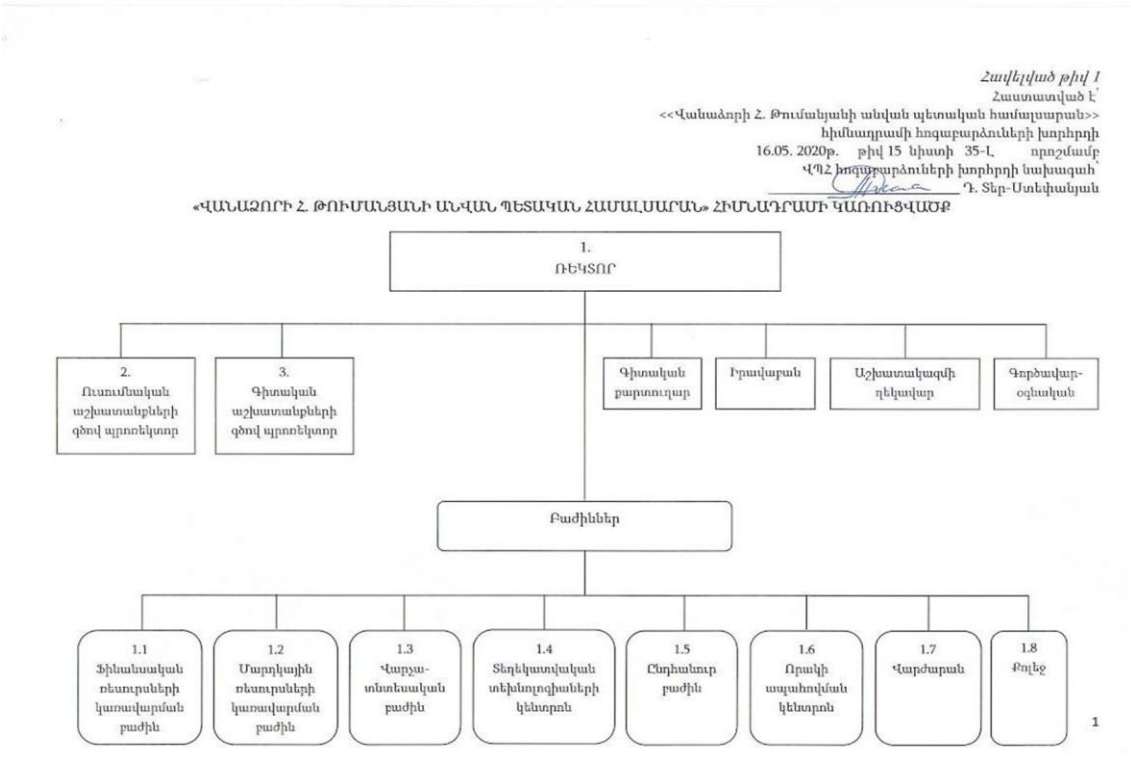
46.	Grounds for annual evaluation of administrative staff	5
47.	Criteria for incentivizing the faculty and administrative staff	5
48.	Departmental research plans	6
49.	List of faculty members involved in international research projects	6
50.	Number of staff doctoral candidates and applicants	6
51.	Financial report on the activities of SMART CAFFE	6
52.	Databases of experts and employers formed for the development of science	6
53.	List of cooperation agreements by direction	6
54.	Examples of the "Master's" journal	6
55.	Examples of the conference proceedings of the Student Scientific Society	6
56.	Concept of the Academic Integrity Policy	6
57.	Results of research conducted in the last three years	6
58.	Grounds for Granting Internal Research Grants	6
59.	Regulations for the creation of research groups and grounds for annual funding	6
60.	Budget for development-related expenses and performance examples	7
61.	Allocation of financial resources for health and safety services in the last 5 years	7
62.	Grounds for access to online scientific websites	7
63.	Satisfaction surveys on resources	7
64.	List of stakeholders who participated in training courses	8
65.	Website data	8
66.	Website and social platform visibility data	8
67.	Analysis of survey results with schools regarding the "Career Fair" event	8
68.	The work plan of the Center for Educational Reforms and Training	8
69.	Employers' database	9
70.	Descriptions of foreign language courses	9
71.	Analysis of surveys with employers	10
72.	Quality assurance structure, plan, and report	10

73.	Results of the "Lecturer through the Eyes of the Student" survey	10
74.	Survey for evaluating the effectiveness of courses and topics by students	10
75.	Benchmarking results of quality assurance process policies and procedures	10
76.	Work plans and reports of the QA	10
77.	Compositions and protocols of working groups that conducted self-assessments of the QA system	10
78.	Program for improving the QA system	10
79.	Analysis of quality assurance policies comparing them to best practices	10

APPENDIX 4. RESOURCES OBSERVED

- Auditoriums
- Computer classrooms
- Laboratories
- Departments
- Library
- Reading room
- Event hall

APPENDIX 5. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION INSTITUTION



APPENDIX 6. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANQA-National center For Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation

VSU- Vanadzor State University

AC- Academic programmeme

TLI-Tertiary Level Institutions

QA- Quality Assurance

NQF-National Qualification Framework

SSQ- Sectoral Scope of Qualifications

SP- Strategic plan