

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



National Center For Professional  
Education Quality Assurance  
Foundation

**EXPERT PANEL REPORT  
ON INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION OF  
VANADZOR STATE UNIVERISTY AFTER H. TOUMANYAN**

**Yerevan- 2015**

## INTRODUCTION

The institutional accreditation of Vanadzor State University (hereinafter VSU) is carried out on the initiative of the Educational institution and based on its application. The process of institutional accreditation was organized and coordinated by the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance, Foundation (ANQA).

ANQA is guided by the regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Academic Programs” set by the RA Government on 30 June, 2011 N978-Ն decree as well as by N959-Ն (30 June, 2011) decree on approving RA Standards for Professional Education Accreditation.

The institutional audit was carried out by the expert panel composed according to the requirements of ANQA Regulation on the Expert Panel Composition. The expert panel consisted of 4 local and 1 international experts.

Institutional accreditation aims not only to the external evaluation of quality assurance but also to the continuous improvement of the institution’s management and quality of academic programs. Hence, there were two important issues for the expert panel members:

1. To carry out an audit of institutional capacities in line with the RA standards for state accreditation
2. To carry out an evaluation for the improvement of university’s quality and for its integration to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

This particular report covers the institutional audit of VSU on the basis of RA accreditation criteria of professional education and the peer review on the basis of international standards.

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## SUMMARY OF EVALUATION

### EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES ACCORDING TO ACREDITATION CRITERIA

The institutional accreditation process was carried out by the expert panel composed according to the requirements of ANQA Regulation on the Expert Panel Composition<sup>1</sup>. The evaluation was carried out according to the 10 criteria set by the RA Government on 30 June, 2011 N 959-Ն decree.

While carrying out the evaluation it was taken into consideration that VSU, according to its vision, tends to “meet the demands of the labor market for making competent professionals and to become a leading regional center ensuring stable development, providing educational services and carrying out scientific research in the northern regions of RA”

The mission of VSU is

1. To ensure stable development and to be integrated into the common European education area, the University pursues *the policy of meeting the needs of the stakeholders* in the basis of realization of its educational and scientific activities.
2. To educate competent specialists with fundamental and applicable knowledge and practical skills, the University is creating *a student-centered atmosphere*.
3. To contribute to the ongoing development of the individual, to create a favorable environment for educating a comprehensively developed person by *accepting its responsibility towards the society*.

According to the resolution of RA government on 30 April, 2014, Vanadzor State Pedagogical Institute after H. Toumanyan was renamed into Vanadzor State University after H. Toumanyan. VSU is the first educational complex in region which carries out a four-level education: Specialized Secondary Education (since 2010), Bachelor’s and Master’s (since 2008) and PhD studies (since 2006).

Education in VSU is provided through 28 Bachelor’s and 13 Master's academic programs and in 2015 there will be admission with 3 new specialties. There are some shortcomings in the governing system that limit the effective activities of HEI. Great work is being done at VSU in revealing the needs of the internal stakeholders, but there is clearly tardiness in meeting the identified needs. Plan-do-check-act mechanisms are not fully embedded in governing system. Collegial governance still yields to one-man decision-making.

Academic programs descriptions with clearly defined outcomes (knowledge, skills, abilities) and SCP’s have been developed through tuning methodology in which teaching, learning and assessment methods are described in detail. Academic programs were compared with the other universities’/ Armenian and foreign/ similar programs. Labor market analysis is represented in academic programs. The university does not always have appropriate material and technical base and building conditions for the implementation of diverse set of teaching and learning methods of academic programs.

There are certain mechanisms of recruitment and admission of students at VSU, but HEI has not evaluated their efficiency yet. In recent years, the number of students is decreasing. There is a tendency among the the students learning full-time to shift into part-time study system. VSU successfully creates a student-centered environment. Various mechanisms facilitate the

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<sup>1</sup> APPENDIX 1. THE CURRICULA VITAE OF THE PANEL MEMBERS

identification of students' needs. The institute of Academic Advisers was established to support the students.

HEI has a qualified teaching staff, but there are some problems in ensuring generation shift in some specialties. VSU regularly conducts faculty training and qualification development activities. It encourages faculty's professional growth and in recent years the number of lecturers with academic titles and degrees has increased, but the university does not still have enough potential for the internationalization of research.

Most of the defined objectives of VSU in the field of research is externally ambitious in comparison with the existing resource base and financial resources, they are very broad and unrealistic within the set period of Development Conception. The priorities of the University are not clarified. The research component is defined in Master's academic program. One of the main priorities of HEI was Armenian Studies; there is a large number of research in this field. VSU plays a significant role in Pedagogy too. The creation of necessary conditions and funding in other fields will allow the teaching staff to match with the rank set by HEI. The university should make certain financial investments, but as it is evident from the self-evaluation analysis of the University, they are insufficient and the research activities do not ensure any kind of financial flows.

HEI does not have a policy of effective management of financial resources, which hampers the creation of learning environment and implementation of mission and purpose of VSU.

The University is aware of its responsibility towards the society of Lori region and tends to meet the needs of the region.

VSU takes active steps towards external relations and internationalization. The experience gained in international relations contributes to the university's development; elaboration of academic programs through tuning methodology, introduction of network model of quality assurance, involvement of students and lecturers in mobility programs. The internationalization of HEI is hampered by the limited knowledge of foreign languages. VSU organizes trainings, founded the Language Center, but still has not achieved great success in this field.

VSU conducts activities in creating quality assurance network system. For many years Quality Assurance Center has organized many awareness-raising seminars, trainings, discussions with stakeholders, surveys for revealing the needs. Due to that daily work the quality assurance processes and the attitude towards ANQA are gradually changing within the University. The activities of Quality Assurance Center at HEI contributes to the continuous improvement of all the processes, timely identification of stakeholders' needs and solution of problems. Nevertheless, there is a need to clarify the governing bodies-ANQA relations and to strengthen the connections. Cyclical style of quality assurance activities is not yet adopted by all the subdivisions of VSU.

## **STRENGTHS OF THE INSTITUTION**

1. The mission of the institution is consistent with the demands of labour market of Lori region and the choice of academic programs.
2. The existence of staff ready for reforms.
3. The existence of developed academic programs for promoting student-centered environment, some of which are already introduced, the others are in the process of introduction.
4. The diversity of teaching and learning methods in accordance with the outcomes of academic programs.
5. The existence of the Institute for Academic Advisors for academic support and guidance to students.
6. Ensuring moral-psychological healthy environment for the students with special needs.

7. The implementation of experience acquired in the institutional reform process within the framework of external grants /development of academic programs, faculty training, introduction of quality assurance model/.
8. Constant development of external relations of the University.
9. The proactive work of quality assurance subdivision
10. The University is well aware of its own weaknesses.

#### **WEAKNESSES OF THE INSTITUTION**

1. Incompliance of existing resources with the mission, purpose and their implementation
2. Incomplete application of the principle of quality assurance i.e. plan-do-check-act in governing system
3. The existence of unnecessary vertical management methods in governing system.
4. The lack of funds to encourage research activities of students and lecturers.
5. The lack of university resources /the absence of canteen, gym-halls, dormitory and guest house, electronic library, necessary conditions for students with special needs, etc/.
6. Absence of Financial audit.
7. Weak resource base for the promotion of Science
8. Research activities conducted at VSU do not have international recognition.
9. Research based education has not been formed yet.

#### **MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **Mission and Purpose**

1. For making the HEI's mission more measurable and precise, it must be noted, that the mission of VSU is to prepare competent specialists who will meet the market needs of the northern regions of Armenia to ensure the sustainable development of the society, and to provide education and cultural services.
1. For controlling the implementation of the mission, it is necessary to establish a strategic plan with certain schedule and with those who would be responsible for it, based on the strategic directions of the conception of HEI.
2. It is necessary to develop quantitative and qualitative measurable and available indicators for the evaluation of outcomes of strategic, mid-term and annual plans.
3. It is necessary to improve feedback mechanisms with the external stakeholders. Taking into consideration the increase of number of employers as a result of changes in mission, it is necessary to update labor market research, reveal the problems and provide the students with necessary knowledge and skills that would meet the requirements of the labor market.
4. To find means in increasing the motivation of internal and external stakeholders for the reforms.

##### **Governance and Administration**

5. Search additional sources for funding. It is necessary to improve the mechanisms of the formation and effective management of financial revenues and financial resources and to introduce a system of financial audit.
6. Reform the governing system, engage stakeholders into decision-making process, to improve feedback mechanisms.
7. It is necessary to take into account the needs of students with special needs.
8. Coordinate the survey of factors affecting the activities of the university, to create mechanisms for verifying the accuracy of data recruited.

9. It is necessary to use the recruited data more effectively to identify trends of development and to set new targets. Planning and decision-making should be based on the analysis of the data revealed.

### **Academic Programs**

10. It is necessary to create appropriate resource base /particularly, resources of physics, biology, chemistry should be modernized/ for ensuring the outcomes of academic programs
11. It is necessary to pay attention to the academic integrity in the improvement process of assessment policy. The university should develop clear assessment guidelines for ensuring the academic honesty. It is not necessary to apply only to punitive or controlling actions but work hard to raise the awareness of the students and explain the dangers of plagiarism.
12. To introduce reliable mechanisms for graduates' feedback. To evaluate the risks of the employment of graduates and improve the academic programs according to those risks.

### **Students**

13. It is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of students' recruitment mechanisms.
14. To establish relations with various external stakeholders in order to involve students in research activities.
15. To organize meetings, seminars and discussions with the employers regularly involving both full-time and part-time students.
16. To develop more effective mechanisms for maintaining feedback with the graduates.
17. The university should provide equal opportunities for full-time and part-time students.
18. To make the part-time students to be involved in Student Council's activities at least in online format. The same method can be used revealing the needs of part-time students.

### **Teaching and Supporting Staff**

19. To develop mechanisms for ensuring the mobility of lecturers.
20. To encourage the involvement of the lecturers in individual grant projects and create mechanisms to spread their positive experience / mentorship /.
21. The development and implementation of competitive recruitment regulation of administrative and supporting staff, which will contribute to the improvement of the quality of human resources.
22. It is necessary to organize trainings for staff to promote its development in accordance with the identified needs.

### **Research and Development**

23. It is necessary to revise and clarify research priorities.
24. To create long-term and short-term plans with certain schedule based on the conception of reforms in scientific field and scientific priorities of HEI.
25. To develop the encouraging methods for research activities.
26. To create mechanisms for evaluating the quality of research activities in chairs.
27. To develop and implement regulations encouraging the involvement of students and faculty in international research initiatives.
28. To develop such mechanisms that will promote the internationalization of research (improvement of foreign language proficiency level, involving the graduates of the department of translation studies in the translation of research and scientific articles).

### **Infrastructure and Resources**

29. To carry out external financial audit.

30. The University should try to find other funding sources, as the existing sources of revenues tend to decline.
31. It is necessary to examine the effectiveness of budget allocations according to the needs of academic programs and to make improvements based on the data obtained.
32. Expand the list of programs and services provided, types of payment services, to increase their volume and profitability.
33. Take steps in providing students with dormitory, to create opportunities for meals on campus.

### **Social Responsibility**

34. Ensure accountability based on the strategy of HEI and annual plans. In this case, it will be easier to evaluate the outcomes.
35. To create a sustainable mechanism for supplementing the website of VSU with the materials in foreign languages, which will be beneficial step towards the internationalization.
36. One of the lecturers from the Faculty of Journalism and few students can participate in trainings for ensuring PR of VSU.
37. To consider the establishment of legal clinics, that will provide free services to the public. The clinic will greatly contribute to the students practice and create more connections with the public.

### **External Relations and Internationalization**

38. To develop certain mechanisms for checking the quality of foreign language courses regularly.
39. To carry out joint research programs and form effective international cooperation indicators.
40. It is preferable to include internationalization in the work plans of chairs as well.

### **Internal Quality Assurance**

41. It is necessary to clarify and strengthen relations between governing and quality assurance bodies.
42. The quality assurance tools should be developed in accordance with the University's strategic priorities.
43. It is necessary that the quality assurance cycle, PDCA, applied to all university subdivisions and cover all the processes.

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

As critical friends, the panel has conducted a peer review resulting in a number of recommendations related to the ambition of the university to enter the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The panel would like to commend the University for making progress in this respect and also put forward some recommendations, which can help the university to move forward into the EHEA. Most of these recommendations are intended to encourage the university to continue the work already started.

### **Observations, commendations**

**It is acknowledged that staff is working tirelessly to achieve the university's mission** and the university is clearly in a phase of continual development. The emphasis that the university has put

upon the employability of its graduates is evident and the panel has seen some encouraging initiatives and plans in this area although the impact of these is not yet quantified. The second emphasis highlighted in the mission statement is the creation of a 'student-centered' atmosphere. Staff and students have a good awareness of this concept, both in relation to the mission, and are able to articulate what it means in relation to andragogy.

The third part of the mission statement refers to 'the ongoing development of the individual' and 'a favorable environment for educating a comprehensively developed person'. What this means for every student (full time and part time) was not clearly articulated during the review meetings and is the least developed aspect of the mission in terms of principle and practice. It may be argued that there is a tension between a narrow curriculum for 'employability' and a broader one which seeks to educate a 'comprehensively educated person' and that the university has yet to resolve these competing drivers.

The panel encountered many articulate, thoughtful and motivated students, including *two with special education needs*, during the review. European Universities are fully inclusive institutions and the two SEN students were strong evidence that students with physical disability are able to succeed at VSU and were a credit to their university. The university is also engaged in a developing a distance learning non-award bearing course for *students with SEN* using Moodle. This is an exciting development that will contribute towards the inclusivity of the university and also has potential to lead to research output.

In general, the programs are in the process of modernization particularly with respect to more transparent requirements of the students and the emergence of a student-centered approach. There is work to continue regarding the communication of university standards of academic honesty, although it is not suggested here that we have seen cases of dishonest practice. **Faculties and chairs take academic honesty very seriously** but the university has yet to ensure there is standard practice applied across all faculties and programs for both part-time and full-time students.

Research activities are very limited both in terms of national and international output and in the number of staff and students involved in such research. Funding has been difficult to access and the university may wish to direct further financial support towards promising research staff and productive avenues of research (see recommendation 3 below).

The process of internationalization has begun with pockets of good practice emerging. The department of internal and external relations has been established and appropriately staffed. Students are aware of the opportunities of international mobility and of the value of internationalization of the university. Indeed the senior students welcome the process and have seen considerable development in the last five years. Students and staff speak positively of the importance of cultural exchange, the understanding of others' cultural values, the need to become 'networked' and integrated into international and global systems. Clearly more can be done to prepare and motivate all staff to engage in international networks and activities and to bring an international dimension to the curriculum for each chair.

**International partner institutions have been identified and agreements exist.** Some chairs are involved in establishing and cooperating in networks. There is potential for the university to draw on the expertise and understanding of members of staff currently within the institution to further this project.

In relation to many of the universities initiatives, qualitative data is available that informs evaluative activities. The mechanism for data collection is operating but is not yet fully developed and, not yet fully integrated. More needs to be done regarding the identification of quantitative measure to inform

evaluation and quality assurance. As such the internal structure of providing and analyzing information on the quality of programs is rather piecemeal and could benefit from a more systematic and coordinated approach.

### **Recommendations**

**The following recommendations are made in order to better align the university with international frames of reference in respect of weaknesses observed during the review.**

#### **Mission and Purpose**

- The university should seek ways to resolve the tensions inherent in its short term purpose (employability on graduation) and a longer term purpose of seeking to develop of 'a comprehensively developed person'.
- The university should develop a mechanism for defining quantifiable targets in relation to goals (e.g of employment of graduates) so that improvements can be identified and initiatives evaluated.

#### **Governance and Administration**

- The university further should develop its reputation as a fully inclusive institution. It should ensure that the rights and needs all students, irrespective of ability or disability, should be upheld. This could include ensuring that *students with SEN* and other minorities are represented on university and student boards. The university should consider ways in which it can better meet the needs of disabled students through improving the physical environment. The development of an inclusion policy would be the first step towards this.
- The university needs to ensure key performance indicators that are quantified and measurable are identified through a process of inter-departmental collaboration so that all internal and external stakeholders both contribute to and take responsibility for their realization. The setting of quantifiable targets through a process of consultation and dialogue with stakeholders would enable the university to demonstrate developments towards mission and goals.
- The university should consider ways in which data that is gathered can be better exploited to identify trends and set new targets for development. The panel suggests that such targets could be set in relation to student recruitment, research output, student achievement, student satisfaction and teaching quality.

#### **Academic programs**

- The university should begin to develop a virtual learning environment (VLE) to complement its physical resources, such as those commonly encountered in European universities. A VLE that provides students with online access to course materials, program information and university regulations will create efficient and effective channels of communication with students and enhance the student experience. VSU is in a good position to develop a pilot VLE project, building on the SEN Moodle project highlighted above. The information technology skills of staff and students ought to be exploited in order to create a new 'blended' learning approach that is found in European universities nowadays.
- Further work is needed to ensure that all MA dissertation work meets international standards, particularly with respect to the ways in which students demonstrate an understanding of methodology and justify methodological approaches to their research questions.

## **Students**

- Data provided by the university indicate that the majority of students now study part-time at VSU. It also appears that due to the economic environment of the region, this trend may well continue. The university is urged to ensure the experience of part-time students is equitable to their full-time peers and that inconsistencies identified in relation to access to guidance and support are eliminated. Virtual Learning Environments have great potential to improve communication with part-time students and to enhance face-to-face teaching (see 'Academic Programs' above).

## **Teaching and Support Staff**

- The university has a significant human resource and it is recommended that it seeks ways to further invest in the development of staff through systematic and target professional development. Targets may include the improved language skills of staff (so that they can fully participate in international activities) and the improved knowledge and skills of administrative staff in educational management and quality assurance so that they build a sustainable workforce which has the capacity to achieve the long term plans of internationalization.

## **Research and Development**

- The panel wants to urge the university to extend its research activities in a systematic and targeted way. This could be done by focusing its efforts primarily on a limited number of carefully chosen centers of excellence. VSU has the potential to develop research centers in the field of tertiary education andragogy alongside pedagogical research. These centers can stimulate innovation and generate new knowledge and inform teaching and learning within the university. This approach has the potential to stimulate more interdisciplinary research.

## **Infrastructure and Resources**

- The university will need to make significant investment in teaching resources and the physical environment if it is to continue to effectively support the provision of a safe and healthy learning environment for all students. In particular, the resources for physics, biology and chemistry seen during the review need further updating to enable students to access an appropriate curriculum.

## **Internal quality assurance**

- QA has a significant role in ensuring the rights of both staff and students are protected. In particular, the university should develop clear guidelines for assessment practices to ensure academic integrity and honesty. These might include a handbook for students explaining academic honesty and unfair practice; how it is to be avoided; the likely sanctions for transgressing agreed regulations. Regulated and consistent processes of cross checking or peer-to-peer moderation of assessment practices will ensure there is protection for staff against their academic judgments being questioned by students.

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**Lilit Zakaryan**

**Chairman of the expert panel**

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**Anahit Utmazyan**

**Coordinator of the expert panel**

## DESCRIPTION OF EXTERNAL REVIEW

### COMPOSITION OF EXPERT PANEL

The external evaluation of VSU's self-evaluation and quality assurance processes was carried out by the expert panel with the following members,

1. **Lilit Zakaryan**, Candidate in Historical Sciences, Yerevan Northern University, Head of the department of Quality Assurance, Armenia, chairman of the expert panel
2. **Alan Howe**, Bath Spa University, Head of Department and Programme Leader for Education and Childhood Studies, United Kingdom, member of the expert panel
3. **Varoujan Atabekyan**, Doctor in Physics and Mathematics, YSU, Head of the chair of Algebra and Geometry of YSU, Armenia, member of the expert panel
1. **Susanna Hovhannisyan**, Doctor of Philological Sciences, NAS RA M. Abeghyan Institute of Literature, leading researcher, Armenia, member of the expert panel
2. **Sima Bosnoyan**- Yerevan *Brusov* State University of Languages and Social Sciences, 1<sup>st</sup> year Master's student in the field of "Education Management", Armenia, member of the expert panel

The composition of the expert group was agreed upon with the University.

The works of the expert panel were coordinated by –**Anahit Utmazyan**.

The translation was provided by **Lilit Muradyan**.

Protocols were made by **Srbuhi Djandjughazyan**.

All panel members as well as the secretary signed a statement of independence and confidentiality.

## PROCESS OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW

### **Application for State accreditation**

VSU applied for institutional accreditation by submitting application form, the copies of the license and respective appendices to ANQA on February 23, 2015.

The ANQA Secretariat checked the application package, the data presented in the application form, the appendices and the ANQA electronic questionnaire completed by the University. Based on the decision on accepting the application request, the schedule of activities and estimate of expenses were prepared and approved. An agreement was signed between ANQA and VSU on March 17, 2015.

### **Preparatory Phase**

VSU started the self-evaluation process in 2013 in the framework of grant program "The introduction of internal quality assurance system or its contribution to the further development".

The revised versions of the self-evaluation report in Armenian and English languages and package of appendices were presented to ANQA on April 15, 2015. The coordinator of ANQA studied the self-evaluation report to verify its compliance with technical requirements. Based on the positive opinion of the Coordinator, the self-evaluation report and package of documents attached were accepted by ANQA on April 28, 2015.

The members of expert panel were agreed upon with the university and were confirmed by the director of ANQA. On April 30, 2015 the self-evaluation report was given to the expert panel for draft report. The evaluation was carried out in the period starting from May 1, 2015 till May 29, 2015. During that time, the expert panel held 5 phases of training, regular meetings once a week for discussing the self-evaluation report of the university and packages of appendices. The issues raised by the international expert were included in the draft report. As a result, the issues during the site-visit and target groups were clarified.

The Coordinator together with the chairman of the expert panel decided on the schedule of the site-visit. Intended meetings with all the focus groups, close and open meetings, document and resource review were included in the schedule.

### **The Self-Evaluation Report of the University**

The self-evaluation report is mostly written precisely and each standard is taken into account. Sufficient evidence for the statements of the document is provided in appendices.

In general, the expert panel considered the self-evaluation report, presented in critical way, to be a useful document for obtaining information about VSU and for organizing discussions with HEI.

### **Preparatory Visit**

In May 11-15, 2015 the schedule of the site-visit of the expert panel was agreed upon with the VSU online<sup>2</sup>. The list of the documents was presented, subdivisions, the expert panel planned to visit and organizational and technical issues concerning the site-visit, were discussed.

The day before the site-visit, May 31, the coordinator and the chairman of the expert panel visited the University to observe the rooms, meeting hall and technical resources for the panel.

### **Site-visit**

The day before the planned site-visit the local experts of expert panel met international expert. During the meeting the expert panel shared its initial impressions on the report, discussed and

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<sup>2</sup> APPENDIX 2. SCHEDULE OF THE SITE VISIT

summarized the list of main issues / problems, decided who is responsible to clarify the issues related to each criterion as well as discussed the meetings with separate focus groups/.

Afterwards, the members of the expert panel discussed the assessment scale which consists of two levels: 1. compliance with the requirements of the criterion is satisfactory, 2. compliance with the requirements of the criterion is unsatisfactory.

The site-visit took place from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2015.

The site-visit began and ended with the meetings with the Rector. The meetings were held with heads of the chairs, working group that carried out the self-evaluation, faculty, graduates, employers, and full-time and part-time students as well as with graduate students. The expert panel chose the focus groups randomly. In the framework of scheduled and announced open meeting, number of employees of the university expressed a wish to meet the expert panel; there were deans, heads of the chairs, teaching and support staff, heads of departments and centers of the University.

The expert panel reviewed the documents<sup>3</sup> and observed the resources<sup>4</sup>, participated in defense of Master's thesis, and screening of films shot by the students of "Journalism"

The expert panel highly appreciates the participants' open discussion.

Information obtained during the meetings, as well as the main findings from the observation and reviews of the documents were summarized at the end of each day and at the final meeting at the end of the visit.

The expert panel discussed the main outcomes and reached an agreement first on accreditation standards and then on the requirements of criteria. The final conclusions have been reached on the standards through open discussion of all the members of expert panel using consensus method.

### **Expert Panel Report**

After the site-visit, the chairman of expert panel with the assistance of coordinator prepared the draft version of the expert panel report.

All the members of the Expert panel had their contribution in revealing the findings, formation of considerations and evaluation of each criterion of the report, as well as responded to the full version. Experts' comments were taken into account when summarizing the draft report.

The international expert prepared his conclusions and peer assessment review. Both documents were translated and given to the chairman of the expert panel. It was the responsibility of the chairman and coordinator of the expert panel to include the international expert's opinion and approaches in report. The peer review opinion was fully included into the text of the report. The draft report was approved by all members of local expert panel, was translated and sent to the international expert. The draft report was reedited based on his observations and represents the main outcomes, commendations and recommendations.

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<sup>3</sup> APPENDIX 3. THE LIST OF OBSERVED DOCUMENTS

<sup>4</sup> APPENDIX 4. RESOURCES OBSERVED BY THE EXPERT PANEL

## EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

### BRIEF INFORMATION ABOUT THE EDUCATION INSTITUTION

**HISTORY:** Kirovakan Pedagogical Institute was founded on 9 July, 1969 on the base of Armenian SSR State Pedagogical Institute of Part-time Studies (founded in 1936). Five faculties of part-time studies were moved to Kirovakan: Faculty of the Armenian Language and Literature, Faculty of Physics and Mathematics, Faculty of Biology, Faculty of History and Faculty of Pedagogy. In 1970 full-time studies were also organized at the Institute. In 1988 the students and staff of Stepanakert Pedagogical Institute moved to Kirovakan State Pedagogical Institute. In 2006 a Department of PhD Studies in 6 fields of study and in 2010 was given an opportunity to implement a Program of Specialized Secondary Education. So, it has enabled the institution to become the first education complex, which has the right to organize education for NQF 5-8 levels.

In 1983 due to the efforts of the Rector of the institute, academician S. Mergelyan, the study field of “Applied Mathematics” was given to the Kirovakan State Pedagogical Institute. Since 2011-2012 academic year a range of non-pedagogical new fields of studies have been introduced. On 30 April, 2014, according to the resolution 485-Ն of RA Government, Vanadzor State Pedagogical Institute after H. Toumanyanyan was renamed into Vanadzor State University after H. Toumanyanyan. As an educational and research state institution, VSU has its mission which reflects its goals and objectives. The aim of Vanadzor State University (VSU) is to develop the quality of education, meet the demands of the labor market and enlarge the opportunities to be integrated into the common European education area.

VSU provides education services in the form of full-time and part-time studies, on the principles of paid tuition and within the framework of state education order through 28 Bachelor’s and 13 Master’s academic programmes.

Provisions reflecting the tendencies and ambitions of University in various fields are reflected in self-evaluation report, in the strategic plan and other documents.

**EDUCATION:** VSU intends to conduct education that will meet the needs of the labor market and will be in compliance with Bologna processes and meet the requirements of ANQF. The University attaches great importance to educational outcomes and comparability with similar programs and mobility of students and lecturers.

For the implementation of the mission and academic programs, the University plans to have a professional teaching staff, ensure smooth generation shift and regularly tends to recruit faculty members with academic degrees and titles and organizes trainings.

HEI is seeking to revise radically the whole package of teaching and learning methods and approaches, so that the process becomes more interactive and prepare students for professional activities. Various methods and technologies are important in the development and introduction strategy of academic programs. Currently, advanced methods Bank is being developed at VSU and later it will be distributed in all the chairs of the University as guidance.

VSU aims at ensuring educational environment for promoting quality education.

- Enhancement and modernization of the library
- Acquisition of necessary equipment
- Distribution of expenses for ensuring classroom conditions, sanitary-hygienic, health and safety
- Financial resources should be in line with the institution's strategic objectives. There are still problems in full implementation of these objectives in this field.

**RESEARCH:** It is mentioned in the self-evaluation report that the goals of the scientific research are the sustainable growth of human resources and ensuring of smooth generation shift as well as the development of Armenian Studies as a priority. The aims of the University's 2014-2018 development Conception are: increasing the funding for science, clarifying the models and mechanisms of funding, raising the effectiveness of funding, modernization of the infrastructures in the field of science, clarifying the priorities in the development of science, establishing a system of independent expertise in the field of scientific research, integrating science and education.

**INTERNATIONALIZATION:** The policy of internationalization and external relations are based on the mission of VSU and is determined by the following priorities: enhancement of international relations, creation of regional and international university network, promotion of cooperation with the European universities and Higher Education international institutions, searching of grant programs, improvement of Advisory Service supporting the International Relations, development and implementation of Master's and PhD programs in cooperation with foreign Universities, activation of granting qualification award, encouraging mobility of students and teachers.

**QUALITY ASSURANCE:** The aim of VSU's quality assurance system is to ensure public trust, responsibility, competitiveness and training of the qualified specialists. The expert panel was guided by the principle "compliance to purposes" and viewed this information as the primary goals and ambitions of the University.

## CRITERION I. MISSION AND GOALS

**Criterion: The policy and activities of the TLI stem from the Institution's mission, which is in accordance with the Armenian National Qualifications Framework (hereafter ANQF).**

### FINDINGS

**1.1** Until 2014 the educational institution functioned as Vanadzor State Pedagogical Institute after H. Toumanyanyan. The decrease in the number of applicants in pedagogical specialties and the survey of the labor market carried out by the university proved that the labor market is saturated with pedagogues, and there is a need for specialists in other fields / bank employees, pharmacists, journalists, etc. /. The new labor requirements expanded the list of specialties of the university. Since 2011-2012 academic year a range of new fields of studies have been implemented (“Translation Study”, “Journalism”, “Management” “Pharmaceutical Chemistry” and “Social Work”). On April 30, 2014, according to the resolution 485-Ն of RA government, Vanadzor State Pedagogical Institute after H. Toumanyanyan was renamed into Vanadzor State University after H. Toumanyanyan and the new regulations of the University were approved. In 2014 new mission of the University was developed which is in accordance with the Armenian National Qualifications Framework.

The mission of VSU is

1. to ensure stable development and be integrated into the common European education area, the University pursues *the policy of meeting the needs of the stakeholders* as a basis of realization of its educational and scientific activities.
2. to strive to educate competent specialists with fundamental and applicable knowledge and practical skills, the University is creating (creates) a student-centered atmosphere.
3. to contribute to the ongoing development of the individual, create a favorable environment for educating a comprehensively developed person by accepting its *responsibility towards the society*.

**1.2** Educational institution revised its mission, goals and objectives based on the identifying and revealing the needs of internal and external stakeholders.

Long-term development plan of Lori Region was examined, the meetings were held with employers, survey was conducted among the graduates. Being involved in institution’s management the external stakeholders also participated in the development process of the mission. Discussions were also held with the administrative and teaching staff, as well as with students. The suggestions during the discussions are reflected in the mission.

**1.3** Until 2014 there was no approved certain procedures and mechanisms for the evaluation of the implementation of the mission and strategic plan. The evaluation of the implementation of the strategic plan was presented in Rector's annual reports / electronic versions of reports are on VSU website 2010-2014 /. Strategy implementation plan was developed for the evaluation and monitoring of the outcomes of objectives. The implementation indicators are included in it.

For evaluating the implementation of mission and purpose “Procedure on Internal audit management” was approved in 2015 based on the strategic directions and procedure on Monitoring was approved for monitoring the implementation of strategic plan. Monitoring groups are formed and students are involved in them. The responsibilities of the students are to organize surveys, to recruit and analyze data. Auditing and monitoring mechanisms were tested, which revealed the need of improving the evaluation mechanisms.

### CONSIDERATIONS

The educational institution as a regional HEI has a clear vision of its role and importance in the region. Being Pedagogical Institute until 2014, it fulfilled its mission by providing the region with pedagogues. About 70 percent of the region's teachers and 48.7% faculty of VSU are graduates of Vanadzor Pedagogical Institute.

The expert panel highly appreciates the change of the type of the educational institution and its mission and the fact of becoming a university based on identification of the needs of the labor market in 2014 as well as the expansion of the list of specialties. It is acknowledged, that staff works tirelessly to achieve the university's mission and the university is clearly in a phase of continual development. Though the University clearly perceives its mission in the region, the statement of the mission is not yet clear.

In the Development Conception of 2014-2018, which is perceived as a strategic plan by VSU, the university clearly noted its role in the northern region but it is not specified in the mission at all. Implementing its mission, the University creates "student-centered" environment and provides the society of the region with different services. The policy of the University is directed to the preparation of specialists corresponding to the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> levels of NQF.

The expert panel highly appreciates the discussions with external and internal stakeholders in the development of mission during which the needs of the stakeholders were taken into consideration. The expert panel notes that the University doesn't have strategic plan correspondent to Development Conception with certain schedule.

The mission, purposes and evaluation mechanisms of the University have been introduced lately. The steps of implementation, people who are responsible for the process, resources are not specified in the strategy plan for the evaluation and monitoring. The performance indicators are not clear and measurable. It should be noted that VSU tested the developed mechanisms, noticed their weaknesses and works on the improvement of evaluation mechanisms of the implementation of the mission and purposes, revises the performance indicators of strategy as well.

**SUMMARY: Taking into consideration, that** the policy and activities of VSU are mostly in compliance with its mission and are in accordance with the National Qualifications Framework. Mission, goals and objectives reflect the needs of external and internal stakeholders and the evaluation mechanisms are in improvement phase and the expert panel concludes that the university meets the requirements of the criterion 1.

**CONCLUSION:** The correspondence of VSU institutional capacities to the requirements of criterion 1 is **satisfactory**.

## CRITERION II. GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

**Criterion: The TLI's system of governance and administrative structures are effective and aim at the fulfillment of the institution's mission and goals, ensuring ethical decision-making.**

### FINDINGS

**2.1** VSU governance system has a regulated process of decision-making. VSU governance is implemented according to VSU regulations approved by Resolution 485-Ն of the RA Government on April 30, 2014. Here are the following regulations of governance and administration of VSU; Regulation of the Scientific Council of Vanadzor State University, Rectorate's regulation of VSU, monitoring regulations. The regulations of the other departments' activities are elaborated too /general office, archive, library, research room etc./. Part of the regulations was developed when the

institution was pedagogical institute and the others have already been revised based on the needs of the University. The procedures of the selection of deans, heads of chairs have been developed. The policy and procedures for hiring, transferring, dismissing, promoting, encouraging and giving penalties to the employees has been regulated. The University does not have developed ethic code of governance.

VSU has the necessary human resources, but the university authorities still have not provided the university with necessary material and financial resources.

The financial resources generate from the students' tuition fees, Government's refunds and other sources. The main funding source is the students' tuition fees.

The University has developed a clear financial-economic policy; the financial-economic policy of the TEI is implemented on the basis of the conclusions made by the financial-economic committee. Financial audit has not been conducted at the university, thus the evaluation of effectiveness of expenses has not been done.

The working conditions of the governing bodies are in high-level; there is a separate building for the administration staff. But the conditions of dean offices and chairs are far from being satisfactory. Although 80% of budget is allocated to salaries, they are still low whereas the work being done is increasing. The University tries to find additional sources of funding, but they haven't had any success yet.

The university has not introduced electronic document circulation for raising the effectiveness of governance system, but it is planned and the project was presented to expert panel during the site-visit.

**2.2** VSU enables the lecturers and students to be involved in decision-making process of the issues concerning them. Teaching and support staff, students are involved in decision-making committees and councils. Lecturers and students are members of VSU Scientific Council. The University ensures that at least 25 percent of students be involved in the Scientific Council. VSU Rector and deans are meeting regularly with students and listen to their suggestions and needs. However, the process involves the students learning full-time. Part-time students, whose number is growing every year, do not participate in the work of decision-making bodies / though there are no obstacles for it /.

The HEI's regulations, programs, protocols of sessions of Rector and Scientific Council on the website provide the faculty and students with necessary information.

During the meetings with students and lecturers it turned out that the questions raised in focus groups or meetings sometimes get positive solutions, sometimes not.

**2.3** The University does not have long-term planning i.e strategic plan and the development conception of 2014-2018 is considered to be a strategic plan. There is no schedule for the implementation of the plan too. The mechanisms of the implementation of the mission and purpose and evaluation have been lately elaborated and are in the process of introduction.

The strategy implementation plan, which is a form of monitoring, was introduced for monitoring the implementation of the conception. In February, 2015 the monitoring regulation was approved which aims at evaluating the institutional processes of the University according to set criteria and standards. The monitoring tools, scheme of the actions, organizational structure and analyzing mechanisms are described in the regulation.

**2.4** The decisions are made based on the discussions in chairs, faculties, councils, rectorate and scientific council's sessions, but the study of factors affecting the University is not regular or systematic. Comparative analysis of the factors affecting the university is not carried out.

For example, there are data on the analysis of labor market but the needs of the graduates are not included in it, as graduates' base is missing. Not all the employers are motivated to take part in the discussions organized by the University /weak connections between employers and graduates are

indicated in self-evaluation report too/. The University's research lacks the prospective analysis of demographic data. It can't be said that environmental scanning is being conducted, which is the base for improvement of planning. But, there is also a positive experience too. For example, the Faculty of Law was established based on specific research data recruited by sociologists.

**2.5.** There are "Quality Management System" regulation (approved by Scientific Council on February 27, 2015) and strategy of introduction and improvement of VSU quality assurance of 2014-2018.

According to documents, it is planned "to check and analyze systematically the outcomes of processes for quality improvement by the subdivisions of the university, carry out informative, material and technical, staff, educational and methodological investigations of education process, control the processes ensuring the transparency and accountability of the governing system, coordinate the introduction of quality management methods in structural subdivisions". New regulations have been adopted, but there are no grounds for applying them in practice.

**2.6** The concept of academic programs and strategy of their introduction were developed by "tuning" methodology in the frames of educational reforms. Several academic programs were tested in corresponding chairs of YSU. The remarks became the base for the revision of academic programs. The monitoring mechanisms of academic programs are in the process of introduction. Procedure on Internal audit management of academic programs was approved by the Scientific Council in February 2015. The experience in conducting audit has been acquired since 2013. The regulation of audit was developed on that experience. It intends to evaluate the academic programs at bachelor's level every four years while the measures aimed at detecting dangers and deviations from the program in time, revealing them and improving the process are to be implemented through periodic monitoring.

**2.7** The publication of information on quality evaluation mechanisms of academic programs and quality of qualification awarding are elaborated, but they are still in the process of introduction. The mechanisms of information evaluation are to be introduced both by regulations of "Quality Monitoring of Vanadzor State University after H. Toumanyan" and "Center for Quality Assurance". Both were approved in February 2015 and have not been implemented yet.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

The expert panel records, that a number of regulations have been developed at the University to ensure the effectiveness of governance and administrative structures, but most of them were approved in 2015 and don't have implementation history, so the university has not evaluated their effectiveness.

The expert panel was convinced that VSU has a professional and highly-qualified staff and is able to carry out the university's mission, goals and objectives. The University Vice-Rectors, most of the mid-level executives are responsible and perform their duties in proper way. But the educational-methodological resources and technical level of the University for carrying out the mission and purpose are of concern.

HEI enables the lecturers and students to be involved in the decision-making process of the issues concerning them. According to experts, a survey conducted by the university's quality assurance center, gives huge information on revealing the needs, making suggestions and evaluating the processes.

But there is clearly tardiness in meeting the identified needs. Collegial governance still yields to the one-man decision-making.

VSU has a development conception but it doesn't have strategic plan and clear timetable based on it. Short-term planning is often fragmented and is done by steps, which causes risk of non-systemic

approach. The expert panel thinks that correlation of mission, goals and activities is weak because of the shortcomings in planning.

The Expert panel believes that auditing of several academic programs by pilot program was a good experience for the university. However, audit and monitoring regulations are in the process of introduction. Experts think that the introduction of electronic document circulation can significantly contribute to the effectiveness of governing system. According to the expert panel, the measures presented in the rector's report are not yet sufficient to exclude the corruption risks.

Thus, acknowledging that the educational institution has made a great progress in a short period of time, in the improvement of the regulations that contribute to the improvement of management, however, it must be recorded that the plan-do-check-act mechanisms are not fully embedded in governing system. Therefore, there are some difficulties in evaluation of the effectiveness of processes in other spheres of the University. There are serious problems in the distribution of financial resources. They are not implemented according to the strategic priorities and their implementation is under the risk.

**SUMMARY:** Taking into consideration that the effectiveness of management, administrative structures and the level of their activities is not high, the plan-do-check-act mechanisms are not fully embedded in governing system, the University have not developed ethic rules, have not carried out the investigation of factors affecting the activities of the University, the expert panel concludes, that there are risks in the implementation of mission and purpose. The shortcomings in other fields of VSU stem from the imperfection of the governing system.

**CONCLUSION:** The correspondence of VSU institutional capacities to the requirements of criterion 2 is **unsatisfactory**.

### CRITERION III. ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

**Criterion: The programs are in concord with the institution's mission, form part of institutional planning and promote mobility and internationalization.**

#### FINDINGS

**3.1** 40 academic programs are being implemented in the five faculties of the University, 27 of which are bachelor's and 13 master's programs. 3 new university programs will be introduced in 2015 (it is a strategic step): the introduction of "Service", "Applied Mathematics and Informatics" and "Psychology" is in compliance with the Lori region development policy.

The university approved a certain strategy on the development and introduction of academic programs where their creation process is described in detail. Other documents are also developed based on it /"acquired competences and the matrix of coordinating the teaching, learning and evaluation methods of academic program, etc/. The University has conducted a pilot program for the development of academic programs / Social education, OSI Grant N16532/ and the gained positive experience helped in the process of development of other academic programs.

The academic programs are in accordance with the mission of the Univeristy. Study of the labor market, benchmarking with the similar programs of other univerisities have been conducted before the development of academic programs through "tuning" methodology. The academic programs were developed based on Dublin Descriptors, RA state educational standards (if available) and ANQF. The subject curriculum packages (SCP) were developed. Academic program directories were also developed.

**3.2.** Based on "Academic Program Development and Implementation Strategy" and «The Development Strategy of Course Descriptions" the University carries out a clear policy; teaching and learning methods are chosen in accordance with intended learning outcomes. Special matrixes are developed for complying academic programs' outcomes, teaching and learning methods.

In a survey held in 2014 the students were asked to state their level of satisfaction with the education quality at VSU on a 10-point rating scale. 60-70% of the respondents rated the teaching level more than 7 and 61% were pleased with the teaching methods. Surveys showed that there are still practical problems, especially in increasing laboratory hours, number of experiments and in modernization of laboratories. Building conditions and resource base do not always give an opportunity to implement teaching and learning methods described in academic programs. Weaknesses of the university are mentioned in self-evaluation report and it is planned to undertake measures to eliminate the shortcomings. Now, modern teaching methods Bank is being developed which will contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning methods. It will be provided to all university departments as a guideline.

The University's teaching and learning methods selection policy will promote student-centered learning system.

**3.3** The students' assessment policy of the University is reflected in a number of regulations: "The regulations of testing, assessing and recording the students' knowledge", regulations on term papers, pedagogical practices, organization of final attestation, implementation and evaluation.

A number of methodological guidelines for the assessment were developed / assessment of the *extracurricular activities*, assessment of papers, etc. /. According to "Academic Program Development and Implementation Strategy", revision of the of student assessment system is carried out in VSU. It is required by the document that competency assessment methods, forms, technologies and standards should be noted in academic programs. 100-point scale is used for assessment, which is formed by a number of components. The aim of the University's policy is to carry out an assessment according to the intended outcomes, at the same time maintaining the academic honesty.

In new SCP assessment system and methods are noted before the outcomes. "The Student Assessment Guide" was developed for making the assessment policy available to the internal stakeholders. By the regulation on knowledge assessment approved in 2015, importance is attached to the students' participation in practical, seminar and laboratory activities and formative assessment should be applied more widely to ensure feedback.

Some measures are taken to ensure the academic integrity. Regulation on ensuring the academic honesty was developed, the written examinations are taken in pre-sealed notebooks computer testing is conducted. The reforms towards academic integrity have not been so effective so far. VSU is planning to create new mechanisms for that.

**3.4** Based on the "Strategy of Benchmarking Implementation" VSU has carried out comparative analysis of academic programs with RA and foreign Universities. The comparative analysis format of academic programs according to competency, teaching and learning methods were developed in the University.

The compliance of academic programs with other programs in terms of content is ensured by the involvement of VSU in EMINENCE and IANUS projects of ERASMUS MUNDUS program. The involvement of students in mobility programs is the way of checking the compliance of the academic programs / As of 1 January 2015 26 students were selected to study abroad and there will be 7 more students for 2015-16 academic year/. The surveys among the students studying through mobility programs are additional source for checking the compliancy of academic programs.

The compliancy of the academic programs is ensured by the participation of the University in MAHATMA project within the framework of TEMPUS program and the specialty "Education management" was introduced together with some European universities. Though, according to the

research of university, the academic programs are in compliance with other similar programs in content, VSU student mobility rate is still low.

**3.5** According to the tradition at VSU, the academic programs were discussed regularly in faculty educational-methodological councils or rectorate sessions. The policy being developed now at VSU is on the evaluation of academic programs of all specialties, prediction of the possible obstacles in quality assurance process, development of suggestions for improvement, provision of necessary recommendations. In 2014 pilot programs of academic programs' audit were carried out / The Russian Language and Literature" and "Pharmaceutical Chemistry"/. The students were also involved in monitoring groups. In 2015 monitoring and audit procedures were developed and implemented in the University. It is planned to conduct the audit of academic programs of Bachelor's level every four years and in Master's level every two years.

Round-tables, focus groups and qualitative and quantitative surveys were organized with internal and external stakeholders for clarifying the effectiveness of academic programs. But graduate surveys that are extremely important for evaluating the effectiveness of academic programs, haven't been conducted regularly because of the lack of graduates' base. The most frequently used forms of mechanisms are survey among the students, lecturers and employees of different departments. The other mechanisms are still in the process of introduction and do not operate systematically.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

While reviewing Bachelor's and Master's academic programs, the expert panel came to the conclusion that they mainly correspond to the mission, and in the case of existence of state educational standards, they were developed on their basis. The policy of the University was to make the development of academic programs in compliance with the requirements of the labor market. The teaching, learning and assessment methods were to be in accordance with the intended outcomes. According to the experts it is good that the regulations, procedures and steps of development of academic programs, educational-methodological guidelines and matrixes were developed for facilitating the transition period. In the developed technological maps of educational-methodological packages teaching, learning and assessment methods are presented in accordance with the competency. As a result, teaching and learning methods are diverse and rich.

It is planned to create a modern teaching methods Bank. Lecturers participate in trainings for mastering the new techniques. Many processes are either in testing phase or are being implemented. For example, the requirements of the labor market were taken into consideration, while developing and selecting the programs, but their effectiveness can be evaluated only after the first graduates.

There are changes in assessment system too, it became multifunctional but the evaluation is not yet done in accordance with the outcomes. The University has some problems in ensuring the academic honesty, although it is not suggested that the experts have seen cases of dishonest practice. It is simply evident from self-evaluation report and also from the information obtained during the meetings with students and lecturers.

Faculties and chairs take academic honesty very seriously but the university has yet to ensure there is standard practice applied across all faculties and programs for both part-time and full-time students.

The expert panel highly appreciate that the university compared its academic programs with the similar ones of other universities for encouraging the students' mobility.

However, it should be noted that the comparison was often mechanical in nature and programs of the universities chosen for comparison were not always recognized. In this case, the comparison itself was actually formal and was of little significance for academic programs.

The involvement of University and its employees in grant programs greatly contributed to the clarification of the University's goals and objectives, selection of the methodology of academic programs, development of innovative approaches.

In general the programs are in phase of modernization and particularly the introduction opportunities of transparent and student-centered approach of student's requirements are being developed. It is positive, that monitoring and audit mechanisms were developed for the policy of elaboration and implementation of academic programs. The experts are concerned that the lack of financial and material resources can hamper the implementation of the planned activities of the University.

The expert panel is sorry to note that although academic programs were improved in terms of content, the limited knowledge of foreign languages is an obstacle for mobility and internationalization. Perhaps the problem is not only that foreign language curriculum hours are not enough, but the traditional method of teaching.

It should be noted that the teaching and administrative staff are clearly aware of their weaknesses and shortcomings. It is not by chance that in the SWOT analysis of the standard, the group who carried out the self-evaluation, clearly wrote the steps that aim at ensuring the effectiveness of the criterion and therefore VSU its tactics in evaluating the weaknesses which can lead to positive results in case of correct management.

**SUMMARY: Taking into consideration that** Academic programs correspond to the mission of the University, according to competencies, innovative teaching, learning and assessment methods are introduced for creating student-centered environment, more attention is paid to the skills and abilities of the students, VSU introduces such mechanisms that will contribute to the compliance of academic programs with other similar programs, HEI carries out planned policy, evaluation mechanisms were developed for evaluating the effectiveness of implementation, they have been tested and are in the process of introduction, the expert panel concludes that VSU meets the requirements of Criterion 3.

**CONCLUSION:** The correspondence of VSU institutional capacities to the requirements of criterion 3 is **satisfactory**.

## CRITERION IV. STUDENTS

**Criterion: The TLI offers the students relevant support, aiming at providing the effectiveness of the learning atmosphere.**

### FINDINGS

**4.1** The mechanisms of recruitment and admission of students are well-defined. The admission of full-time students on Bachelor's program is carried out in accordance with the RA government admission procedure and the admission of part-time students is carried out in accordance with the decree confirmed by the Minister of Science and Education of RA. The admission in Master's program is carried out by the procedures defined by the University.

Despite the steps taken by HEI in recruiting the students, the number of full-time undergraduate students in VSU in 2015 decreased twice as compared to 2011. In 2010-2014 the admission of students in part-time studies also decreased. In recent years there has been a flow of students studying full-time to part-time. According to the University management, the reason is the low tuition fees of the part-time system, the working opportunities of part-time students, traffic problems and low expenses of students from villages. VSU mentions other reasons of decreasing the number of students in self-evaluation report, these are decrease in the number of applicants in the Republic of

Armenia, attraction of Universities of capital and relatively low tuition fees of private TLI of the region.

Admission thresholds have been gradually lowered for the purpose of increasing the student recruitment volumes, which can lead to the decrease of education quality.

For increasing the number of applicants in Bachelor's program the University developed the following mechanisms: ensuring University-school connection, organizing of school Olympiads. Within the work of "Faculty Days", pupils visit VSU, get acquainted with the conditions of the university, open lessons are organized, lab experiments are conducted and information campaigns are carried out in the other cities of the region. The information is provided to the applicants through the website of VSU.

Free training courses are organized on the examination subjects for preparing high school students for the admission. The courses are conducted by the best graduate students. The university has created various mechanisms on the recruitment of students but does not carry out the evaluation of the effectiveness of these mechanisms.

**4.2** In recent years the university has created mechanisms for revealing students' educational needs. The institution of academic advisors contributes to the revealing of students' needs. Their activities are managed by special regulations. Students have an opportunity to raise their concerns in regular meetings with the rector and the deans. The section "Question-Reply" of the web-site contributes to it too and part-time students apply more to it. The surveys and study of the students' suggestions carried out by the Center for Quality Assurance contribute to the revealing of educational needs of the University too. 30 percent of students made suggestions during the survey in 2013. Part-time students are not involved in surveys.

The role of Student's council is important in revealing the needs of the students. The students are involved in governing bodies (25%) and in different councils. But the review of the experts showed /review of Scientific Council protocols focus groups with students / that students are not so active in formal structures.

Although VSU have introduced mechanisms for identifying the needs of the students, they are not always met. Thus, for example, the university identified, but is still unable to create the necessary conditions for students with special needs.

**4.3** Some of the regulations of VSU include extra-curricular activities and provisions about consultancy / the regulations on "The organization of Educational Process through Academic Credits Transfer and Accumulation System and on testing, assessing and recording the students' knowledge", on "The organization of extra-curricular individual work of students", as well as regulations on the work of academic advisors/.

Institute of academic advisors was established in the University for consultancy.

There are special hours fixed in full-time curricular to receive the guidance from Academic advisors / hour per week and it is included into the workload of the lecturer /. 15 students are attached to one advisor.

Extra-curricular activities are organized for the students with low academic performance.

Students are informed about the participation in extra-curricular activities and advisory services through deans, academic advisors and "The Student Guide" given to the first-year students. The information is provided to the part-time students by electronic means. The chairs organize individual trainings and have approved schedule for consultancy. The total amount of hours for organizing the students' individual work included in the lecturers' workload has been raised from 6% in 2009 to 20% in 2014.

The language center's services are included in extra training courses and 70 students attend it per year which is a low number as compared to the number of students of the whole university.

According to students all the lecturers are available and are ready to provide them with necessary consultancy. The students with good academic performance also receive the necessary consultancy. According to the results of a sociological survey conducted in 2014 students consider the advisors' work effective by 53%, the extracurricular work with students done by lecturers by 54%, the help received from the lecturer in organizing and carrying out individual work by 67%. There is no deep analysis of the survey results and the causes of ineffective assessment of work are not clear. One of the shortcomings of this system is that part-time students are not involved in it. Though part-time students are aware of these services and can receive it upon request but there are no certain mechanisms for that.

**4.4** There are no special regulations and schedule for applying administrative staff for support or guidance, students feel free to communicate with the dean office and can receive assistance any time. Psychological and juridical centers were established for supporting the VSU students. There are other mechanisms in applying to the administrative staff in the University. For example, the phone numbers of subdivisions and e-mail addresses are available in "The Student Guide" and on the website of the TLI. Part-time students usually apply to it. The Student Council plays a great role in ensuring student-administration relations and presents the issues raised by the student to the University management.

**4.5.** The career and distance learning center was established at the University, it is now renamed into "Graduate and Career Support Center". The center conducted a number of researches on labor-market, the effectiveness of employer-University collaboration, satisfaction of graduates, university graduates employment. The center organizes seminars for students to acquire necessary skills to enter the labor market, to establish contact with the employers. Career Center cooperates with the Viva-Cell MTS Company as a result of which the tuition fees of more than forty students are fully compensated by the company. Within this cooperation a number of students and lecturers took part in trainings, summer schools, and had their internship in different departments of the company. The Center also collaborates with the regional employment center. Because of the low motivation the cooperation with other employers of the region is not effective. The work with graduates is not yet effective, there is a lack of human resources; the center has one position which is not sufficient for carrying out such voluminal work. The work of the center with the graduates can be facilitated by the introduction of new electronic register, which includes data of recent graduates and students. Career Center plans to create a database of information and resumes of graduates, which would increase the effectiveness of feedback.

**4.6** VSU Student Scientific Society's aim is involve students in research activities of the University. It functions according to the Charter of Student Scientific Society. The mechanisms of involving students in research activities have not been developed yet. Work of the Student Scientific Society is not yet effective. One of the reasons is that the chairs do not have approved certain priorities for research. Students take part in republican and inter-university scientific conferences. A research complex laboratory has been established which enables the graduate students of Natural Sciences to perform experiments with new appliances. Thus, the students are not fully involved in the research activities of the University. The published works of the students are very few. There are no joint scientific works and published articles of students and lecturers. In Master's program the students conduct research in the last year of their studies.

**4.7** Students' rights and ways of their solution are reflected in a number of University regulations: Charter of the Student Council, VSU inner disciplinary rules, regulation on the suggestions of the students and ways of making complaints and their discussion.

The Student Council is the body that protects the students' rights. 10% of VSU students are involved in Student Council. As a rule, the part-time students do not take part in the activities of Student Council. There is a commission on protecting the rights of the students in Student Council. The University financially supports the organization of the activities of the Student Council, but that sum is mainly used for the organization of cultural and sport events.

Students can apply to academic advisors in case of violation of their rights. Since the meetings with the rector are regular, students said that they apply directly to the rector. In the case of conflicts during the examination period students can apply to the Exam Supervision Commission.

A Juridical advisory center was founded at VSU in 2013 and its aim is to create certain conditions in the University for developing legal culture, raising legal awareness. Thus, there are certain mechanisms for the protection of students' rights. However, there is no special rights-defending independent body at the university.

**4.8** Surveys are considered to be the main mechanism for the evaluation of educational, advisory and other services of VSU. For the surveys a set of tools has been developed for the evaluation of educational services, services offered by support staff, educational resources, corruption risks, student satisfaction rate. The survey "The lecturer through the eyes of the student at VSU" is conducted regularly and has a special regulation.

The surveys are conducted by the Center for quality assurance. It is good that students participate in surveys too. But the mechanisms ensuring the evaluation of the educational, advisory and other services and quality assurance are not coordinated yet and it reduces their effectiveness.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

The expert panel is of opinion, that the university has various mechanisms for recruitment of students, but it has never evaluated their effectiveness. According to the administrative staff of VSU, the decrease of the number of students is because of the social-economic conditions, migration rate of the region, poverty, but it is possible that the effectiveness of the mechanisms implemented is low and they should be altered and select modern methods for having more applicants.

Experts were convinced, that survey mechanisms of the educational needs of students are more effective. The activities of Institute of Academic Advisory are quite interesting; it provides information about the needs of students to governing bodies. Students can discuss the issues at the meetings with the deans, the rector that are held regularly. Students are involved in decision-making bodies; participate in the monitoring groups organized by the Centre for QA.

It is positive that students' survey questionnaires are designed in such a way, so that the students are given the opportunity to make suggestions and these suggestions are later reviewed.

The expert panel thinks that proper attention is not paid to the educational needs of part-time students. They didn't complain about their status, but when experts compare the opportunities provided to full-time and part-time students, it is clear that there are big differences among them.

The survey of the educational needs of students in recent years led to changes in academic programs, practical, laboratory hours were added, teaching and learning methods were improved. Senior and graduate students noted that there are positive changes in the improvement of educational environment. But there are specialties that need more financial investments. For example, students studying biology have many problems with the lack of material and technical resources.

There is no special body ensuring the protection of rights of students in the University. Student Council is in charge of it, but its rights-defending activities yield to the cultural, sports and leisure

activities. The expert panel expresses concern about the part-time students, who do not participate in the activities of Student Council.

Though the students and Student Council emphasized that they do not have any problems concerning the protection of rights, the expert panel is of opinion that the institutional mechanisms of the protection of students' rights are not reliable. The university simply carries out "favor gaining" policy towards the students for ensuring their quantitative composition. At the same time the experts think, that created mechanisms /academic advisors, meetings with rector and deans/ enable to solve the conflicts. In fact, the part-time students are not involved in those activities. According to the self-evaluation, only 15 percent of students are satisfied with the processes of protection of rights. Therefore, this issue should be discussed and revised. The activities of raising legal awareness of juridical advisory center can be a good means in future.

According to the expert panel the administrative staff is available for the students and they can apply to them any time.

Experts acknowledge that career services are being carried out for the students, but the service is still not functioning effectively, as there is a lack of human resources. "Success stories" of providing the students with job through Career Center students are few, that is why culture of trust towards the center has not been developed among the students, the university is unable to create proper motivation for employers. The activities in ensuring the graduates' feedback are in initial stage.

According to the experts the involvement of students in research activities is not coordinated. The University has much to do in this field.

The University has mechanisms for evaluation of students' educational, advisory and other services and for quality assurance, but they are not coordinated and are in finalization stage.

**SUMMARY: Taking into consideration, that** VSU provides the students with necessary support for ensuring the effectiveness of the educational environment, but the evaluation mechanism of effectiveness need to be improved. Despite the shortcomings, the expert panel concludes that the university meets the requirements of the criterion 4, as the basic principles of protection of the rights of students, their involvement in decision-making processes, healthy environment, guidance and support to students are preserved.

**CONCLUSION:** The correspondence of VSU institutional capacities to the requirements of criterion 4 is **satisfactory**.

## CRITERION IV. TEACHING AND SUPPORT STAFF

**Criterion: The TLI provides for a high quality faculty and staff to achieve the set goals for academic programs and institution's mission.**

### FINDINGS

**5.1** According to the development conception of 2014-2018, VSU is staffed with qualified professionals for conducting the academic programs. A number of regulations are developed for the implementation of that policy. The regulation on the competitive selection of teaching staff and staff appointment order, annual syllabus criteria, regulation on concluding of a new employment contract without a competitive selection when it expires, awarding of honorary titles were approved. Part of the regulations were approved when the university was still a pedagogical institute and haven't been revised yet/. The professional staff of the University is staffed through a vacancy competition, invited professionals and part-time employees according to the RA Labor Code and Convention and also according to the regulations of VSU. Adjacent to Scientific Council, there is a competition board, which

strictly supervises the legality of the professionals' staffing. This board works according to the fixed regulation of VSU. The teaching staff comprises of lecturers, assistants, associate professors and professors.

VSU regularly conducts professional training of the teaching staff, analysis and evaluation of their pedagogical skills and personal qualities and age composition. According to the date of 2015, the 78% of the University lecturers have academic degrees and titles, there are 11 professors, 118 associate professors, 1 NAS RA associate member. HEI's potential is sufficient for the implementation of academic programs. When necessary the University invites part-time employees.

**5.2** It is noted in the "Academic Program Development and Implementation Strategy" that academic programs should also include the necessary human resources, but there are not special requirements for the competences of teaching staff in academic programs descriptions.

VSU is staffed by announced competition. Basic education of teachers is in compliance with the direction of the courses they teach. The professional qualities of the applied candidates are inspected in accordance with the aims of the academic programs. VSU is also staffed with invited professionals. The priority is given to the candidates who are engaged in research or methodological activities.

The lecturers delivering special professional courses, as a rule, have academic degree (or academic title, honorable title in arts etc.) or work experience in an appropriate field. In fact, according to the academic programs, the requirements to teaching staff hasn't been defined yet, but according to VSU Quality Assurance System implementation and development strategy 2014-2018 "The teaching staff qualifications for each program are comprehensively stated".

**5.3.** The procedure of the assessment of teaching staff started in 2009 in Vanadzor State pedagogical Institute by the regulation of student survey "The lecturer through the eyes of the student". This survey is conducted periodically; the results are set in local net, discussed in scientific council and departments. There are also traditional methods of assessing the lecturer's work, for example lesson observation according to regulation of organizing lesson observations and lesson discussions in chairs.

The University planned to develop and introduce lecturers' rating system, the important indicator of which is research work. Every lecturer of VSU presents SCPs to the chairs. At the end of the year they present a report and by the discussion of the reports the activities of the lecturer is assessed.

**5.4** The regulation on supplementary education was developed in 2013 the aim of which is to ensure the continuous improvement of lecturers' general, curriculum and research capabilities. The department of supplementary education realizes a five-year program, on the quality enhancement of lecturers, according to a credit system. This program consists of two main parts i.e. educational and research -methodological and the schedule is fixed. The lecturers are trained in foreign languages, computer skills and legal awareness raising. From 2013-2015, 201 lecturers and 20 members from support staff took part in the trainings and quality enhancement courses.

**5.5** The University doesn't have certain policy for ensuring the stability of the teaching staff. But HEI tries to ensure that stability and generation shift at the expense of its graduates. 70% of teaching and support staff are VSU graduates. As there are not so many universities in Vanadzor, the age of the human resources is not high. It is planned to increase the number of students in PhD studies which can be a reliable source for the supplementation of teaching staff of the University. VSU has acquired right to organize postgraduate education for about 12 scientific disciplines. The age of about 38.4% of the teaching staff members is above 60. It concerns especially to the department of mathematics.

**5.6** VSU does not have a developed policy to ensure the professional progress of teaching staff, but encourages them in acquisition of academic degrees and titles. The University organizes trainings for

ensuring the progress of the teaching staff. One of the means of ensuring professional progress is the publication of lecturers' scientific articles for free. But activities done in this field are not yet sufficient for the improvement of research capacity of employees.

**5.7** The training and attestation of administrative and support staff is in the regulation process. VSU carries out policy in the encouragement of the teaching staff and development of procedures. /in accordance with professional, pedagogical and other standards/. But there is lack of encouraging mechanisms for administrative, teaching and support staff.

Grant programs can be a good opportunity for the development of University's professional qualities, but the limited knowledge of foreign languages is a barrier for the teaching staff. The University organizes training courses for the lecturers, language center was established and the fees for training are very low.

VSU plans to use financial leverages for ensuring the professional growth. The regulation is in the process of development, the aim of which is to allot rating- distinguishing based payment to the lecturers.

**5.8** HEI has necessary administrative and support staff to achieve the strategic goals. The administrative, support, technical employees comprise 42% of University employees. In the last three years the support staff was optimized (from 71 employees to 49) and it is now 11%. The administrative staff is 22% and maybe this number is justified in the phase of reforms. The regulation on training and attestation of administrative and support staff is developed for improving the system.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

The transition from institute to university creates a necessity in review and processing human resources in the field of management and activity organization. The regulations developed in the pedagogical institute are still preserved in the university.

Of course it is understandable that it has lately become a University and the regulations are currently reviewed.

Teaching staff recruitment policy at VSU is carried out through competition and out-competition regulations. There are not still certain requirements for teaching staff in academic programs but it is required by quality assurance strategic plan. According to expert panel, it is positive that there are training and qualification improvement activities for lecturers at VSU.

For this purpose a special credit system was developed, which will likely be completed when the lecturers' rating system is introduced. Now the university carries out activities in this direction, and a regulation on rating- distinguishing based payment to the lecturers is being developed.

But the trainings of the lecturers are not based on the identified needs, they are obligatory. Because of low motivation and workload the staff doesn't always participate in qualification improvement courses and that lessens the efficiency.

The financial difficulties hinder the efforts of the university to support the professional growth of the teaching staff. The grant program resources are not implemented fully for the training of lecturers.

The teaching staff is distinguished by its stability. However, there is a need in ensuring generation shift in some specialties and this issue is among the priorities of the university and as experts noted, it is solved by employing the best graduates of the University. Most of the administrative staff and lecturers proudly notice that they are graduates of Vanadzor State Pedagogical Institute.

Though the University encourages the professional growth of the lecturers and the number of lecturers with academic titles and degrees increased, VSU doesn't have sufficient potential for the development of research.

According to expert panel the administrative and support staff is sufficient to achieve set goals.

**SUMMARY:** Taking into consideration that the University has qualified teaching and support staff for achieving the mission and purpose of the University, expert panel concludes that VSU meets the requirements of criterion 5.

**CONCLUSION:** The correspondence of VSU institutional capacities to the requirements of criterion 5 is **satisfactory**.

## CRITERION VI. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

**Criterion: The TLI has well established mechanisms for linking research with learning**

### FINDINGS

**6.1** Research activities and its continuous development were one of the priorities of strategic plan of VSPI (2010-2015), and are one of the priorities of development conception of VSU (2014-2018). In 2015 "The reform conception of scientific development of VSU" and "The priorities of scientific development at VSU in 2015-2019" were approved by the Scientific Council. But the priorities in presented documents were different. Even in self-evaluation report it is noted that the priorities of the University are Armenian Studies and Pedagogy, in other places "life and earth sciences, efficient and safe energy, information and communication technologies" are noted too.

The governing system was reformed. There was a center of knowledge and science by 2013, which was coordinated by the Vice-Rector on research and academic work, now there is a position of Vice-Rector on Science and International Relations.

Since 2015 "Vanadzor State University Bulletin" is included in the list of periodic scientific publication of HAC (Higher Attestation Commission). From the September of 2015 the approved "Regulation on research grants of Vanadzor State University" will start functioning. The budget allocations for research are not consistent with the strategic priorities of the University.

**6.2** The reform conception of scientific development of VSU and the priorities of scientific development at VSU in 2015-2019 were approved by the Scientific Council but the planning was not carried out.

The planning of mid-term and long-term plans is carried out in chairs and is fixed in work plans but they do not stem from above mentioned documents. The chairs plan research activities in accordance with the lecturer's interests, but they are not clarified in time. Every lecturer should publish a number of articles during the year and at the end of the year should present a report. The chairs present reports to governing bodies about the performance of lecturers.

VSU plans the organization of republican and international conferences, establishment of professional councils, involvement of graduate and PhD students in research activities, commercialization of scientific results and their withdrawal to foreign and inner markets, development of programs to promote the growth of young scientists, involvement of students in conferences, competitions seminars, performing scientific business trips of employees, cooperation with the branch institutes of NAS RA and research centers but all these activities are still vague and there is no implementation grounds for them.

Moreover, the university regularly organizes scientific conferences, but the articles of employees do not have significant place in the collection. It is mentioned in self-evaluation report, that only 31 from 114 articles published in the collection are the articles of the employees of the university, i. e 27%. One of the shortcomings of the management is that the financial resources are not only little, but are not used effectively. In 2013 VSU provided 3 million drams for the purpose of financing research activities within the chairs, which is 0.4% of the budget. Though none of the chairs applied for the provided money.

**6.3** Though there is a conception for the development for research field and research priorities are determined, certain policy hasn't been developed in this direction yet. In 2014-2015 several regulations have been developed at VSU. "The Regulation of research grants of Vanadzor State University" will function only from September, 2015 and can give positive results in case of financing. The procedure on Academic Integrity was developed but these procedures are not coordinated and they seem not to be the part of the strategy implementation which allows approving the existence of the developed policy.

Resource base of research is also weak. There is an internet connection in library but HEI doesn't have electronic library. The catalogues of the university are in development phase and the literature is not digitalized. Scientific cabinets are equipped with computers, some of which need modernization.

The budget for research is partly distributed based on the applications, reports presented by the chairs and on the events of the work plan.

In the budget of 2015, 10 thousand drams are already purposed for grants that will contribute to the development of research activities. In 2014 several chairs have not published scientific works at all (Art, mathematics) (Report of the Rector 2014). University relates it to the lack of financial means. The university doesn't have programs developing the potential of young human resources, because of the lack of necessary laboratories or conditions research is carried out in other universities or scientific institutions.

**6.4** VSU attaches importance to the internationalization of research activities but hasn't reached any positive results yet. There are not publications in internationally recognized journals.

University considers the limited knowledge of foreign languages to be an obstacle in the internationalization of research activities. Thus, Language Center was established for the training of the lecturers. From the second term of 2012-2013 academic year 128 employees attended the courses of English language, 74 of which attended 1<sup>st</sup> level courses and 54 to 2<sup>nd</sup> level.

The University lecturers and students participate in scientific conferences in CIS countries and abroad.

**6.5** One of the stipulations for the development of science sphere of the University is the "integration of science and education". Still in the Bachelor's course of study the students deal with research work when they start to write term papers, then graduation papers. The students at Master's course of study take part in the workshops of the chairs. A part of their graduation papers, as a rule, deal with the research themes of the chairs.

Starting from 2015-16 academic year the research component in the Master's academic programs will increase till 48 credits (40%), 30 credits of which will be given to research and practice.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

The development of science is one of the priorities of the University, but the budget allocations for the research activities do not approve the priority of this field. /0.4 % of the budget/. The expert panel is convinced that without sustainable investments, it is impossible to ensure the development of the science. The conception of science development was developed in the university but there is

no strategic plan with clear timetable and people responsible for it. At the end of this criterion the university attached chart of activities and development of science at VSU where it is noted that by the end of 2015 they will “set a timetable for the implementation of scientific research and to develop system of accountability”.

There is no short-time planning based on long-term one. It is true that chairs make short-term plans based on individual research plans of the lecturers, but they do not stem from the general strategic plan and are not the part of the planning.

VSU organizes conferences, the collection of articles is published but there are no publications in internationally recognized journals /having impact-factor/, the research of the university is of not great interest for donor organizations and the culture of fundraising is not still formed at the university.

The form and the topics of Scientific conferences concerned the experts because they are of planned nature, are not organized in a scientific discussion format and therefore, do not have practical importance.

HEI explains the problems in scientific field by the lack of financial resources, but according to the expert panel one of the reasons for it are the workload of lecturers and the lack of resources which restricts the possibility of carrying out a serious research. It is noted in self-evaluation report that two research groups are involved in the work of collecting Zoryan's and Toumanyanyan's concordances. In 2013 the groups were dissolved because of the financial difficulties of the University.

The expert panel considers that even if in the field of the Armenian studies, which is the research priority of the university, the conditions are so poor, then the conditions in the other fields are much worse.

In 2007-2012 4 research projects, funded by the state budget were carried out, but currently there is no funds from RA state budget.

The absence of research priorities of chairs, may lead to inefficient spending of funds. Besides, it's difficult to procure the grant funds.

The Expert panel is concerned that the broad list of priorities established in the field of science / Armenian Studies life and earth sciences, efficient and safe energy, information and communication technologies / may lead to no tangible results.

The University takes the first steps in ensuring academic integrity. There is no plagiarism detection program at the University.

The examination of the list of published scientific works proves that they are mostly the materials of conferences and publications in journals without impact factor. Even in this case the number of publications is not reassuring. It is not clear to what extent some of the priorities (e.g. efficient and safe energy, information and communication technologies) correspond to the potential of the University.

**SUMMARY:** According to the expert panel, though the university considers the development of science and research education to be the priorities of the university and has ambitious goals, its policy does not comply with it, priorities set in the field of science are not realistic. There are no mid-term and short-term research plans. The link between research activities and learning is still weak. The research activities are very limited in terms of both national and international results and of involvement of staff and students. However, the University has human resources and in case of effective management can achieve certain results.

**CONCLUSION:** The correspondence of VSU institutional capacities to the requirements of criterion 6 is **unsatisfactory**.

## CRITERION VII. INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES

**Criterion: TLI has its own property and resources, which effectively support the implementation of its stated mission and objectives and create a learning environment.**

### FINDINGS

**7.1** VSU has 1 administrative, 3 educational subsidiary buildings. The buildings are divided according to specializations: humanitarian, scientific and artistic. There is a small hall in the basement for shooting and physical education. The Computer Center after S. Mergelyan was established in 2008 with 51 computers. There are 7 laboratories, 15 rooms (with 1-5 computers), in 8 of which there are video projectors, electronic blackboards. Lecturers apply beforehand for conducting lessons in these classrooms and equal availability of the rooms is ensured.

It is mentioned in self-evaluation report, that the University allocates amount of money from budget annually for the repair and reconstruction of buildings and that there are good building conditions at VSU, but in reality only the administrative building is in good condition. The conditions of the other buildings are not so good, the chairs, dean offices, rooms are small and not convenient for having break or rest.

Some classrooms are renovated and equipped, others are not. Reading halls can serve up to 232 readers, but there is not still a digital library, which reduces the efficiency of reading halls. Now the library is being reconstructed, catalogues are being digitized, but currently the library still does not meet the modern requirements. Financial problems have made it difficult to modernize the literature of the library.

The University does not have an electronic library, although the measures are taken in this direction. The VSU library cooperates with the Vanadzor City Library and the Innovation and Enterprizing National Center but does not have contracts with national library of Republic of Armenia or with NAS RA Fundamental Scientific library which could provide students and staff with necessary literature. There is no dormitory which limits the inflow of students from other regions. There is no canteen in University area.

**7.2** VSU financial means are formed by budget and out-budget entries. The tuition fees form the most part – 76, 5 % of the VSU budget entry, State financing – 17,5 %, other income – 6 %. The tuition fees are high as compared to the poverty rates in the region although are lower than the fees of Yerevan state universities on the same specialization. The mission of VSU intends to educate competent specialists with fundamental and applicable knowledge and practical skills, for which rich resource base is needed. But the University hasn't ensured all the necessary resources yet. And it is not able to make essential allocations for the research activities too.

According to the survey carried out, the financial income of the University decreases which is dangerous for the implementation of mission and purpose.

**7.3** The budget allocations are not made on the basis of strategic priorities, in each new academic year the budget estimates of revenues and expenditures is done on the basis of actual data analysis of previous years. The budget allocations are based on the accrued money from the accounting department and the department of education, the future total expenses and need based applications of subdivision. The scheme of the budget is formed by Rector, vice-rectors and the chief accountant and is discussed in the session of the financial committee of VSU and in the case of being approved; they are submitted to VSU Governing Board for approval.

Thus, the policy of distribution of financial resources in accordance with the implementation of aims of academic programs is missing.

7.4. HEI has planned to carry out reforms in academic programs. The University succeeded in developing good descriptions of academic programs, SCPs and intended outputs in details. Joint methods of teaching and learning are planned for ensuring these outcomes, but the resource base, building conditions do not allow their full implementation. All the subdivisions submit pre-applications. The specialist of procurement coordination department recruits them according to goods, and then decides on purchasing goods, works and service volumes. The University's financial base is not rich, and not planned expenses of the financial resources / according to strategy plan/ endanger the implementation of the strategy.

7.5. Information and documentation processes are manageable, documentation circulation is carried out by "Vanadzor State Pedagogical Institute after H. Toumanyan " and SNPO general department regulations. But it wasn't reviewed after becoming the University. There is also a regulation developed on filling out the register.

The circulation of information and documentation is done through website and inner network.

7.6 VSU has 1 medical center only in one building (1 nurse works there). Each year VSU allocates certain financial resources for obtaining medicine for medical center. All the first year students pass a compulsory medical examination, and since 2013 it has been used for the whole staff too. The University acquires resort packages for the university employees. But there is no certain regulation for it.

The provision of health and security is one of the main issues of "Chair of PE Theory and Methodology". The members of the chair freely train groups of different type of sports and games, as the result of which the students win prizes in the republican student competitions.

VSU headquarter together with a special squad of Emergency situations of Lori region carries out planned events.

The building conditions are not convenient for ensuring the rest of staff, there is no canteen and gym-hall at the University. But University planned to undertake an improving policy towards it.

Students with special needs study in warmly and caring atmosphere, but resources appropriate to their needs are missing. The expert panel met 2 students *with special educational needs*. These two students prove that the students with disabilities can achieve success at VSU. The university is also engaged in a developing a distance learning non-award bearing course for *students with SEN* using Moodle. This is an exciting development that will contribute to the inclusivity of the university and also has potential to lead to research output.

7.7. There are some mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of resources. The efficiency of allocated funds by State is constantly checked by the relevant structures. The effectiveness of the University's grant programs is monitored by programs' coordinating structures and organizations. The University also planned to established institute for external financial audit. VSU is also planning to introduce an external audit of the financial institution. The evaluation of resources, availability of services and evaluation of their efficiency is carried out mainly through surveys. This process is not yet coordinated, but the strategy of the University gives an opportunity to correct the process of the ensuring resources. The lowest of the received answers (53%) concerns the workload of the special cabinets, the highest (67%) concerns the literature of the library.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

VSU tries to create necessary learning environment for the implementation of academic programs. At the meeting with expert panel, students and lecturers assured that the resources are sufficient for

organizing effective education. But if we put the usage of resources in comparison with the previous criteria, we will see that the reasons of weaknesses in all the criteria are mostly the lack of resources. The digitalization of catalogues of the Library has already started, but there is no electronic library yet. Taking into account that the University doesn't have a dormitory and the majority of the students are from villages and other cities, it limits the opportunities to study the assigned literature and students spare additional time for finding it. Mostly part-time students are affected by it.

The resources are more or less able to meet the humanitarian and math-oriented academic programs. The effectiveness of the implementation of academic programs of Biology, Chemistry, Physics, etc is declining.

There are no conditions for food and rest at the University. One of the most serious shortcomings is that the budget allocations are not done in accordance with the priorities of the strategic plan. If we take into account the lack of financial resources and their decrease in recent years it becomes clear that it is the shortcoming of management and it endangers the strategic objectives and can cause an inappropriate dispersion of resources.

It's true that each year the needs of the subdivisions are taken into account by budget but it might also lead to an incorrect distribution. Because of inefficient distribution of budget, VSU planned to optimized positions which will affect moral atmosphere of the staff. Before applying to such an extreme step it is appropriate to carry out an external financial audit and clarify current policy weaknesses.

The financial reports make it clear that the university has invested considerable funds necessary for the purchase of equipment, but they are still insufficient to ensure effective education.

Information and documentation processes are in relatively better situation. The internal network greatly contributes to it. But it became clear during the visit that the lack of paper hampers the documentation processes in subdivisions. Although the staff certifies that everything is fine, but, for example, for providing a sample of SCP to experts, they had to procure a paper.

The University has serious problems in providing health and safety of services; the needs of students with disabilities are not taken into account.

The mechanisms of evaluation of the applicability, availability and efficiency of resources for students and staff are combined in a single system, which makes the evaluation difficult. It is necessary to carry out the evaluation according to the priorities of strategic plan and annual plans.

**SUMMARY:** The expert panel concludes, that the resources are not sufficient for the implementation of mission and purpose of the University. There are not always material and technical base and building conditions for implementing teaching and learning methods fixed in academic programs. Mechanisms of evaluation of applicability, availability and efficiency of resources for the internal stakeholders are not coordinated.

VSU does not have policy for the effective management of financial resources which hampers the creation of learning environment and effective implementation of the mission and purpose of the University.

**CONCLUSION.** The correspondence of VSU institutional capacities to the requirements of criterion 7 is **unsatisfactory**.

## CRITERION VII. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

**Criterion: TLI is accountable to the government and society at large for the education it offers and the resources it uses to meet these objectives.**

## **FINDINGS**

**8.1** The University has no regulation on accountability but there is a tradition of presenting reports. Each year the Rector presents a report to VSU council. Then it is put on the university's website. Performance analysis of previous financial year's budget and "Complex of action plan of combat corruption" performances are presented at Council meeting. The Rector presents the report to the staff meeting which is attended by students as well.

Heads of departments (non-academic) present a report at the end of the calendar year, academic departments and professors at the end of the academic year, deans of the faculties present it at the end of the academic year and at the end of the calendar year. Statements of academic and administrative departments are given according to the university structure. All the reports are added to the University website and excerpts are published in mass media. They are presented to Ministry of Education and Science of RA and statistical department.

**8.2** Information is provided to public by means of "Vanadzor State University" biweekly newspaper, local "Lori TV" channel, "Banber VSU" programs. Since 2013 "Vanadzor State University" newspaper is delivered to state universities, to Vanadzor and regional schools.

In 2006, press and printing department was established, which ensures the provision of information to stakeholders and society. The activities of the University of almost all the fields are placed on the official website of VSU.

**8.3** The formation of public relations, taking into account the ambition of HEI to play a great role in the northern regions of RA is of strategic importance. Feedback from public is mainly provided by Department of Cooperation and Relations mainly through the website. The materials are mostly in Armenian. There is a problem in presenting news in other languages (English and Russian). Since the development of external relations and internationalization are among the priorities of the university, it is a big gap. The number of visitors of the official website of the University has increased during the last 5 years. A great attention is paid to the use of social internet websites. Several groups in Facebook are specifically active.

VSU cooperates with mass-media too. The university authorities participate in TV round-tables, debates and press conferences.

Another means of providing information and feedback is accepting the citizens' applications and responding to them. The applications are accepted in the general office and are put into circulation. The mechanisms of forming relations with the public and providing feedback are developing slowly at the University; the newly formed structure is working out corresponding procedures. The PR system is not yet institutionalized.

**8.4** Certain attention is paid to the social-educative activities. Cultural, military-patriotic and sports events have been organized at the University, numerous meetings and open lessons have been organized with the participants of Artsakh War.

VSU supports the socially unsecured class and gives them discounts on the tuition fee. Free trainings for the admission to the University are conducted for the children from poor families.

Language Center provides services to students and public by below-market prices, VSU provides consultation to the students through Psychological and Juridical centers.

The program "Returning Student" is implemented, which aims at re-qualifying the university graduates who are not working by their received qualification. Foundations were created for distance learning, which will improve the learning conditions of part time-students and students with special needs. Through variety of humanitarian causes "History of the Armenian people", "History of Civilizations", "Philosophy" etc, VSU tries to transmit civic qualities to students and to spread universal and patriotic values.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

According to the expert panel, even with no certain defined regulation on accountability, the practice of presenting reports is wide-spread. The reports are a good way to evaluate the implementation of the University's mission and development conception. But since the accountability mechanism is not developed completely, it is not carried out in accordance with SP's directions, which is the shortcoming of governing system.

Experts also appreciate the fact that VSU provides information on its activities through web, social networks but the work with media is carried out in a proper way.

HEI has a good experience in ensuring feedback from the public. Constant contact with schools is ensured, it tries to find common ground for cooperation with employers, provides services through a number of centers, but all these activates are not coordinated, so it does not provide sufficient output for HEI.

The University hasn't carried out the evaluation of the above-mentioned mechanisms, so there are no data on effectiveness. Carrying out its mission of providing educational services in the northern regions of RA, the University tries to find ways for cooperating more closely with regional and local authorities.

According to experts, the establishment of number of centers at HEI is a good idea, as they can become institutions providing public services, but it would be better if they be self-financed organizations and not be financed by the university budget.

**SUMMARY:** VSU is accountable to the government and society at large for the education it offers and the resources it uses to meet these objectives, ensures transparency of its procedures and processes and availability, has created mechanisms that takes care of transferring values to the society.

**CONCLUSION:** The correspondence of VSU institutional capacities to the requirements of criterion 8 is **satisfactory**.

## **CRITERION IX. EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND INTERNATIONALIZATION**

**The TLI promotes experience exchange and enhancement through its sound external relations practices, thus promoting internationalization of the institution.**

### **FINDINGS**

**9.1** In its mission, HEI attaches importance to its integration to the Common European Education Area. The development of external relations and internationalization is emphasized in the Development Conception of 2010-2015. They are considered to be one of the priorities of the University. VSU Scientific Council approved several documents which are meant to contribute to the development of external relations and internationalization of VSU. Several regulations have been developed for that purpose: Regulation of the Department of Educational Reforms and Relations, Regulation on Development of International Activities and Strategic Cooperation, Regulation on the Development Strategy of Annual International Activities.

For promoting the internationalization process foreign languages (English, German, Spanish and Russian) are taught at Language Center in compliance with the requirements of language proficiency programs of pan-European system.

The development of external relations at VSU aims at establishing effective relations with other universities of RA and with external stakeholders.

VSU places accent on cooperation with Lori Region Schools and professional institutions. In 2010 a subdivision of university-school relations was established at the Department of Educational Reforms and External Relations, which operates in accordance with the regulation adopted by the Scientific Council of the University and annual work plan.

**9.2** In 2009-2012 the department of education reforms and external relations was in charge of ensuring international relations. The department operated under the vice-rector on education. Since 2013 the department was renamed “Department of Relations and Cooperation” and has been supervised by the vice-rector on science and International Relations. The department informs the students, staff and administrative employees about grant programs, republican and international conferences, seminars and other activities. It provides information and practical assistance to the Erasmus Mundus program applicants to correctly fill in the necessary documents. The staff of the Department also meets guests from abroad, ensures their comfort and deals with seminar organizational issues.

**9.3** In the last three years there has been a progress in the strategy of the development of international activities and in all the directions of work plan. The University is a member of 10 international consortiums. The overall number of the members of the consortiums is 157 among which European and post-soviet leading universities. VSU has bilateral cooperation agreements with the universities of Russian Federation, Belarus, Kazakhstan Poland, Germany, etc.

VSU cooperates with a number of universities of RA in the frames of university consortium.

VSU cooperates with number of organizations; IREX, Open Society Fund (Soros Fund), VivaCell MTS, National Office of EACEA. So, the graduates can use labor market opportunities and get feedback from the employers. HEI participates in Tempus and Erasmus Mundus programs.

VSU is an active member of the Laboratory of International Communication as well as a partner university in nine grant projects.

According to the statistical analysis of ERASMUS+ national office ranks VSU the second in the number of international projects with only YSU in the first place.

Another major trend in external relations is VSU participation in regional projects to foster Francophony. The projects are carried out within the frameworks of the bilateral cooperation agreement with Lori Region Council. Since 2008 the University has been productively involved in the activities of the Organization of French Language Retired Teachers (GREF).

In recent years the University has signed cooperation agreements with 14 foreign higher educational institutions, is a member of 10 consortiums, which enabled the students and staff of the university to participate in activities of the Laboratory of International Communication (Kostroma-2010, 2011, Darmstadt 2012). The articles submitted by them have been published in the collection of the Laboratory’s activities. So far 8 joint collections of scientific articles have been published. VSU staff members were invited to Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences to deliver lectures and workshops. In 2013 the regular session of the Laboratory was held in Vanadzor.

In order to create an active internal system of Quality Assurance the VSPI participated in grant project N 15110 “Quality Assurance and Assessment of Education” offered by the Armenian office of Open Society Fund (Soros). HEI participated in another Soros Fund project, “Development and Investment of Mechanisms of Quality Enhancement of Academic programmes” (Grant N 16532) which resulted in establishment of MA program. “Conception of Development and Investment of Academic

programs” was developed based on the model of the above-mentioned MA program and all the academic programs of the University have been revised in compliance with Tuning-Methodology. VSU established relations with not only European, but also with universities of CIS countries. The University closely cooperates with the Armenian Department of “Rossotrudnichestvo” Agency. The cooperation includes scientific and practical events and Russian language courses. HEI effectively cooperates with VivaCell MTS. In 2010 a specialist of the Department of Educational Reforms and Relations was granted IREX scholarship of MA education in the USA. VSU is involved in several projects of Tempus: MAHATMA- the project resulted in the development of MA program “Education Management”, **VERITAS**-the specific objectives of the project is to promote postgraduate studies. **LeAGUE**- the objective of the project is to develop a network of lifelong learning in Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine. SSRULLI- the project aims at development of Lifelong Learning, GOVERN –the aim of the project is to improve the governing system of HEI. The University is also a member of the international consortiums of two long-term projects EMINECE and IANUS within the frameworks of ERASMUS MUNDUS academic mobility program under EACEA. 26 BA and MA students studied or study at different European universities (France, Portugal, Sweden, Poland, Romania, Spain). Within the 3rd call of EMINECE project 7 students will study in Portugal, Sweden, Romania and Poland. 6 VSU lecturers have been invited to deliver lectures and carry out research in Poland, Portugal and Romania. Within the frames of EMINECE project VSU has hosted an MA student from A. Mitskevich University of Poland as well as two lecturers from Poland and two lecturers from Romania. Within the frameworks of the same call of EMINECE project two lecturers from A. Mitskevich University of Poland will visit VSU in October, 2015. The HEI participates in program ERASMUS +. The University is in intensive negotiations with several European higher educational institutions to issue double diplomas and joint degrees. The staff of the International relations Department widely disseminates information about similar ongoing projects at other universities in the republic. Thus, 1 MA student of the University has been granted a scholarship of BACKIS (operating in YSU) of ERASMUS MUNDUS.

**9.4** One of the problems of internationalization is the limited knowledge of the English language. In the last three years there has been some progress in the University, from 2012 language Center and from 2013 supplementary education department were established. One of the activities of Supplementary education department is to organize English language courses for staff. 128 members of university staff attended the courses during the recent 3 years. From 2014, 15 courses in English language were offered to the University’s foreign students. The effectiveness of the implemented activities is not high, the stakeholders do not have the required level of foreign language proficiency and the University hasn’t revealed the factors causing it.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

The expert panel was convinced that the development and internationalization of external relations are not only declared as priorities at VSU, but the University conducts a purposeful policy towards it. External relations and internationalization processes were regulated and the Department of Cooperation and Relations was established.

The process of internationalization has begun with pockets of good practice emerging. Students are aware of the opportunities of international mobility and of the value of internationalization of the university. Indeed the senior students welcome the process and have seen considerable development in the last five years. Students and staff speak positively of the importance of cultural exchange, the understanding of others’ cultural values, the need to become ‘networked’ and integrated into international and global systems.

Some chairs are involved in establishing and cooperating in networks. There is potential for the university to draw on the expertise and understanding of members of staff currently within the institution to further this project.

The experts could not deny that substantial changes have occurred in this field in recent years. It is true that the process was greatly facilitated by the negotiations of RA for the integration in the Eastern Partnership and activation of EU grant policy. However, the department's activity, active cooperation policy have led to positive results, and the university is involved in a number of grant programs.

Experts find it positive, that the university has benefited from each grant program, creating academic programs by tuning methodology, introducing an effective quality assurance model. The current grant programs contribute to the development of postgraduate education, improvement of university management, increase of the social responsibility. It is positive that the university implements programs not only with EU, but also with EAEC countries' universities.

The internationalization process of the University is impeded by a limited knowledge of foreign languages. Training programs didn't result in radical changes, though there are the first steps in this direction; exchange of students and teaching staff.

The process of development of relations between the university and external stakeholders in the region are effective.

The University is aware of all of its shortcomings in the process of ensuring the criterion. The evidence of it is the SWOT analysis and the description of all necessary further steps.

**SUMMARY:** Taking into consideration that the university encourages exchange of experience and development through external relations and having scarce financial resources for internationalization, the university is widely involved in different grant programs also has bilateral agreements and established and developed effective relations with RA and regional external stakeholders, created opportunities for foreign language proficiency for students and professors, the expert panel assesses the criterion as satisfactory.

**CONCLUSION:** The correspondence of VSU institutional capacities to the requirements of criterion 9 is **satisfactory**.

## CRITERION X. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

**Criterion: The TLI has a set infrastructure for internal quality assurance, which promotes establishment of a quality culture and continual development of the institution.**

### FINDINGS

**10.1** VSU QA system policy stems from the university's mission. QA system implements its functions in accordance with the strategic plan, clear policy and procedures. QA processes are coordinated by ANQA. QA groups are working in all the subdivisions, they regularly monitor and audit the educational process, and the results are presented to the Scientific Council, at the Rector's sessions, are discussed in faculties, chairs and so on. Students actively participate in this process.

**10.2** The Center for Quality Assurance was established in 2010 and in 2013 it acquired the status of independent structure and directly reports to the scientific council and the rector. "The creation and consolidation of QA inter-institutional system" program contributed to the development of internal

QA system. This enabled to enrich the resource base of Center for Quality Assurance. Grant programs and trainings organized by ANQA and the Center for Quality Assurance of the HEI contributed to the enhancement of QA processes. Lecturers, administrative employees and students were involved in it. 3.5 staff members are involved in the works of the Center. The Center tries to create network system through faculty committees. Students and employers are also involved in it. Every year the management of HEI presents the working load for the next year on the base of which the center is financed.

**10.3** The stakeholders participate in the faculty QA through committees. Periodical surveys is carried out in the section of students, lecturers, graduates and employers, and questionnaires are distributed (e.g. "The lecturer through the eyes of the Student", the students' attitude towards the educational process, their psychological adaptability, electronic testing, their attitude towards the evaluation of personal and professional qualities and improvement).

The students' participation in the QA processes has considerably improved, although there are still problems which have not been solved yet /low motivation of students/. For involving the stakeholders the Center for Quality Assurance organizes round-tables and discussions. Judging from meetings with lecturers and students the awareness of the activities of the Center for Quality Assurance is low.

**10.4** The regulation of The Center for Quality Assurance was approved by Scientific Council. The QA system functions on the basis of VSU's conception and strategy development plan with the help of the short and long-term plans. In 2013 the Quality Assurance handbook was published, in which QA models, methodology development, mission, issues, aims and conception is introduced. QA Conception includes the main principles and strategy of the activities of the Center. At present a new handbook is being prepared, where both international skills and the ones gained over the years are taken into consideration. The questionnaires are worked out for a five-year-validity; they are reviewed in case of necessity and edited in order to make the results more reliable and objective.

**10.5** Internal quality assurance system conducted many research activities and surveys in the last three years. The analysis of the results gave an opportunity to carry out external evaluation. The introduction of self-evaluation mechanism is very important for the implementation of external evaluation. For this purpose, faculty committees have been established in various departments for the realization of self-evaluation process, in which both the lecturers and the students were involved. The Center for Quality Assurance coordinated the self-evaluation process. It contributed not only to the involvement of the stakeholders, raising of their awareness, but also to the identification of the needs of the subdivisions, obtaining the suggestions for the solution of problems. Working groups were formed in the university, for the analysis of each criterion of the self-evaluation report, but the responsibility was put on certain individuals. The process was coordinated by the rector. Each criterion was periodically discussed by the groups then presented to the subdivisions. The existence of self-evaluation creates sufficient bases for external evaluation.

**10.6** For ensuring the transparency its activities the official information is put on the University Website. In order to ensure the awareness of the processes for the internal and external stakeholders, the university implement several mechanisms: report on VSU activity results, publication of course guidebook, information on the internal process and regulations on VSU website, Annual internal audits with the aim of evaluating the educational and research activity of the faculties, whose results are discussed with the faculty QA committees and then at the Scientific Council, regularly meetings with the students and the staff during which the completed tasks, current (existing) problems and their possible solutions are discussed by the center.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

Attaching importance to quality assurance processes VSU established the Center for Quality Assurance. The Center's functions have been revised and it has gained the status of an independent structure that reports directly to the Rector and the Scientific Council. The Center has the necessary human and material resources. The financial resources are limited, but the University tries to meet the needs. University has a number of documents regulating the quality assurance field. Network of quality assurance system is being gradually formed.

For creating culture of quality assurance and taking into consideration the low motivation of staff and students, the Center for Quality Assurance regularly organized awareness-raising seminars, trainings, involved the stakeholders in the assessment, monitoring, audit processes, being convinced that the greater the number of stakeholders involved, the more effective and quicker new quality assurance system will be formed.

The Center for Quality Assurance succeeded in involving the whole staff and students in the self-evaluation of institutional capabilities. The self-evaluation, many surveys and analyses conducted by the Center greatly facilitate the external evaluation. VSU Center for Quality Assurance has transparent, open cooperative working style. The expert panel was convinced that the Center works effectively with students, teachers and employers. The work being done towards strengthening the University is already visible.

Due to that daily work the attitude within the University towards the quality assurance processes and the Center for Quality Assurance gradually changes. Center's activities contribute to the continuous improvement of all processes at the university, identification of needs of stakeholders, solution of problems. Gradually the center becomes an important part of the university management, which definitely will contribute to the improvement of university governing system.

However, there is much to do in clarifying governing bodies- the Center for Quality Assurance relations and separation of functions. It is necessary that the quality assurance cycle, PDCA, be used by all university subdivisions and covers all the processes.

**SUMMARY:** Quality assurance policy and procedures have been developed at VSU. The Center for Quality Assurance has sufficient human and material resources, involves internal and external stakeholders in quality assurance processes and ensures the transparency of its activities. The quality assurance system is regularly revised. The inner internal quality assurance is in development process and contributes to the continuous improvement of all processes of the institution.

**CONCLUSION:** The correspondence of VSU institutional capacities to the requirements of criterion 10 is **satisfactory**.

## EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

<b>CRITERION</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>
<i>1. Mission and goals</i>	<b>Satisfactory</b>
<i>2. Governance and Administration</i>	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>
<i>3. Academic Programs</i>	<b>Satisfactory</b>
<i>4. Students</i>	<b>Satisfactory</b>
<i>5. Teaching and Support Staff</i>	<b>Satisfactory</b>
<i>6. Research and Development</i>	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>
<i>7. Infrastructure and Resources</i>	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>
<i>8. Social Responsibility</i>	<b>Satisfactory</b>
<i>9. External Relations and Internationalization</i>	<b>Satisfactory</b>
<i>10. Internal Quality Assurance</i>	<b>Satisfactory</b>

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**Lilit Zakaryan**  
**The chair of the expert panel**

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1. CVS OF EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS

**Lilit Zakaryan** - In 1988 graduated from Armenian State Pedagogical Institute after Kh. Abovyan and received a qualification of certified specialist, teacher of Soviet history and law. In 1993 received the degree of Candidate in Historical Sciences, in 2008, title of Associate Professor in History. Scientific Research scope includes the transformation of the political system in Armenia, formation of civil society and topics on gender-related aspects. She taught at the Northern University, Armenian State Pedagogical University after Kh. Abovyan, Slavonic University. At the Northern University she was the dean of the department of Law and Journalism, head of the chair of Journalism and Social Sciences, head of the Education Department. Currently she works at NAS RA Institute of History as a Senior Researcher and is the head of Quality assurance department of Northern University. In 2009-2010 she participated in pilot program of accreditation organized by ANQA at the Northern University and in 2012-2013 in institutional pilot accreditation. She participated in ANQA trainings and as a member of ANQA expert panel visited a number of RA Universities.

**Alan Howe** - In 1982 graduated from University of Bath in Applied Biology. In 1985 received Post Graduate Certificate of Education. In 1994 received MA (Professional Studies) in Bath Spa University College. Since 2014 is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Currently is the Head of Department & Programme Leader for Education and Childhood Studies (Grade 9/ Ac4A) at Bath Spa University. Programme Leader (since 2006) and Tutor (since 2003). He was the member of the examinership committee at number of Universities and conducted external examinerships. Currently he is the Vice Chair of the British Education Studies Association. He made presentations in many international seminars and conferences and is the author of a number of publications.

**Varuzhan Atabekyan** - In 1983 graduated from the Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics of the Yerevan State University, In 1983-1986 studied PhD in the Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics of Moscow State University after M. Lomonosov. In 2011 received a degree of Doctor of physics and mathematics in the V.A.Steklov Institute of Mathematics of the Russian Academy of Sciences. In 2012 received a title of Professor. Scientific scope of interests includes the combinatorial theory of groups, geometric methods in group theory, periodic groups, and algorithmic questions of algebra. From 2013 is the head of the chair of YSU Algebra and Geometry. He received numerous honors and awards: Award of the President in the field of Natural Sciences (2010), 2013 and 2014. Winner of the competition "Industrious researcher" by RA State Committee of Science of the Ministry of Education and Science. Winner of the contest for Young Scientists dedicated to the 275th anniversary of M. Lomonosov at Moscow State University's Contest (1986), Thank-You note from Prime Minister of RA for the contribution to Education and Science (2014) etc. He has participated in various international conferences. Author of 31 scientific articles and 4 books.

**Susanna Hovhannisyan** - In 1979 graduated from Yerevan State University with Diploma with Honor. In 1986 received a degree as a Candidate in Philological Sciences and in 2010 degree of Doctor in Philology. Doctoral thesis was on "Toumanyan's life and history of his creative activities" (Toumanyan's scientific biography) (1900 - 1912)." In 2006 was awarded a title of Associate professor. Since 1990 she has been working in NAS RA M. Abeghyan Institute Literature first as a senior then leading researcher. She was a lecturer at YSU, SEUA and Northern University. Participated in international conferences in RA and abroad. Author of more than 100 scientific articles and 4 monographs.

**Sima Bosnoyan** - 1st year Master's student in "Public Administration" (in the field of Education Management") at Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences. She received her BA in "Linguistics" in the field of "Political Sciences" in YSLU faculty of Intercultural Communication. Participated in a number of trainings and has work experience in translation.

## APPENDIX 2. SCHEDULE OF SITE-VISIT

01.06.2015- 04.01.2015

<b>01.06.2015</b>		<i>Launch</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Duration</i>
1	Meeting with the Rector of the University	9:30	10:15	45minutes
2	Meeting with the vice rectors	10:30	11:30	60 minutes
3	Meeting with the self-assessment working group	11:45	12:45	60 minutes
4	Lunch, internal discussions	13:00	13:45	45 minutes
5	Observation of the documents and resources	14:00	15:00	60minutes
6	Meeting with the heads of the chairs	15:15	16:15	60 minutes
7	Meeting with the lecturers	16:30	17:30	60minutes
8	Close meeting of the expert panel	17:45	18:45	60 minutes
<b>02.06.2015</b>		<i>Launch</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Duration</i>
1	Meeting with the group of academic advisors	9:30	10:30	60 minutes
2	Meeting with the heads of subdivisions	10:45	12:00	75 minutes
3	Meeting with the representatives of employers (not only from Pedagogical Institutions)	12:15	13:15	60 minutes
4	Lunch, internal discussions	13:30	14:15	45 minutes
5	Observation of the documents and resources	14:30	16:15	105minutes
6	Meeting with the graduates	16:30	17:30	60 minutes
7	Close meeting of the expert panel	17:45	18:45	60 minutes
<b>03.06.2015</b>		<i>Launch</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Duration</i>
1	Meeting with the representatives of Students Council	9:30	10:30	60minutes
2	Meeting with the BA students	10:45	12:00	75minutes
3	Observation of the documents and resources	12:15	13:45	90 minutes
4	Lunch, internal discussions	14:00	14:45	45minutes
5	Meeting with the MA students	15:00	16:00	60minutes
6	Meeting with the part time students	16:15	17:15	60minutes
7	Close meeting of the expert panel	17:30	19:00	90 minutes
<b>04.06.2015</b>		<i>Launch</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Duration</i>
1	Meeting with the staff members of Quality Assurance Center	9:30	10:30	60minutes
2	Observation of the documents and resources	10:45	12:00	75minutes
3	Meeting with staff chosen by the experts panel	12:15	13:15	60 minutes
4	Lunch, internal discussions	13:30	14:15	45 minutes
5	Open meeting with the expert panel	14:30	15:00	30minutes
6	Close meeting of the expert panel	15:15	16:00	45minutes
7	Meeting with the Rector of the University	16:15	17:00	45minutes
8	Close meeting of the expert panel	17:15	18:00	45minutes

### APPENDIX 3. LIST OF DOCUMENTS OBSERVED

N	NAME OF THE DOCUMENT	C/S
1.	VSU self-evaluation of institutional capabilities	1-10
2.	Charter of VSU	1,2
3.	VSPI Strategic plan, 2010-2015	1-10
4.	VSU Development Conception 2014-2018	1-10
5.	Questionnaire forms and examples	1-10
6.	Grounds of surveys and analyses on the change of the mission /grounds for shifting to university education/	1,2
7.	Protocols of Scientific Council /2010-2014 /	2,3,5,6
8.	Protocol of Rectorate session 14.05.2014	2
9.	Feedback from stakeholders on the implementation of the SP (protocols of discussion)	2,10
10.	Short-term plans /chairs, subdivisions/	2,3,5
11.	Reports of subdivisions and chairs	2
12.	Materials on academic programs audit and monitoring	2, 3
13.	Grounds of the analysis of effectiveness of the academic programs	3,10
14.	Grounds of Feedback from graduates	10
15.	Protocols of the sessions of the chairs 2013-2014	4,
16.	Integration of the Institute into Global Education Area (report of the Rector)	
17.	The academic programs of “The Armenian language and Literature”, “Mathematics”, “Law” and their SCPs	3
18.	Course lectures elaborated at the University	3
19.	Protocols of Scientific Council 10/2014-2015	2
20.	Set of assessment tools and Competency passport	3
21.	Benchmarking materials	3,10
22.	Pilot program N16532	3
23.	The analysis of data of the labor market by Career and distance-learning center	4,10
24.	Dynamics of the students admitted in full-time and part time systems in 2010-2014	4
25.	The materials of Juridical advisory center	4
26.	Grounds of sociological surveys and analyses	10
27.	Document-based individual –group training	3,4
28.	Documents of Career center	3,4
29.	Documents of research complex laboratory	6
30.	Protocols of Exam Supervision Commission	3,4,10
31.	The research methodology of “Labor market demand analysis of Lori region”	1,2
32.	Lists of the lecturers and students who visited schools	8
33.	The regulation and results of effectiveness of student survey “Lecturer through the eyes of the student.	10
34.	List of support staff	4
35.	Position passports	2
36.	Regulation on the annual syllabus criteria of the teaching staff 05.05. 2014, order 671L/Կ	5
37.	Professional development schedule of Lecturers	5
38.	Master’s thesis, graduation and term papers	3

39.	List of articles of VSU employees published in international (CIS and foreign) and RA peer-reviewed journals	6
40.	The registers of laboratories, library and medical center	7
41.	Planning and reporting materials of chairs	2
42.	The reports of the department of Education and Methodology and their analyses	2
43.	Materials published in Mass Media	8
44.	The performance of the program "Complex of action plan of combat corruption"	
45.	The programs of Language and supplementary training center	3,9
46.	Grounds that provide evidence of monitoring	
47.	The analysis of the protocols of focus groups and questionnaires	10
48.	Report on the audit of the academic program "Russian language and Literature 2014	
49.	Procedure on the organization of internal audit of academic programs, 2014	3
50.	Academic program "Russian language and Literature" /exemplary/, 2013	3
51.	The findings and recommendations of audit on the academic program "Russian language and Literature"	3
52.	Electronic base of Students' data /registrar/	2, 4,
53.	SCP-s /assembly language, programming languages, theory of algorithms , etc/	3
54.	VSU budgetary and non-budgetary incomes and expenditures, 2014 and 2015	6
55.	Portfolio of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> year graduate student	4
56.	The list of publications in journals peer-reviewed in CIS countries	6
57.	Internal quality assurance /inner-University model/ Brochure	10
58.	The activities of the chair of Armenian language in the academic year 2014-2015 /Bachelor's, Master's, academic program, full-time and part-time studies	3,4
59.	Lori-Pambak Geological museum / Certificate about the Graduates from VSPI /	4
60.	List of the employees of education institutions of RA Lori region who graduated from the Department of History of VSU	4
61.	List of the administrative employees of education institutions of RA Lori region who graduated from the Department of History of VSU	4
62.	Reference on graduates of VSU who are employed in the Lori branch of National archives	4
63.	The Development Strategy of the chair of History 2012-2017	2,5
64.	Chair of History, Schedule of the advisory work carried out with the students who received unsatisfactory mark during the exams.	3,5
65.	Materials of the section "Suggestions" of the questionnaire "The Lecturer through the eyes of the student"	5,10
66.	"Regulation on the organization and performance of students' extra-curricular activities"	4
67.	"Methodological guidelines on the organization and assessment of students' extra-curricular activities" /appendix/	3
68.	"Forms of individual work of students"	3
69.	"Regulation on the term paper"	3
70.	"Methodological guidelines on the preparation, formulation, presentation and evaluation of papers"	3
71.	"Regulation on testing the students' knowledge, abilities, skills (competences), evaluating the set of assessment tools", "Set of assessment tools"	3
72.	Regulation on development and the annual syllabus criteria of the teaching staff"	5

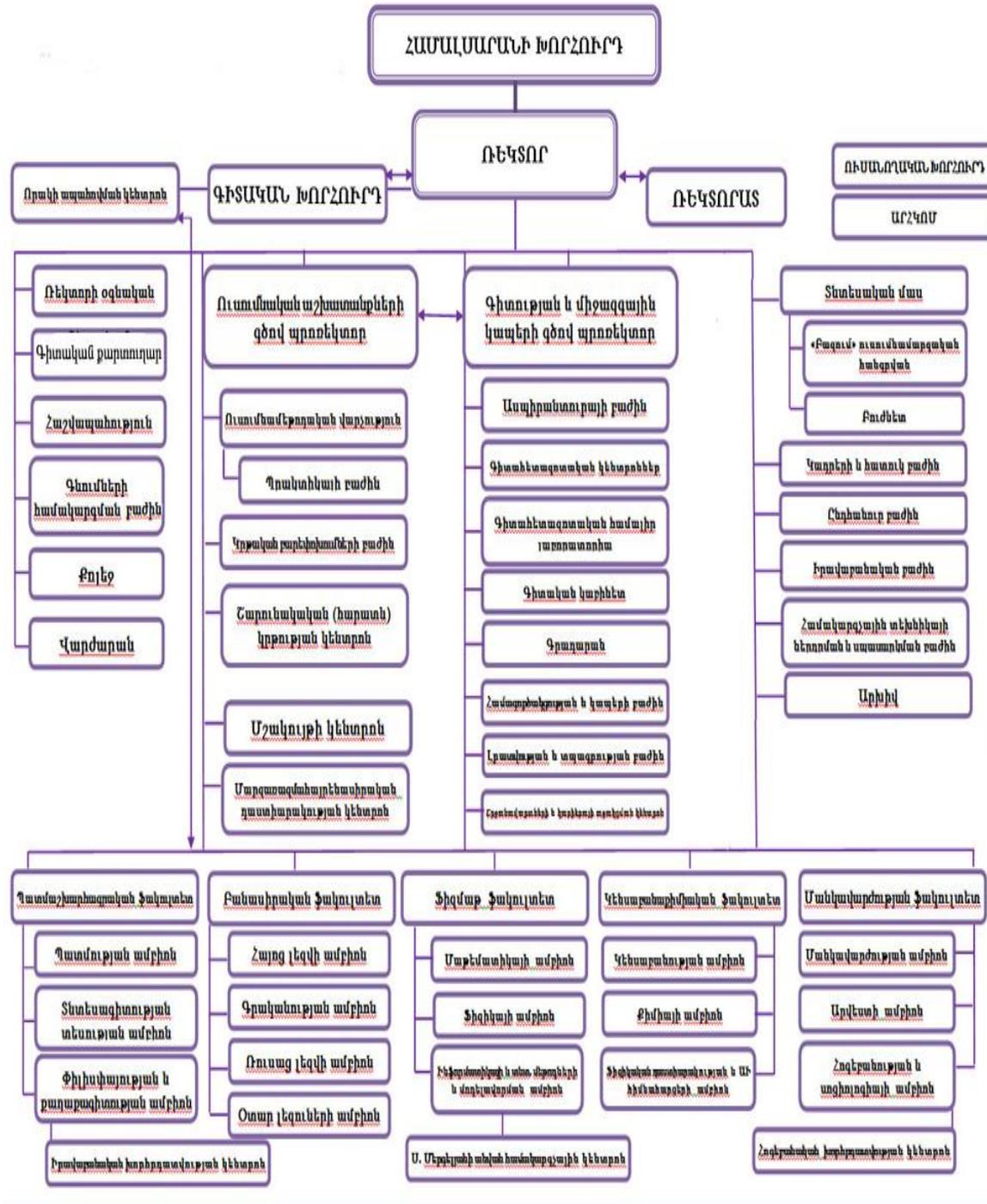
## **APPENDIX 4. RESOURCES OBSERVED**

1. Department of Education and Methodology
2. Dean offices – Law, Mathematics, Armenian language and literature
3. Chairs – Armenian Language and Literature, Foreign Languages, Mathematics, Physics, Biology, Pedagogy, History
4. Laboratories – research complex, Biology, Chemistry
5. Cabinets – linguistics, Physics, Informatics, Mathematic modeling
6. Language Center
7. Quality Assurance Center
8. Department of Cooperation and Relations
9. Supplementary training center
10. Juridical advisory center
11. Psychological Center
12. Computer center after S. Mergelyan
13. Student Council
14. Career and distance-learning Center
15. Library
16. Medical center
17. Shooting-hall

The members of expert panel participated in

1. Screening of Journalism specialty students' individual works
2. Defense of Master's thesis
3. Final exam in Biology

# APPENDIX 5. THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE INSTITUTION



## **APPENDIX 6. LIST OF THE ABBREVIATIONS**

**CIS** - Commonwealth of Independent States  
**SCP** - Subject Curriculum Package  
**EHEA**-European Higher Education Area  
**HAC**-Higher Attestation Commission  
**HEI** –Higher Education Institution  
**SC** –Scientific Council  
**YSU**-Yerevan State University  
**MES**- Ministry of Education and Science  
**RA**-Republic of Armenia  
**NAS RA** – National Academy of Sciences of Republic of Armenia  
**SEUA**-State Engineering University of Armenia  
**AP**-academic program  
**TLI**- Tertiary level institution  
**QA**-Quality assurance  
**ANQA**- National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance  
**NQF** - National Qualifications Framework  
**PDCA** – Plan-do-check-act  
**SP**-Strategic plan  
**VSU**-Vanadzor State University after H. Toumanyanyan  
**VSPI**-Vanadzor state pedagogical Institute after H. Tumanyan  
**SSS**- Student Scientific Society  
**SC**-Student Council  
**PR**- Public relation  
**SWOT**- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats