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# ENQA AGENCY REVIEW: NATIONAL CENTRE FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE (ANQA)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA) has been an affiliate of ENQA since June 2009. In 2015 ANQA asked to be reviewed against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (the ESG) by a Panel appointed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The review is for the purpose of determining whether ANQA would be compliant with the ESG and thus meet the criteria for membership of ENQA, and the requirement for registration in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). The review process involved a self-assessment done by ANQA and a three-day site visit in Yerevan in October 2016.

Armenia joined the Bologna Process in May 2005, since then the higher education of Armenia has undertaken intensive reforms within the framework of the Bologna Process. ANQA was established in 2008. From the beginning, the objective of ANQA has been to promote the continuous improvement of universities, having as a framework the European Higher Education Area. ANQA is the sole Quality Agency in Armenia.

Currently, ANQA's activities can be classified in three main areas. Firstly, and the most important, it is the Institutional accreditation, a mandatory process both for private and state institutions operating in the territory of the Republic of Armenia. The result of the accreditation procedures has a direct impact on the institutions. A positive institutional accreditation is valid for a period of four or six years, a conditional accreditation is valid for two years or the Accreditation Committee can deny the accreditation. Secondly, there are activities to enhance the quality of the institutions, to support policy decisions and to promote the quality culture in Armenia, such as conferences, reports or studies. Finally, International activities are an important part of the Business Plan and Strategic Plan of ANQA.

ANQA has in place the methodology for the programme accreditation, due to the fact that institutional accreditation is a prerequisite for programme accreditation, during the site visit it was not still possible to review it.

ANQA is funded from three principal sources: state budget, accreditation fees and international programmes. Currently ANQA is composed by 22 employees. The panel appreciated the high level of commitment by staff and management.

In the light of the evidence provided by the documentation and the interviews at the site visit, the panel considers ANQA a well-established quality assurance agency, recognized by all stakeholders. Given the short history of the Republic Armenia as an independent country, it should be mentioned the important role that ANQA is playing for the improvement of higher education in Armenia. ANQA is seen as the connection between government, universities and employers.

ANQA's overall performance against the ESG is high,  
Standards 3.2, 3.6, 3.7, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.6 are fully complaint  
Standards 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 2.5 and 2.7 are substantially complaint

## INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance, Foundation, (ANQA), with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG 2015). It is based on an external review conducted from June 2016 until December 2016.

### BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

#### BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

ENQA's regulations require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they act in substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

As this is ANQA first external review, the panel was expected to pay particular attention to the policies, procedures, and criteria in place, being aware that full evidence of concrete results in all areas may not be available at this stage.

#### REVIEW PROCESS

The 2016 external review of ANQA was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The panel for the external review of ANQA was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Axel Aerden (Chair-ENQA nominee), Coordinator Quality Assurance, Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), Belgium.
- Núria Comet Señal (Secretary-ENQA nominee), Responsible of Internal Quality and Project Coordinator in the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya), Spain.
- Bernard Coulie (Academic member-EUA nominee), Full Professor, Honorary Rector, Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium.
- Inguna Zarina (Student member-ESU nominee), Bachelor Student, University of Latvia, International affairs officer in the Student Union of Latvia.

Paula Ranne, ENQA coordinator of the process, participated in the evaluation by facilitating its development.

ANQA produced a self-assessment report which provided a substantial portion of the evidence that the panel used to draw its conclusions.

Additional documents were requested by the panel and provided by ANQA both prior to and during the site visit.

Prior to the visit all panel members reviewed the report and its evidence individually. The panel used a mapping grid to assure consistency in evidence gathering and decision making. Likewise a telephone conference led by the coordinator of ENQA in order to clarify all doubts took place in September.

The panel conducted a site visit to validate fully the self-assessment and clarify points at issue. Decisions were reached collectively by the panel led by the chair.

Finally, the review panel produced the present final report on the basis of the self-assessment report, website, site visit, and its findings. In doing so it provided an opportunity for ANQA to comment on the factual accuracy of the draft report.

The review panel confirms that it was given access to all documents and people it wished to consult throughout the review.

### **Self-assessment report**

The self-assessment report (SAR) was delivered to the panel on time in June 2016.

The core team for the preparation of SAR was formed by a team of seven people that included an expert and a student. A part of the writer team, all members of the agency and stakeholders were involved in its preparation and review. The coordinator of the report highlighted the active participation of the experts.

To carry out the SAR, the agency first made several brainstorming sessions to perform a SWOT analysis for each of the standards. As benefits of this SWOT analysis, the staff mentioned the good team building activity and the opportunity to reflect on where they were and where they are now and where they are going to. Anecdotally the panel should mention that the Director of the agency designed a specific notebook for this analysis.

In parallel the necessary data were collected for the report. The staff explained that all the data needed to prepare the SAR were available. This fact demonstrates the proper functioning of the internal quality system.

The SAR is structured in three parts. In the first part, the SAR mainly includes a description of Armenian higher education, the history, mission, structure, and main activities of ANQA. In the second part the report describes the compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (part 3 and 2). In the third part, ANQA describes the current challenges and areas for future development.

### **Site visit**

The site visit took place in ANQA Office in Yerevan from 3 to 6 October 2016. At the end of the site visit the panel had the opportunity to visit the ANQA offices.

ANQA drew up the programme for the site visit, which was approved by the panel. The detailed programme of the site visit is included in the Annex 1.

Prior to the site visit, the panel held an internal meeting on 2 October 2016 to prepare the interviews and to share opinions.

The visit was well planned with a very intensive agenda and organized mainly by the agency with the panel secretary's support. The programme included interview sessions with:

- Director
- Board members
- Senior management team
- Accreditation Committee members

- Policy development and implementation division
- Institutional and programme accreditation division
- Minister of Education and Science
- Heads of HEIs (public and private)
- Representatives from the reviewers' pool including meetings with international experts
- Employers' representatives
- Students' representatives

The detailed agenda can be found in Annex 1.

A simultaneous translator was present in most of the meetings. The development of the visit has not been hindered by the simultaneous translation. Some interviews with international experts or members of the Accreditation Committee were held via Skype. The staff of the agency demonstrated a high professionalism during the entire review process and provided excellent assistance to the panel regarding all matters.

In the end of the site visit, the panel held an internal meeting to present the preliminary conclusions and to thank the excellent cooperation of the whole staff. Likewise the coordinator of ENQA explained the timing and next steps in the process.

The secretary of the panel then wrote the report in cooperation with the rest of the panel.

The draft report was submitted to ANQA for factual verification in late December 2016, the final report was sent to the Board of ENQA in February.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

### HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Higher education in Armenia is regulated by the Law on Education and the Law on Higher and Post Graduate Education of the Republic of Armenia (RA).

- The Law on Education was adopted on 14 April, 1999, and defines the principles of state policy in the field of education and the legal, organisational, financial, and economic grounds of the education system.
- The Law on Higher and Post Graduate Education in Armenia was adopted on 14 December, 2004. It regulates legal, organisational, and financial relations in the sphere of higher and postgraduate professional education

The types of higher education institutions (HEIs) functioning in the Republic of Armenia are the following: Universities, Institutes, Academies, Conservatory. (\*Data provided in SAR)

	State HEIs	Private HEIs	Transnational Tertiary Level Institutions
Number of HEIs	20	32	13

	Bachelor	Master	PhD
Number of students 90% in State HEI's	79.263	14.476	1223

The state HEIs, representing 40% of HEI, offer bachelor and master programmes, involving 90% of students and teachers. The private HEIs mainly offer bachelor programmes.

In 2011, the Armenian Government adopted the National Education Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Armenia (ANQF) consisting of 8 levels; the responsibilities for the operation and maintenance of the ANQF are within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES).

The higher education of Armenia undertakes intensive reforms within the framework of the Bologna Process. Armenia joined the Bologna Process in May 2005. Since then the "Development Strategy of Education for 2008-2015" has been developed and put into practice. In this sense, nowadays, all the universities now issue Diploma Supplements and all higher education academic programmes have implemented the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) since 2008.

#### **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

The evolution of the external quality assurance in the Republic of Armenia can be divided into two major phases: prior to and after Armenia's joining the Bologna Declaration in 2005.

The first phase was launched in 1999 by establishing a unit within the Ministry of Education and Science that started the process of accreditation. The consequences of the first experiences with accreditation were considered successful partially since the way it was designed failed to attract the state HEIs that were supposed to undergo accreditation according to the Law on Education (1999). Moreover, due to its non-cyclical nature, the private universities that had undergone accreditation ceased to follow-up on the development and enhancement of a university quality management system that would provide impartial and objective data for further decision-making and effective management of institutions. Thus, the first attempt yielded lessons for developing and implementing a more viable and effective system.

After joining the Bologna Declaration in 2005, higher education of Armenia began a second phase where the need arose of establishing an external quality assurance (EQA) system that would be similar to that of Europe and the need to have an in-depth change of higher education in order to attain the required level of institutional autonomy.

The important promoter of the establishment of EQA was the integration into European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

In the meantime, the first version of programme and institutional accreditation criteria and standards was developed, and several pilots were implemented involving higher education including private and state institutions.

The first evaluations began with pilot plans for the accreditation of educational programmes in private and public universities. It was evident that universities were focused on "do", but not on "plan" or "check" phases. Therefore it was necessary to improve the "Strategic Management", enhancing self-evaluations processes and introducing internal quality assurance system in HEI.



## ANQA

The National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA) was established in 2008. From the beginning, the objective of ANQA has been to promote the continuous improvement of universities, having as a framework the European Higher Education Area.

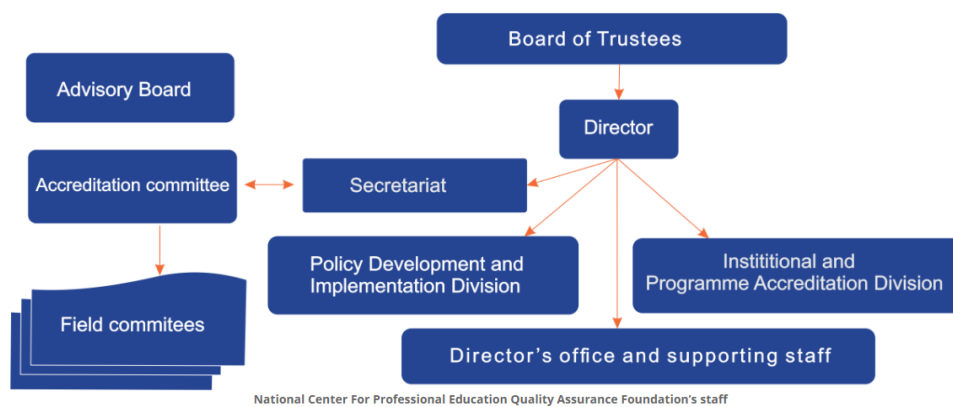
After a series of pilots of the criteria, standards, and procedures for institutional and academic programme accreditation, the external quality assurance framework was officially adopted and put into practice by the Armenian Government in 2011.

Some of the most relevant facts have been:

- In 2010, the ANQA strategic plan was developed with the support of the World Bank and with the help of NVAO.
- In 2011, the statute on State Accreditation and the accreditation procedure were published. This year ANQA started the first accreditation cycle after conducting trainings for experts and workshops with institutions.
- In 2013, the Accreditation Committee was formed.
- In 2015, the decision-making process started with a special focus on consistency and the ANQA Manual and supporting documents were reviewed, based on the opinion of stakeholders.

### ANQA'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

ANQA has the following structure, represented in this diagram :



**The Board of Trustees** is the highest governing body, which consists of 12 representatives from different groups of stakeholders, renewed every 4 years. The names of the members are nominated by stakeholders and approved by Prime Minister. They hold meetings every two months. Their main functions are:

- to appoint the director and evaluate his performance
- to approve the strategic plan, yearly plans and yearly budget
- to draw up the list of Accreditation Committee members
- to approve the expert panel for the appeal procedure

**The Accreditation Committee** is an independent, collegial, permanent body which consist of 10 members. It is the highest quality assurance body within ANQA designed to be solely responsible for:

- making decision on institutional and programme accreditation
- making suggestions to ANQA for the improvement of the accreditation mechanism.

The members are nominated by universities and are approved by the decision of ANQA Board of Trustees. The chair of the Committee is decided by the committee through an open voting. The chair is the link between the Accreditation Committee and the Board or the Director.

**The Advisory Board** provides consultations to the Board of Trustees and the Director of ANQA on strategic development when necessary. The Advisory Board provides its consultation when asked by the Director or the Board, or it can give unsolicited advice. Nowadays, not many consultations have been made, but ANQA regularly takes into consideration the opinion of international experts, through the accreditation procedures.

**The Field Commissions** are not yet established, however a statute and a policy regulating their functioning have been developed. Each Field Commission will consist of 8-10 members. Their main duties will be:

- to design the strategy for development of Sectorial Qualifications Framework
- to define the research spheres and priorities, discuss and approve the research results, provide recommendations to the Ministry.

**The Director** leads the management of the agency. He is responsible for setting policy direction and for communicating with stakeholders.

ANQA has three functional departments, which are in permanent cooperation between them: Policy Development and Implementation division is responsible for the development and implementation of ANQA policies and procedures, the production of supporting regulatory documents, and ensuring stakeholder communication.

Institutional and Programme Accreditation division is responsible for operating the external evaluation processes in higher education institutions (organizes procedure of accreditation process, as coordinators) and providing the Accreditation Committee with data and documents to make consistent accreditation decisions. Also participates in training of experts.

Secretariat is responsible for providing technical assistance to ANQA in external communication as well as in communication with ANQA Accreditation Committee. It is responsible for planning of accreditations, the flow with stakeholders, and acts as a secretary of the Accreditation Committee.

ANQA Director's office includes:

- Human Resource specialist;
- International Relation manager;
- Internal Quality Assurance specialist;
- Lawyer;

- Information Technology specialist;
- Public Relations specialist;
- Accountant.

#### **ANQA'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES**

The goals of ANQA, set in the Charter of ANQA since November 2008, are as follows:

1. Conduction of the required expertise for accreditation of preliminary professional (vocational henceforth), secondary and higher (professional henceforth) education;
2. Development of criteria and procedures for accreditation and external evaluation of quality of education institutions and academic programmes;
3. Submission of Academic Program Accreditation Results and Decision on Accreditation to MoES with the aim of awarding Certificate on Accreditation;
4. Submission of the Results of the academic audit of education institutions, Quality evaluation, Accreditation and Decision on Institutional Accreditation to MoES with the aim of awarding Certificate on Accreditation;
5. Publication of ranking indicators of education institutions based on the results of external quality evaluation of education institutions and academic programmes;
6. Evaluation of Internal Quality Assurance systems of education institutions and provision of recommendations to education institutions for further development of those systems;
7. Provision of consultancy to education institutions on the development of criteria and methods for students' formative and summative assessment;
8. Raising public awareness on the state of the arts of quality assurance of education institutions and academic programmes;
9. Promotion of the integration into European Network for QA, thus ensuring RA participation in projects;
10. Making analysis of professional education system.

Currently ANQA activity focuses on the external quality assurance carried out through accreditation. There are two types of accreditation: institutional and programme.

Institutional accreditation is a mandatory process both for private and state institutions operating in the territory of the RA. The main purpose of the Institutional Accreditation is to evaluate the effectiveness of TLI (Tertiary Level Institutions) operations, as well as to find out whether the TLI is in compliance with its mission, whether it follows the policy of continuous improvement and enhances its academic programmes.

Programme accreditation is the recognition of academic programmes and the correspondence of their quality with state academic standards and programme accreditation criteria. Programme accreditation is targeted at separate academic programme. This procedure allows to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of each academic programme as well as to monitor whether it thoroughly ensures the achievement of intended learning outcomes. Programme accreditation is carried out on the initiative of the TLI, based on voluntary basis, with the exception of medical academic programmes, the accreditation of

which is compulsory. It should be noted that according to the statute on *State Accreditation in RA*, institutional accreditation is a prerequisite for programme accreditation.

However, ANQA has prepared a proposal to make amendments in the regulation to make it obligatory, thus stimulating the process of application in order to ensure the accountability at academic programme level.

ANQA has implemented 7 pilot programme accreditations, carried out within the framework of International Projects.

Likewise, International activities are an important part of the Business Plan and Strategic Plan of ANQA. It highlights the participation in 13 TEMPUS programmes, 3 World Bank projects and 2 Twinning projects such as:

- ARARAT (Armenian Coordination Agency “University – Employer”)
- ALIGN (Achieving and checking the alignment between academic programmes and qualification frameworks)
- GOVERN (Fostering Autonomy and Accountability: Development of State-of-the-art HE Management System for Efficient Changes in Line with Bologna Principles)
- PICASA (Promoting Internationalization of HEIs in Eastern Neighbourhood Countries through Cultural and Structural Adaptations)

Also, ANQA has an active participation in the international debate on quality assurance through attendance of EQAF and IQAAHE Forums, ENQA workshops, as well as writing scientific articles.

#### **ANQA’S FUNDING**

Since its establishment the funding of ANQA has been changed. During the first years the financial resources available to ANQA were mainly provided by the Government. Nowadays, in 2015, ANQA is funded from three principal sources: State budget, Accreditation fees and International programmes.

The evolution of the budget is shown below:

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
State budget	97.8 %	95.9%	93.5%	88.5%	84.7%	68.1%	48.5%
Accreditation fees	2.2%	0.7%	1.0%	6.5%	5.4%	1.4%	35.5%
International programmes and others	0%	3.4%0%	5.5%	5.0%	10.0%	30.5%	16%

The budget of annual expenses of the foundation is published every year in the website.

# FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF ANQA WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)

## ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

### ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

#### Standard:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

#### Evidence

ANQA describes its vision for 2020 as an organisation supporting the enhancement of tertiary education quality, internationally recognized and reliable for all its stakeholders.

The strategic plan, the annual report and the budget are published on ANQA's website.

The three main goals and objectives in ANQA's vision are:

- ANQA's activities have significantly supported the enhancement of tertiary education quality
- ANQA is a reliable organisation for all its stakeholders
- ANQA is an internationally recognized organisation

To ensure its achievement, ANQA develops every four years its strategic plan.

For the coming period, ANQA has set priorities in accordance with the needs of the Armenian education system, thus defining the next phase oriented towards the continuous development of quality culture. Strategic documents are submitted to internal and external stakeholders to engage them in the discussions of these documents.

The first strategic operational objective is the assessment of institutions and programmes. Between 2015 and 2016, ANQA has carried out 16 Institutional accreditations.

#### Analysis

The strategic plan reflects the activities that ANQA carries out, these activities include external evaluation, services of advice and research and analysis in the higher education. Currently the activities of evaluation follow the European Standards of part 2, but they are focused only on the accreditation of the institutions that is compulsory.

The panel found that the assessment of the institutions has finished the first cycle. These assessments clearly follow the processes, methodologies and criteria that are established and published.

Regarding the accreditation of programmes, in spite of some pilot accreditations, it cannot yet be considered periodical or cyclical. During the visit, it was mentioned the meeting with the Director of ANQA, the institutions and the government to talk about the new project of Cluster Audit of Academic Programs. This assessment will be compulsory for all universities.

About the involvement of stakeholders, its engagement is ensured through its participation in the Board and in the Accreditation Committee. They are also invited to take part in periodic meetings that are carried out in ANQA to discuss new evaluations, such as programme accreditations or methodologies.

The involvement of the students is ensured through the Students' Voice, a programme developed and supported by ANQA. Every year a new call is published and all students who want to participate in trainings can apply.

The goals of the Students' Voice programme are:

- to increase students' awareness on educational reforms
- to reveal the main issues of concern for students via researches
- to replenish student-experts database and provide students-experts for accreditation processes through continuous trainings
- to establish students' network for collecting and studying their opinions and publishing the results

The long-term goal of the Student' Voice is to train students who will participate in quality assurance processes in their universities.

ANQA collaborates with Student Councils and the Armenian National Students' Association (ANSA) for student-expert involvement in the processes.

The panel can conclude that ANQA is recognized by the HEIs and stakeholders, as contributing significantly to the development of a quality culture in higher education. ANQA can be clearly considered as the main actor in external quality assurance as defined in Part 2 of the ESG in the Republic of Armenia.

ANQA complies fully with ESG 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.6.

ANQA complies substantially with ESG 2.5 and 2.7.

#### **Panel commendations**

The panel would like to commend the agency for the Students' Voice programme, which helps to promote the participation of the students in institutions and prepare students for ANQA experts' panels.

#### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends increasing the activities of external quality assurance. Particularly, to develop capacity to carry out evaluation of the programmes on a regular basis.

The panel recommends publishing the annual plan.

#### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

#### **ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS**

Standard:

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

#### **Evidence**

ANQA was established in November 2008 under the Government Decree (No1486 -published in the website). In this Charter, it is defined as a non-membership and non-commercial organization established on the basis of voluntary property payments of the Founder and it aims to make studies, analysis, recommendations, and evaluation in the sphere of professional education.

ANQA is clearly the main instrument of the Republic of Armenia (hereafter: RA) to promote the improvement of the quality of the higher education system. The main goal in ANQA's mission is "to support tertiary level institutions to create a quality culture in accordance with the legislation of RA".

It is formally recognized as an agency to provide external quality assurance services for the Armenian tertiary education.

ANQA activities and results are fully recognised by the state authorities.

During the visit, the panel met with the Minister of Education, who expressed significant appreciation for the effectiveness and independence of the agency and its contribution to the development of a quality culture in higher education in Armenia.

### **Analysis**

ANQA is the body responsible for external review on accreditation in middle level professional education and higher education (bachelor's and master's degrees) in the Republic of Armenia.

ANQA has an established legal basis and it is formally recognised as a quality assurance agency by the Government of the Republic of Armenia and higher education institutions.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

### **ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE**

Standard:

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

### **Evidence**

Organizational independence is determined by ANQA's legal status as "*a foundation institutionally governed by a Board of Trustees and independent from tertiary level institutions, the Ministry of Education and Science and third parties*".

The Board of Trustees is composed of 12 members elected from stakeholders (4 member representatives of State and Public Universities, 4 member representatives of professional associations and employers, 3 members representatives of the Ministry linked to the university sector and one student).

The Accreditation Committee is an independent, collegial, permanently operating body, which carries out its functions and exercises its powers in compliance with "*the Accreditation Statute of Educational Institutions Implementing Academic Programmes and their Specialties in the RA*" and with the statute on "*Formation and Operations of Accreditation Commission*" set by ANQA. Members of the Accreditation Committee may be experienced professionals, employers, and students from the sector of education, science, culture, industry, and administration.

Candidates for the members of the Accreditation Committee are nominated by HEI, employers and other professional associations and the National Students' Association. They are approved by the decision of the Board of Trustees. The election values experience, diversity, and gender balance.

The Director of the Foundation is selected by a public competition.

Operational independence is mostly based on the Code of Ethics, values of ANQA and independence-assuring mechanisms set for different procedures, particularly regarding the independence of experts and their individual experience.

For each accreditation procedure, ANQA submits a selected shortlist of experts to the Accreditation Committee. Then the expert panel is selected from the agreed list. ANQA has adopted a strict conflict-of-interest policy for experts.

ANQA has methodological independence and the agency is considered to be the main policy-maker in the field of QA. Most of the QA documents are designed by ANQA and approved to become national regulations. ANQA also prepares proposals for changes and/or amendments regarding the QA issues in the legislative framework.

#### Formal outcomes independence

Each ANQA accreditation procedure ends with the decision of ANQA Accreditation Committee. In order to take the decision, first the Committee analyses all submitted materials; TLI's self-evaluation report, the expert panel report, ANQA conclusion, the institution's follow-up plan, and the expert panel's opinion of that plan.

After the Committee holds a meeting. This meeting is attended by the representatives from the institution under review, the expert panel chair, the ANQA coordinator, as well as a representative from RA Ministry of Education and Science. During the session, the expert panel chair introduces the outcomes of external review. Institution representatives can express their opinions and make observations, in case of need, elucidate the action plan and answer the questions posed by the Accreditation Committee members and the Ministry representative. After reviewing the documents and considering the opinions of the panel chair and institution representatives, the Accreditation Committee convenes a closed-door meeting. The decision of the Committee is made through open voting, simply by the majority of votes, based on the conclusions of peer-review panels.

The decision made by ANQA Accreditation Committee together with the accreditation certificate and supplement forms are sent to the Ministry for the Minister's approval. In case of revealing procedural problems, the documents are returned to ANQA for additional consideration. In case of the absence of procedural problems, the accreditation certificate is approved by the Minister and is handed to ANQA in order to make a respective record in the State Accreditation Registrar.

### **Analysis**

#### About the organisational independence:

As for the Board of Trustees, the panel considers that there is equilibrium among representatives of the public and private HEI's, experts of the professional sectors and representatives of the government and ministries. This composition balances all the main stakeholders and it is suitable taking into account the national context. It was clear that ANQA considers itself like a bridge among the universities, the labour market and the government, therefore the Board reflects this equilibrium. It is necessary to take into account that all the decisions about the external quality process depend on the Accreditation Committee.

Regarding the Accreditation Committee, it is formed by representatives of the different universities, public as well as private.

Regarding student selection process to governance bodies, students can be nominated to bodies also by universities. To ensure meaningful student representation it would be better to ensure that students can be nominated only by student representation bodies.



#### About the operational independence

During the interviews the independence of the experts who carry out the procedures remained evident. On the one hand all the interviewed experts showed clear independence in the institutional evaluation and in writing of the reports.

On the other hand the universities who received the reports do not express any doubt about the independence of the experts. It is necessary also to highlight the good practice of including international experts in the process of external evaluation.

All the interviewed experts stated to act in an individual way and not as representatives of their organizations.

#### In relation to independence of the formal outcomes

In a general way the panel considers that the decision-making process is developed in an independent way, but two issues leave room for improvement.

Firstly, the Accreditation Committee, before taking a decision, hears the chair of the panel, the representatives of the assessed institution, and the representatives of the ministry. The Ministry can put forward questions about the process and the decisions of ANQA's expert panel. About this role of the representatives of the Minister in the decision-making process, the panel believes that there should not be room for them to pose questions in order to avoid any undue influence.

Secondly, the panel considers that once the decision of the Accreditation Committee is done, the Minister should approve the decision of the Committee directly. There is no obvious reason why the Minister should be able to judge ANQA's procedures selectively and individually. The participation of representatives of the Ministry in the preparatory meetings of the Accreditation Committee should ensure sufficient insight into its lawful and valid operation. In case of procedural problems, it is the responsibility of the institution to appeal ANQA's decision. It is necessary to mention that, until the present, the Minister has never returned the report for its reconsideration.

#### In relation to financial independence

The panel considers that the different sources of funding of ANQA (state, fees, and international projects) guarantee its financial independency.

#### **Panel commendations**

The panel commends ANQA for the incorporation of international experts in the processes of institutional accreditation and encourages the agency to incorporating them also into the programme accreditation processes.

#### **Panel recommendations**

To avoid undue influence and to increase transparency in the decision-making process, the panel recommends limiting the role of the representatives of the Ministry to that of silent observers in the preparatory meetings of the Accreditation Committee.

In addition, the panel recommends that the Ministry directly ratifies the decisions of the Accreditation Committee.

To strengthen the Boards independence and autonomy, the panel recommends adding an international perspective to the Board.

To ensure meaningful student representation the panel recommends that students can be nominated only by student representation bodies.

**Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

### ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Standard:

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

#### Evidence

The staff of ANQA, as a part of its regular activity, carries out some dissemination activities such as:

- conducting surveys and analysis, organizing events, discussions and forums to reveal the best practices, the needs of stakeholders and the problems of the field
- conducting system-wide analyses on a three-year cycle. The second system wide analysis 2012-2015 was published this year (2016)
- intending to create a “club” of QA professionals with at least monthly meetings
- periodic publication of the results of the evaluations and analysis of the sector

Thematic analysis is set as one of the priorities for the upcoming period in the strategic plan of ANQA.

#### Analysis

The panel review has identified in ANQA’s website different publications and activities that make evident the will of the agency to describe and to analyse the results of its external evaluation processes. This fact is also considered in ANQA Strategic Plan.

Some of its international publications describe the current situation in Armenia such as:

- Impact of Accreditation Process on Higher Education Internationalization Developments. Case of Armenia
- Salzburg principles: State of arts in the Republic of Armenia

These publications describe the situation in Armenia and can be a useful tool for agencies or institutions in a similar national context.

The periodic studies “system wide analysis” is also a good tool of analysis of the sector.

However, the panel considers that the publication *Comprehensive analysis of the accreditation process* can clearly be considered as a sample of thematic analysis. The panel considers that this report is an initial sample of the will of the agency of analysing and publishing theirs results.

Given the size and the age of the agency the panel considers that ANQA is working in the good direction.

#### Panel recommendations

The panel recommends that the report *Comprehensive analysis of the accreditation process* becomes a periodic analysis of the accreditation process.

The panel recommends broadening the thematic analysis, for example, carrying out analysis by disciplines.

**Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

### ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

#### Standard:

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

#### Evidence

##### Physical resources:

ANQA has enough space (800 m2) for organizing all its activities. All the rooms are well-equipped and have all the necessary facilities to effectively organize the day-to-day activities and the work of the Accreditation Committee and other committees.

ANQA has its library and a digital system “DocFlow” to maintain the documentation of ANQA as well as to manage the accreditation procedure electronically.

It highlights the available own space for the students who take part in the program Students’ Voice.

##### Human resources

The staff of ANQA is formed at present by 21 persons, structured in four big areas

- Secretariat (2 places)
- Policy Development and Implementation Division (5 places)
- Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division (5 places)
- Director’s office and supporting staff (9 places)

The staff works in flexible groups, with the possibility of participating in different projects. Nowadays, five staff members are procedure coordinators and each manages 4-5 procedures per year. One of the objectives of ANQA is to increase the number of procedures per person.

The new staff is provided with initial training and participates in the core procedures as an observer. Once hired, they first act as a junior coordinator (learning through doing) for an accreditation procedure under supervision of a senior coordinator during which mentoring takes place. Fluency in the English language and writing skills in Armenian and English are among the prerequisites for the newly hired staff since ANQA reports are produced both in English and in Armenian. During the interviews, the staff of ANQA shown being well trained and qualified, this fact makes that they are invited to higher positions in other organizations, and in consequence the rate of rotation is very high.

##### Financial Resources

The financial policy of ANQA endeavours to have diversification of income sources.

In 2015:

- State budget: 48,5 %
- Accreditation fees: 35,5 %
- International Programmes: 15, 4%
- Consultancy: 0,6%

The institutions cover all the expenses related to the accreditations process and pay a fee for the process depending on the nature and duration of the external evaluation.

From its beginning, the percentage of the state budget has evolved from 97% into 48%. In the last years, the public contribution has been kept in absolute figures. In contrast, the income for rates of accreditation and the contributions for participations in European projects have grown from 0% to 50% of the budget.

ANQA has not the prevision to reduce the cost of the experts.

During the interview with the Minister, he remarked the possibility of increasing ANQA's budget.

### **Analysis**

#### As regards physical resources

ANQA has technical and physical capacity to run its activities.

During the visit different documents were requested on site, all of them were quickly located, so it was made evident the proper functioning of the electronic file system.

#### About the human resources

The panel remained impressed by the technical team of the agency, very well trained and with excellent knowledge of the processes, showing a great enthusiasm and at the same time being aware of the threats and current opportunities.

In this moment, the volume and quality of technical staff is adapted to the requirements of the activity carried out by ANQA, the panel considers that satisfy the current needs.

However, in opinion of the panel, two situations are foreseen of future risk, in consequence the agency will have to implement preventive measures.

On the one hand, the agency can have a risk of lack of resources in short-medium future. In this moment it is foreseen to start new activities such as the accreditation of programmes, the follow-up of the institutional accreditations with conditioned result, the biennale follow-up of positive accreditations or thematic analysis, where it will be necessary to involve more human resources. ANQA might externalize the coordination of some procedures provoking a financial over cost or ANQA might change responsible from other divisions to the Institutional and Programme Accreditation division, but this would bring about a decrease of the internal quality in the other activities.

On the other hand, the high rotation of the staff can provoke a loss of the internal knowledge of the processes.

#### As regards financial resources

The budget shows a diversification of the sources. In these moments the resources are sufficient to develop the main activities, mainly for the fact that universities pay themselves the cost of the institutional accreditation.

However, it will be necessary that the Board of Trustees forecast new staff and more budgets to face new activities not funded or foreseeing a possible decrease of European projects.

It is also necessary to take into account that a part of the budget depends on the universities, which also show problems of lack of funding, for that reason there is a possibility that they cannot face the rates tied to the accreditation of programmes.

### **Panel commendations**

The panel would like to commend the excellent qualification of ANQA's staff.

### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends that ANQA foresees in the medium term the needs of staff and budget, and establishes the necessary measures to carry out all the foreseen activities.

### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

### ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Standard:

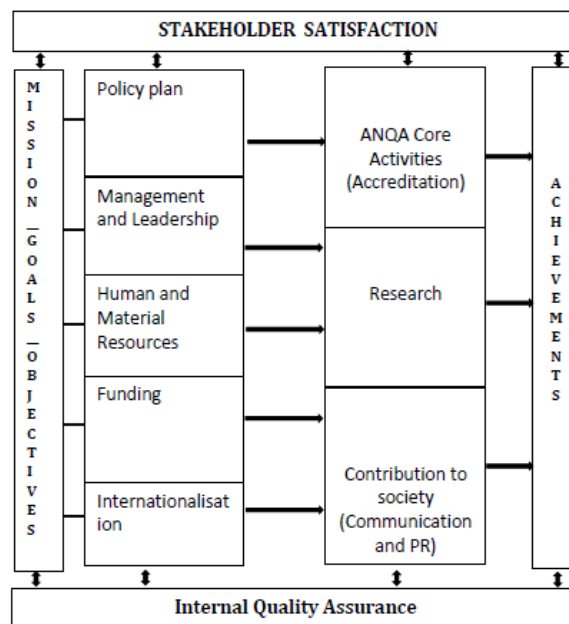
Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

#### Evidence

Since its establishment ANQA has adopted a model of its internal quality assurance (IQA) that would drive its effective management. In 2011, a bottom-up approach to internal quality assurance has been adopted.

Its policy and procedures are described in *ANQA Internal Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures (2012)*, where ANQA IQA is defined as responsible for providing the executive management with information about the adequacy and effectiveness of the quality of ANQA's operations when compared with established standards. It also provides mechanisms and tools for problem solving and effective decision-making as well as communicates opportunities for improvement, when identified, to the appropriate level of management.

ANQA quality model is described in the following schema:



All the activities run by ANQA are divided into 11 quality assurance areas, correspondingly 11 protocols are used to perform and monitor these areas. The protocols are linked to ESG.

The protocols have the following structure:

- Strategic goals
- Targets
- Indicators for evaluating targets
- Description of activities
- Evaluation
- Accountability/ Responsibility
- Reporting
- Documents

The feedback is collected extensively after meetings and focus group discussions: from stakeholders (internal and external), staff, panel experts, HEI with satisfaction surveys.

During the interviews, ANQA explained some of the improvements introduced in the process of accreditation, as results of the mechanisms of feedback, such as simplifying some stage of the desk-review or including the international context in the Manual of Accreditation.

### **Analysis**

ANQA has established a set of procedures for assurance of the internal quality of their processes; each procedure is managed by the responsible for the process and published on the web page.

The Quality Committee meets periodically, with the participation of the Director. During the meetings the activities and the results of the indicators are revised. This fact allows a continuous improvement of the processes.

During the interviews, a clear will of collecting the opinion of all the stakeholders was made evident in all the stages of the evaluation and trainings.

Good and periodic communication was also made evident with the authorities, universities and representatives of the labour market. The Director of ANQA meets the Minister every two months. The universities highlighted that the implementation of the programmes has been made in a cooperative and non-imperative way.

### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends revising periodically their internal and external procedures, for example doing internal audits.

The panel would like to recommend reducing the number of surveys carried out or to space them in the time, in order to not saturate the system with an excess of surveys.

It also recommends establishing a channel in the web page to collect suggestions or consulting of students, teachers, or society not linked directly in the processes of external quality assurance.

### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## **ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES**

Standard:

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

### **Evidence**

This is the first attempt for ANQA to undergo external review against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area to gain ENQA's full membership and to join EQAR.

According to the strategic plan and "*ANQA Internal Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures*", ANQA should undergo external evaluation to promote the recognition of qualifications and enhance trust amongst HEIs/Quality assurance agencies at national and international level.

In 2013 ANQA underwent external pilot evaluation organized by NVAO to prepare ANQA for applying to ENQA for full membership.

## Analysis

The review panel has confirmed the commitment of the agency in following the ESG. The interviews conducted with the Board, the Accreditation Committee, and the Ministry revealed the importance they gave to the agency.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

### ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

## Evidence

The accreditation procedures consider the peculiarities of internal quality assurance described in Part 1 of ESG. In the document “Harmonisation of the criteria of ANQA for institutional and Programme accreditation with Part 1: European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance in the institutions of higher education” it is possible to trace the conformity of Armenian accreditation system with ESG Part 1.

The Director mentioned that external quality assurance methodology includes focus on quality of academic staff, assessment methods used by academic staff to assess students, internal quality assurance, and collaboration with stakeholders in creating new study programmes.

Representatives from universities told that the evaluations and the activities of ANQA have helped universities to understand better their current situation. For example one of the representatives from HEI told that they have created a separate department for internal quality assurance in its university and that this was a result of working together with ANQA.

## Analysis

The panel has checked the mapping of the Armenian accreditation criteria and standards towards the compliance with the ESG and has noted that ANQA covers all the standards of ESG part 1.

ESG – Part 1	Institutional accreditation criteria and standards	Academic programme accreditation
1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance	1. Mission and purpose 2. Governance and administration 10. Internal quality assurance	7. Quality assurance
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	3. Academic programmes	1. Academic programme design and approval 3. Teaching and learning practices 5. Research and development
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	3. Academic programmes 4. Students	3. Teaching and learning practices 4. Student assessment
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	4. Students	1. Academic programme design and approval
1.5 Teaching staff	5. Faculty and staff	2. Teaching staff
1.6 Learning resources and student support	4. Students 7. Infrastructure and resources	6. Learning environment
1.7 Information Management	2. Governance and administration 4. Students 7. Infrastructure and resources	7. Quality assurance 2. Teaching staff 3. Teaching and learning practices

1.8 Public Information	8. Societal responsibility	No
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	3. Academic programmes 4. Students	1. Academic programme design and approval 3. Teaching and learning practices 7. Quality assurance
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	10. Internal quality assurance	No

The panel has checked some of the institutional accreditation expert reports. All the standards are included in the assessment. During the meetings, it was evident that the focus of the external quality assurance is the improvement of institutions through the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard:

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

### Evidence

The external quality assurance is defined in the Accreditation Manual, which has been designed by ANQA and approved by the Board of Trustees in 2015.

ANQA undertook the review of the procedures of the Manual after it had put its quality assurance processes into practice, received feedback from stakeholders, and taking into account the revision of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (2015).

The current Accreditation Manual is a constituent part of the re-elaborated statute on *State Accreditation of Tertiary Level Institutions and Academic Programmes in the Republic of Armenia* approved by the RA Government in 2011. It gives a comprehensive description of the quality assurance framework for Armenian tertiary education, the procedures, criteria and standards, and duration of external evaluation processes through which tertiary level institutions and academic programmes.

The institutional accreditation criteria and standards are:

1. Mission and purpose
2. Governance and administration
3. Academic programmes
4. Students
5. Faculty and staff
6. Research and development
7. Infrastructure and resources
8. Societal responsibility
9. External relations and internationalization
10. Internal quality assurance

The academic programme accreditation criteria and standards are:

1. Academic programme design and approval
2. Teaching staff
3. Teaching and learning practices
4. Student assessment



5. Research and development
6. Learning environment
7. Quality assurance

The involvement of stakeholders was ensured through discussions with HEIs, MoES, employers and students about the aims and objectives of quality assurance to form mutual understanding of QA; circulating the drafts of quality assurance framework, accreditation criteria, standards and procedures among the stakeholders for feedback; and piloting the newly developed criteria, standards and procedures at institutional and academic programme levels.

ANQA regularly gathers feedback from all the parties involved (HEIs, national and international experts, student experts, coordinators). Their reflections are regularly analysed, discussed and considered in the improvement activities: for example, during the revision of ANQA Accreditation Manual or the proposals relating to the changes in the legislative framework.

Representatives from universities told that evaluation and activities of ANQA have helped universities to understand better their current situation.

In order to address stakeholder needs more effectively, ANQA has set up stakeholder groups and defined the levels of cooperation with each of those groups. This description is included in the Accreditation Manual.

### **Analysis**

The educational system in Armenia is very regulated by the legal frame; the law elaborated by the government establishes the way to act in relation to the external quality. However, during the interviews it was made evident that on the one hand ANQA has periodic meetings with HEI's, employers and students, and on the other hand it has periodic meetings with the government to establish the way to work. HEIs, stakeholders and also government see ANQA as a promoter of reforms in higher education area.

For example, during the site-visit, one of the points that are being worked this year is the implantation of the process of programmes accreditation. In this process ANQA, the government and representatives of the universities have participated together in order to decide which is the most efficient way to carry out the accreditation.

The panel considers that external quality assurance is developed in the Manual and the procedures (institutional and programme accreditation) in a clear and complete way. All documents have been agreed with the different stakeholders.

ANQA keeps in mind that the enhancement of the internal quality assurance and the medium-term strategy of the universities are the keys point for their improvement.

### **Panel commendations**

The panel would like to commend the stakeholder's involment in the designing ANQA's methodologies and processes.

The panel would like to commend ANQA's continuous quest for feedback and the overall improvement orientation of ANQA.

### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends using the same approach for the future cycle of Institutional Accreditation.

## Panel conclusion: fully compliant

### ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

#### Standard:

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include: a self-assessment or equivalent

- an external assessment normally including a site visit
- a report resulting from the external assessment
- a consistent follow-up

#### Evidence

External quality assurance procedures in ANQA are institutional and programme accreditation. The statute on *State Accreditation of Institutions and their Academic Programmes in the Republic of Armenia* defines the procedure of state accreditation of all tertiary education institutions. Both procedures are described in “ANQA Accreditation Manual”, which is publicly available.

Institutional and academic programme accreditations are conducted in the following phases, which are described in the Manual:

- self-assessment drafted by the institution according to ANQA template
- external evaluation including a site visit and a report
- follow up (improvement plan)
- decision made by ANQA’s Accreditation Commission regarding the granting or denial of accreditation status
- follow up

**Regarding the self-assessment**, institutions write a report following the “Guide to Self-Assessment” and using self-assessment forms provided by ANQA. The main purpose of this Guide is to provide institutions with tools to carry out self-assessment and improvement planning. The self-assessment process is focused in examining the programme’s or the institution’s strengths and weaknesses relative to ANQA quality criteria and standards.

ANQA has the legal right to return a self-assessment if it does not comply with ANQA’s standardized format, if it has contextual, technical, structural, or other imperfections, or has unreliable data.

**The external evaluation** includes three main steps:

1. Desk review—The expert panel conducts an intensive review of the self-evaluation and the package of respective documents submitted by the institution. Reviewers write out the missing information and issues that need to be clarified during the site visit. The international experts’ involvement in the desk-review process is assured via Skype meetings and e-mails.
2. Site Visit —The expert panel pays a visit to check the institution on-site. The site visit lasts 3-7 days depending on the type of accreditation, the size and specifications of the institution under review, etc. The expert panel holds meetings with internal and external stakeholders, observes additional documents and resources.
3. Report production – The expert panel produces a report, which includes the analysis of the situation, commendations for the achievements and recommendations for further improvements. (See ESG 2.6)

#### **Follow up (improvement plan)**

An educational institution launches the follow-up process immediately after receiving the expert panel’s final report.

The follow-up activities are based on the recommendations in the experts' review report. The expert panel evaluates the follow-up plan by its tangibility and accordance to the recommendations and issues.

The expert panel's opinion on the follow-up plan is included in the ANQA conclusion on the accreditation of the institution.

### **Decision**

Finally, ANQA's Accreditation Committee makes a decision regarding the granting or denial of accreditation status (See ESG 2.5). Institutions can appeal to their decision (Comments on ESG 2.7).

### **Follow up**

The Institutions that gain conditional institutional or programme accreditation should submit a written report to ANQA once every six months on follow-up implementation. Institutions should highlight the compliance with follow-up while preparing the reports and analyse the effectiveness of the implemented actions.

ANQA discusses the report and within fifteen working days submits its written conclusion to the institution and to the Accreditation Commission.

Once every two years, the institutions that gain positive accreditation must carry out an internal institutional evaluation of the areas in need for amelioration as mentioned in the expert report. The assessment can be carried out both internally as well as through an external expert. The results must be submitted to ANQA.

### **Analysis**

Regarding institutional assessment, ANQA has carried out 16 institutional evaluations, all of them following the established phases. In the same way the pilot testing programme accreditation also follows the same process. The panel confirms that the review processes performed by ANQA are pre-defined, implanted and published.

Experts and institutions agree on the fact that the phases of the process are clear, well documented, and useful for the quality of higher education in RA.

The review panel concluded that the ESG structure is implemented. Nevertheless, during the visit, the panel could not assess:

- the effectiveness of monitoring processes after the institutional accreditation and programme accreditation, since these processes had not yet been carried out.
- the effectiveness of programme accreditation, since this process had not yet been carried out.

### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends improving the follow-up processes, once implanted in the different centres. Aspects that should be taken into account should be:

- it is satisfactory that HEIs have to submit follow-up and improvement plan, in order to be monitored also after decision making. But the panel had concern about the time frame. The 6-month delay for the submission of the follow-up report is too short and should be reconsidered.
- the effectiveness of follow-up of the institutions valued positively should be carried out externally, including the participation of external experts from the institution, in order to consider the results of the actions taken by institutions.

## **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

### **ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS**

Standard:

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

#### **Evidence**

##### Composition of the panels in Accreditation procedures

Expert panels are composed of two academic staff representatives, one education management and/or quality assurance professional and one student representative. Each expert panel has one or two international experts, in order to give ANQA new approaches.

Employers are involved in expert panels for academic programme accreditation.

For each expert panel ANQA appoints a coordinator, who is responsible for the procedure and organisational part, but who is not a panel member and has no influence on evaluation and decision-making process.

##### Training

There are 2 types of trainings for experts: "Initial trainings" and "On-going trainings". All the experts follow an initial training designed to instil confidence among candidate experts. During the processes on-going trainings and practical guidance are also provided.

Students follow a special training: Candidates students follow an initial training lasting between one and three months. The best students are selected to be part of the expert pool.

##### Selection

The selection of experts follows the following steps:

- ANQA's announcement of candidate expert recruitment is published on ANQA website; it is also sent to co-partner organizations.
- Candidate experts send their CVs to ANQA.
- The committee, formed from ANQA's experienced staff, makes the initial selection of candidate experts.
- The selected candidates are included into the expert pool. Candidates who successfully complete the trainings acquire the status of an external expert and are registered in ANQA's expert pool.
- Universities can suggest changing the experts in the panel if they prove conflict of interest; experts must sign confirmation that they do not have conflict of interest prior to the signature of the contract with ANQA.
- The students for accreditation process are recruited from participants in ANQA Student' Voice Programme who have taken part in a long period of training beforehand.

##### Experts' evaluation

The performance of the experts is periodically monitored and evaluated during all the phases of accreditation. The panel is evaluated by ANQA staff, by the institution (after each site-visit meeting and at the end of the process) and by the coordinator.

#### **Analysis**

ANQA puts special attention on the training and selection of the panels. In relation to the training, the panel could check that all the interviewed experts had an extensive knowledge of the evaluation processes. In particular the panel would like to highlight the level of commitment, the implication and

qualification of the students that had participated in the processes of accreditation. The aptitude of the students is a good illustration of the result of the Students' Voice programme.

The trainings demonstrated being effective and the experts manifested the support provided by ANQA and the utility of the guides.

In relation to the composition of the panels, it is suitable, highlighting as good practice the incorporation of international experts during the process, who include an additional report.

Currently, there are approximately 400 local and 40 international experts in ANQA data-base. This number of experts is considered sufficient to guarantee the independence with respect to the institution or accredited program. In this sense, the agency is conscious that the Republic of Armenia is a small country; consequently its university system is also small. ANQA establishes a rigid mechanism to avoid the conflict of interest, including the signature of a document of no-conflict-of interest.

The evaluated institutions manifested the competence and independences of the panels.

The composition of the Appealing Committee is explained in ESG 2.7

#### **Panel commendations**

The panel would like to commend the agency for the participation of international experts in the accreditation processes and for the degree of implication of students in the accreditation process.

The panel would like to commend the agency for the Students' Voice programme, as a source of students-experts. The selection system of the students contributes to the dissemination of a quality culture among students in a larger way.

#### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends, in the measure of its possibilities, increasing and /or maintaining the number of international experts. This fact would be beneficial specially taking into account agency future plans of internationalisation.

#### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

#### **ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES**

Standard:

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

#### **Evidence**

The procedure on decision-making of the Accreditation Committee is regulated by the procedure on *"Formation and Operation of Accreditation Committee"* and in the Accreditation Manual. These documents are published on ANQA's website and used as tools in the trainings for experts.

The institutional accreditation is based on 10 criteria and programme accreditation is based on 7 criteria.

The Accreditation Committee takes the final decision based on the following documents: self-evaluation report, the expert panel report, ANQA conclusion, the institution's follow-up plan, and the expert panel's opinion of follow-up plan.

The Committee holds a meeting in order to take the decision. The meeting is attended by the representatives from the institution under review, the expert panel chair, the ANQA coordinator, as well as a representative from RA Ministry of Education and Science.

During the session, the expert panel chair introduces the outcomes of external review. University representatives can express their opinions and make observations, in case of need, elucidate the action plan and answer the questions posed by the Accreditation Committee members and the ministry representative.

After reviewing the documents and considering the opinions of the panel chair and the institution representatives, the Accreditation Committee convenes a closed door meeting, the results of which provide a basis on which the Accreditation Committee makes a decision on accreditation by majority vote.

The accreditation decision may be one of the following:

- to grant institutional accreditation for a period of 4 or 6 years or to grant programme accreditation for a period of 5 years.
- to grant conditional accreditation for a period of two years
- to deny accreditation

### **Analysis**

The panel made it evident that the institutional accreditation process to take the decisions is well known for the external experts as well as for the institutions.

However, the panel considers different aspects which it would be necessary to improve:

- In relation to the Manual, the description of the criteria is brief. The Manual could incorporate explanations about how to interpret the standards. The agency explained that the evaluation protocols, which are not public, include explanations on how to interpret the standards, placing particular attention to the evidence that must be presented.
- In relation to the criteria for outcomes, the weight of each criterion in the decision-making process regarding the accreditation decision for 4 or 6 years is not publicly available.
- During the interviews some institutions demonstrated the lack of knowledge of the criteria used by the Accreditation Committee. This can negatively influence relationship between HEIs and the agency, since it may weaknesses the confidence in the agency.

Nevertheless the Accreditation Committee made it evident that the criteria were interpreted in a consistent way basing their decisions on all the evidence presented.

Right now the conclusion about each criterion can be *“meet the requirements of the criterion”* or *“does not meet the requirements of the criterion”* (ANQA Accreditation Manual 2015). Experts mentioned that some sort of scale, e.g. 4 point scale, can show better the situation in universities and from the point of view of universities more explicit evaluation would help to understand the situation better.

### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends improving the Manual of accreditation to make more clear which aspects, indicators or evidence are required for each criterion.

Likewise, the panel recommends publishing the decision rules used by the Accreditation Committee to differentiate their accreditation decisions.

### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

## ESG 2.6 REPORTING

### Standard:

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

### Evidence

The institutional accreditation process generates three separate documents:

- the expert panel report based on both the self-assessment and the outcomes of the site visit
- the ANQA conclusions report: This is a summary of the expert's report, highlighting the strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations. It also includes the action plan done by the institutions and the opinion of the expert panel about this plan
- the Accreditation Committee decision

These documents are published separately on the website in English and Armenian.

All expert panel reports include:

- an executive summary
- a summary including strengths and weaknesses and recommendations for each criteria
- the description of the review process including a description of the institution
- the main part: the experts' evaluation of the institution against ANQA criteria: for each standard the panel describe: findings, considerations, summary and the conclusion
- some annexes such as : CV of experts, schedule of the visit, list of reviewed documents and observed resources

### Analysis

The panel revised different samples of reports of institutional accreditation published on the web page. All reports were complete, clear, and they followed the pre-defined structure for ANQA, which facilitates its reading. Likewise, the reports contain all the sections portrayed to the ESG- Guidelines: description of the centre, evidence, analysis, and recommendations.

It is necessary to highlight that all the outcomes are published on ANQA's website, independently of their result, whether positive, conditional or negative. All reports had a similar degree of detail.

The conclusions report, elaborated by the coordinator of ANQA can be considered as a summary of the expert panel report.

ANQA also publishes the final decision of the Accreditation Committee.

During the interviews, all the experts including students explained that all of them participate in producing the evaluation reports through a decision making process by consensus.

The process of elaboration of the report includes a final stage where the institution can correct factual errors, before its publication.

The objective of ANQA is that experts write reports focused on HEI's improvement. That means that the reports should show possible developments for HEIs improvements without setting concrete things to change but rather to encourage HEIs to find best solutions for themselves internally.

During the visit, the expert panel only review the reports of the accreditation institutions.

### Panel commendations

The panel would like to commend the quality of the reports done by the experts.

### Panel recommendations

The panel recommends using always the same vocabulary (positive/ negative vs. satisfactory/unsatisfactory vs. yes/no) to qualify each criteria, even though the result is clear and it has not produced any confusion.

### Panel conclusion: fully compliant

### ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Standard:

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

### Evidence

The appeals process is described in the part 5.7 of ANQA Accreditation Manual 2015 and in the procedure on *Formation and Operation of ANQA Accreditation Committee*, both documents are published in the web page.

Within a month after receiving the accreditation decision, an institution may appeal to the ANQA Board of Trustees against the Committee's decision. The appeal must clearly and convincingly demonstrate adversely assessed criteria and/or alleged procedural violations against the institution. After receiving the appeal, the head of ANQA Board of Trustees composes a new three-member committee from ANQA's expert pool for an additional assessment.

The institution presents a new self-evaluation of appealed standards. The new self-evaluation must not contain references to the previous self-evaluation, expert report or to the Accreditation decision. New evidences may be attached to the new self-evaluation.

The expert committee examines the documentation, pays a site visit and produces a report, which is send to the ANQA Board of Trustees.

As regards the new panel, the following members are involved:

- International expert from the sphere of education
- Local expert having the experience in teaching and/or education management as well as proficient knowledge in legislative framework regulating education sphere
- Local expert having great teaching experience in one of the spheres of the academic program mentioned in the agreement signed with the HEI.

The composition of the expert panel is agreed upon with the HEI and is approved by ANQA Director.

### Analysis

The process of appeals is clearly described in the Manual of accreditation. The process is known by the universities, and during the visit a procedure was in progress.

However, the panel considers that the process of appeals established by ANQA cannot be considered an appeal, but a second opportunity giving the institution time to improve its situation and then undergo one more evaluation and receive a new decision in a short period of time.

In a usual process of appeals, the experts evaluate the procedural aspects and/or the same evidence, as a way to validate or invalidate the previous outcome. In the appeal process defined by ANQA a new



panel starts a new evaluation based on a different self-evaluation report and on new evidence. This can therefore not be considered as an appeal but a re-evaluation.

With regard to the composition of the new expert panel in case of such an appeal, the panel considers this a regular external quality assurance procedure and thus ANQA's expert panel should include a student as in all their other evaluations.

The Accreditation Committee admitted that the time frame for an appeal is too long, and that decision-making process becomes very difficult when reports from two different expert teams are contradicting, due to different evidence evaluated.

The panel considers that an appeal should primarily regard the satisfactory implementation of ANQA's methodology using all existing evidence.

The panel have been struggling to draft a balanced conclusion. To sum up, the existence of an appeal procedure and its implementation have considered as a positive by the panel. There is no doubt that the aim of the Agency is to include the process of appeals in the accreditation procedures. Nevertheless, the panel considers that the process of appeals established by ANQA cannot be considered an appeal. In the panel's view, this is the major weaknesses of the agency.

#### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends that ANQA reconsiders its appeals process, considering the aspects quoted, in order to avoid any confusion between an appeal procedure and a second chance procedure.

The panel recommends that if the appeal is evaluated by a new panel, ANQA should consider including a student.

**Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

## CONCLUSION

### SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

3.1 The panel would like to commend the agency for the Students' Voice programme, which helps to promote the participation of the students in institutions and prepare students for ANQA experts' panels.

3.3 The panel commends ANQA for the incorporation of international experts in the processes of institutional accreditation and encourages the agency to incorporating them also into the programme accreditation processes.

3.5 The panel would like to commend the excellent qualification of ANQA's staff.

2.2 The panel would like to commend the stakeholder's involment in the designing ANQA's methodologies and processes.

2.2 The panel would like to commend ANQA's continuous quest for feedback and the overall improvement orientation of ANQA.

2.4The panel would like to commend the agency for the participation of international experts in the accreditation processes and for the degree of implication of students in the accreditation process.

2.4 The panel would like to commend the agency for the Students' Voice programme, as a source of students-experts. The selection system of the students contributes to the dissemination of a quality culture among students in a larger way.

2.6 The panel would like to commend the quality of the reports done by the experts.

### OVERALL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The panel recommends increasing the activities of external quality assurance. Particularly, to develop capacity to carry out evaluation of the programmes on a regular basis.

3.1 The panel recommends publishing the annual plan.

3.3 To avoid undue influence and to increase transparency in the decision-making process, the panel recommends limiting the role of the representatives of the Ministry to that of silent observers in the preparatory meetings of the Accreditation Committee.

3.3 The panel recommends that the Ministry ratifies directly the decisions of the Accreditation Committee.

3.3 To strengthen the Boards independence and autonomy, the panel recommends adding an international perspective to the Board.

3.3 To ensure meaningful student representation the panel recommends that students can be nominated only by student representation bodies.

3.4 The panel recommends that the report *Comprehensive analysis of the accreditation process* becomes a periodic analysis of the accreditation process.

3.4 The panel recommends broadening the thematic analysis, for example, carrying out analysis by disciplines.

3.5 The panel recommends that ANQA foresees in the medium term the needs of staff and budget, and establishes the necessary measures to carry out all the foreseen activities.

3.6 The panel recommends revising periodically their internal and external procedures, for example doing internal audits.

3.6 The panel would like to recommend reducing the number of surveys carried out or to space them in the time, in order to not saturate the system with an excess of surveys.

3.6 The panel recommends establishing a channel in the web page to collect suggestions or consulting of students, teachers, or society not linked directly in the processes of external quality assurance.

2.2 The panel recommends using the same approach for the future cycle of Institutional Accreditation

2.3 The panel recommends improving the follow-up processes, once implanted in the different centres. Aspects that should be taken into account should be:

- it is satisfactory that HEIs have to submit follow-up and improvement plan, in order to be monitored also after decision making. But the panel had concern about the time frame. The 6-month delay for the submission of the follow-up report is too short and should be reconsidered.
- the effectiveness of follow-up of the institutions valued positively should be carried out externally, including the participation of external experts from the institution, in order to consider the results of the actions taken by institutions

2.4 The panel recommends, in the measure of its possibilities, increasing and /or maintaining the number of international experts. This fact would be beneficial specially taking into account agency future plans of internationalisation.

2.5 The panel recommends improving the Manual of accreditation to make more clear which aspects, indicators or evidence are required for each criterion.

2.5 The panel recommends publishing the decision rules used by the Accreditation Committee to validate their accreditation decisions

2.6 The panel recommends using always the same vocabulary (positive/ negative vs. satisfactory/unsatisfactory vs. yes/no) to qualify each criteria, even though, the result is clear and it has not produced any confusion.

2.7 The panel recommends that ANQA reconsiders its appeals process, considering the aspects quoted, in order to avoid any confusion between an appeal procedure and a second chance procedure.

2.7 The panel recommends that if the appeal is evaluated by a new panel, ANQA should consider including a student.

The agency is recommended to take appropriate actions, so far as it is empowered to do so, to achieve full compliance with these standards at the earliest opportunity.

# ANNEXES

## ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
09:00 – 09:30	Review panel's private meeting		Axel Aerden (Chair)
09:30 – 10:15	Presentation about the higher education system in which the agency (predominantly) operates	Ruben Topchyan (ANQA Director)	Axel Aerden (Chair)
10:15 – 10:30	Review panel's private discussion		Axel Aerden (Chair)
10:30 – 11:15	Meeting with the team responsible for preparation of the SAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ani Mkrtchyan (IQA responsible)</li> <li>Varduhi Gyulazyan (Coordinator)</li> <li>Lilit Pipoyan (Institutional and programme accreditation division)</li> <li>Ella Karagulyan (Policy development and implementation division / sociologist)</li> <li>Tigran Mnatsakanyan (Expert/Policy development and implementation division)</li> <li>Gayane Ananyan (Student, Assistant to director)</li> </ul>	Axel Aerden (Chair)
11:15 – 11:30	Review panel's private discussion		Axel Aerden (Chair)
11:30 – 12:30	Meeting with senior management team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anushavan Makaryan (Head of the Institutional and programme accreditation division),</li> <li>Tigran Mnatsakanyan (Head of the Policy development and implementation Division),</li> <li>Anahit Utmazyan (Head of the Secretariat)</li> </ul>	Axel Aerden (Chair)
12:30-13:30	Lunch break		
13:30 – 14:30	Meeting with Policy development and implementation division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lilit Zakaryan (Specialist/ responsible for the communication with stakeholders)</li> <li>Ella Karagulyan (Specialist/ sociologist)</li> <li>Arusyak Harutyunyan (Specialist/ responsible for Student Voice)</li> <li>Ofelya Petrosyan (HR manager, Lawyer)</li> <li>Ani Mkrtchyan (Specialist/ responsible for Internal quality assurance)</li> <li>Haykuhi Barseghyan (Specialist/PR manager)</li> </ul>	Axel Aerden (Chair)
14:30 – 14:45	Review panel's private discussion		
14:45 – 15:45	Meeting with Institutional and programme accreditation division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Varduhi Gyulazyan (Leading specialist/coordinator)r</li> <li>Lilit Zakaryan (Specialist/ responsible for the communication with stakeholders)</li> <li></li> <li>Ani Mkrtchyan (Specialist/ responsible for Internal quality assurance)</li> </ul>	Axel Aerden (Chair)
15:45 – 16:00	Review panel's private discussion		
<b>04.10.2016</b>			
09:00 – 09:30	Review panel's private discussion		
09:30-10:15	Meeting with Director and Board members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ruben Topchyan (ANQA Director) Varoujan Avedikyan (Head of the Board, Central Bank of Armenia)</li> <li>Edward Kirakosyan (Board member, Executive director, Union of manufacturers and businessmen (Employers of Armenia)</li> <li>Aleksandr Grigoryan (Board member, Yerevan State University)</li> <li>Larisa Avetisyan (Board member, Yerevan state medical university)</li> </ul>	Axel Aerden (Chair)
10:15 – 10:30	Review panel's private discussion		
10:30 – 11:15	Meeting with the heads of HEIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ruben Aghgashyan (Vice rector, State Engineering University of Armenia),</li> <li>Mkrtich Ayvazyan (Vice rector, Yerevan State Academy of Fine Arts),</li> <li>Vachik Brutyan (Rector, Mkhitar Gosh International University),</li> </ul>	Axel Aerden (Chair)

TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anahit Farmanyan (Vice rector, Gyumri State Pedagogical Institute),</li> <li>Konstantin Enkoyan (Vice rector, Yerevan State Medical University after M. Heratsi),</li> <li>Aneta Erznkyan (Dean of the Faculty of Cinema, TV and Animation at Yerevan State Institute of Cinema and Theatre, Honorary Worker of Art of the Republic of Armenia)</li> <li>Neli Kutuzyan (Head of QA Department, Gavar State University)</li> </ul>	
11:15 – 11:30	Review panel's private discussion		
11:30 – 12:30	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gayane Marmaryan (Lecturer, Armenian National Agrarian University),</li> <li>Angin Martirosyan (Head of the IQA division, lecturer, National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia),</li> <li>Gagik Ktryan (Head of IQA division, lecturer, Military Aviation Institute after Marshal A. Khanperiyants),</li> <li>Vardan Sargsyan (Head of the Chair, Armenian State University of Economy),</li> <li>Ara Amiryan (Head of the Chair Graphics and Basics of Machine Designing, Armenian National Agrarian University),</li> <li>Robert Khachatryan (Head of the Education Management and Planning chair, Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences)</li> </ul>	Axel Aerden (Chair)
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch break		
13:30 – 14:15	Meeting with Accreditation committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yuri Sargsyan (Emeritus Professor of NPUA, Doctor of engineering, Academician of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia)</li> <li>Susanna Karakhanyan (Accreditation Committee member/ Higher Education Quality Assurance Supervisor at Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC)- Skype)</li> <li>Samvel Shoukourian (Accreditation Committee member/ Scientific director, Educational and Research Center for Information technologies of YSU),</li> <li>Nelly Hovhannisyan (Accreditation Committee member/Associated professor, YSU Faculty of Biology)- Skype)</li> <li>Samvel Avetisyan (Accreditation Committee member/ Director of the "Amberd" Research Center, Armenian State University of Economy)</li> </ul>	Axel Aerden (Chair)
14:15 – 14:30	Review panel's private discussion		
14:30 – 15:15	Meeting with employer representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lusine Tarkhanyan (Executive director, Union of IT Enterprises)</li> <li>Tigran Sargsyan (Software Engineering Manager, Synopsis Armenia)</li> <li>Yervand Aghababyan (COO, SFL LLC)</li> <li>Hayk Daveyan (Development foundation of Armenian)</li> <li>Gagik Makaryan (Director of Republican Union of Employers of Armenia)</li> <li>Hovhannes Grigoryan (CEO, Institute for Political and Sociological Consulting)</li> <li>Viktoria Aslanyan (CEO, Golden Grape ArmAs LLC)</li> </ul>	Axel Aerden (Chair)
15:15 – 15:30	Review panel's private discussion		
15:30 – 16:30	Meeting with the student representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meline Gevorgyan (Bachelor's 3<sup>rd</sup> year student, Yerevan State University / Student Voice)</li> <li>David Petrosyan (Bachelor's 3<sup>rd</sup> year student, French University in Armenia/ Student Voice)</li> <li>Gohar Miqayelyan (Master's 2nd year student, Armenian National Agrarian University / Student Voice)</li> <li>Taguhi Abrahamyan (Master's 2nd year student, Armenian National Agrarian University after Kh. Abovyan/ Student Voice)</li> <li>Misha Tadevosyan (Bachelor's 3<sup>rd</sup> year student, Armenian State Pedagogical University after Kh. Abovyan/ Student Voice)</li> <li>Elvina Margaryan (Master's 1<sup>st</sup> year student, Armenian State Pedagogical University after Kh. Abovyan)</li> </ul>	Axel Aerden (Chair)
16:30 – 16:45	Review panel's private discussion		

TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
16:45 – 18:00	Meeting with international experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Mieczyslaw Socha (Former vice-president of Polish Accreditation Committee on Higher Education, rretired associate professor at Warsaw University, Poland),</li><li>Patrick Gray (Associate Head of the Department of Law, Governance and International Relations at London Metropolitan University, UK) - Skype</li><li>Romain Hulpia (VLHORA and VLHUR expert, Netherlands), - Skype</li></ul>	
	Online meeting with international experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Azir Aliu (Advisor to the Prime Minister for Higher Education, Science and ICT, Republic of Macedonia)</li></ul>	Axel Aerden (Chair)
18:00 – 19:00	Wrap-up meeting among panel members		
05.10.2016			
09:00 – 09:45	Meeting with representatives of MOES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Levon Mkrtchyan (Minister of Education and Science)</li><li>Karine Harutyunyan (Deputy Minister for Higher Education)</li></ul>	Axel Aerden (Chair)
10:00 – 10:30	Meeting among panel members to agree on final issues to clarify		
10:30 – 11:00	Online meeting with international experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Patrick Gray (Associate Head of the Department of Law, Governance and International Relations at London Metropolitan University, UK),</li></ul>	
11:15 – 12:00	Meeting with Director to clarify any pending issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Ruben Topchyan</li></ul>	
12:00 – 13:30	Private meeting among panel members to agree on the main findings		
13:30 – 14:30	Coffee break		
14:30 – 15:30	Final de-briefing meeting with staff and Board members of the agency to inform about preliminary findings	ANQA Staff	
15: 30 - 18:00	Private meeting among panel members	To prepare the External Review Report	

## ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

External review of the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (ANQA) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

### TERMS OF REFERENCE

April 2016

#### 1. Background and Context

ANQA strives to promote public trust, social cohesion, equity, responsibility and competitiveness in Armenian society through systematic enhancement of tertiary level education provisions.

It does it by

- being receptive to the needs of the national stakeholders through its mandatory institutional and voluntary programme accreditation
- ensuring visibility at international level thus contributing to a stringer positioning of the Armenian tertiary education within Europe
- valuing close cooperation with stakeholders in the process of developing a quality assurance system.

The following are ANQA's strategic objectives:

- to determine and ensure compliance with appropriate standards of tertiary education;
- to promote and support continuous improvement in the quality and standards of provision of tertiary education provisions, working in partnership and consultation with tertiary education stakeholders;
- to promote tertiary level education's ownership of quality assurance;
- to ensure that clear and accurate information is made publicly available about the quality and standards of tertiary level education; and
- to apply international best practice in evaluation and reviews of tertiary level education's provisions.

ANQA conducts external quality assurance processes in accordance with the norms set by the legislation and regulations of the Republic of Armenia, as well as with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). ANQA also developed Guidelines, Criteria and Standards for Quality Assurance taking into account the local needs and international good practice.

ANQA has been an affiliate of ENQA since June 2009 and is applying for ENQA membership.

ANQA is applying for registration on EQAR.

#### 2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

This review, will evaluate the way in which and to what extent ANQA fulfils the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015)*. Consequently, the review will provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether membership of ANQA should be granted and to EQAR to support ANQA application to the register.

The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards granting membership.

##### 2.1 Activities of ANQA within the scope of the ESG

In order for ANQA to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities of ANQA that are within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and

their relevant links to research and innovation). This is regardless of whether these activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA, and whether they are obligatory or voluntary.

The following activities of ANQA have to be addressed in the external review:

- Institutional and programme accreditation of higher education institutions
- Internal quality assurance of ANQA

### **3. The Review Process**

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in line with the requirements of the *EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the Terms of Reference and protocol for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by ANQA including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to ANQA;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the ENQA Review Committee;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary follow-up visit.

#### **3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members**

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, student member, and eventually a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. For ENQA Agency Reviews at least one of the reviewers is an ENQA nominee (most often the QA professional[s]). At least one of the reviewers is appointed from the nominees of either the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the student member is always selected from among the ESU-nominated reviewers. If requested, the labour market representative may come from the Business Europe nominees or from ENQA. An additional panel member may be included in the panel at the request of the agency under review. In this case an additional fee to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses is applied.

The panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member will not be the Secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide ANQA with the list of suggested experts with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards ANQA review.

#### **3.2 Self-assessment by ANQA, including the preparation of a self-assessment report**

ANQA is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;



- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. All agency's QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which ANQA fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, is present. For the second and subsequent reviews, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within 4 weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 € will be charged to the agency.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

### **3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel**

ANQA will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to ANQA at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by ANQA in arriving in Yerevan, Armenia.

The site visit will close with an oral presentation and discussion of the major issues of the evaluation between the review panel and ANQA.

### **3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report**

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ESG. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language and it will be then submitted to ANQA within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If ANQA chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the review panel will take into account the statement by ANQA, finalise the document and submit it to ANQA and ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will not exceed 40 pages in length. When preparing the report, the review panel should also bear in mind the *EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG*, so as to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR.

ANQA is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which ANQA expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be discussed along with the final evaluation report.

#### **4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report**

ANQA will consider the expert panel's report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. ANQA commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board's decision.

The follow-up report will be complemented by a small-scale visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered as of particular importance or challenge by ANQA. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or compliance of the agency with the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

#### **5. Use of the report**

ENQA shall retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the expert panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, shall be vested in ENQA.

The review report is used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether ANQA has met the ESG and can be thus admitted as a member of ENQA. The report will also be used for registration on EQAR, and is designed so as to serve these two purposes. However, the review report is to be considered final only after being approved by the ENQA Board. Once submitted to ANQA and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by ANQA, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. ANQA may use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved of the report. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on membership.

The Chair of the panel shall remain available to respond to questions of clarification or further information from the EQAR Register Committee provided that the ENQA Secretariat is copied in all such requests.

#### **6. Budget**

ANQA shall pay the following review related fees:

Fee of the Chair	4,500 EUR
Fee of the Secretary	4,500 EUR
Fee of the 2 other panel members	4,000 EUR (2,000 EUR each)
Fee of 2 panel members for follow-up visit	1,000 EUR (500 EUR each)
Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat	7,000 EUR
Experts Training fund	1,400 EUR
Approximate travel and subsistence expenses	6,000 EUR
Travel and subsistence expenses follow-up visit	1,600 EUR

### ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

<b>ANQA</b>	National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance, Foundation
<b>ANQF</b>	National Education Qualifications Framework
<b>AQU</b>	Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency
<b>ECTS</b>	European credit transfer system
<b>EQA</b>	External quality assurance
<b>ENQA</b>	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
<b>ESG</b>	<i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015</i>
<b>ESU</b>	European students union
<b>HE</b>	Higher education
<b>HEI</b>	Higher education institution
<b>IQA</b>	Internal quality assurance
<b>NVAO</b>	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders
<b>QA</b>	Quality assurance
<b>RA</b>	Republic of Armenia
<b>SAR</b>	Self-assessment report
<b>SWOT</b>	Strengths-Weaknesses -Opportunities-Threats
<b>TLI</b>	Tertiary level institutions

## **ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW**

### **DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY ANQA**

- ANQA Strategic Plan\_2010-2015
- ANQA Strategic Plan\_2016-2020
- ANQA Charter
- Procedure on “Formation and Operations of ANQA Accreditation Committee”
- ANQA Accreditation Manual\_2015
- Statute on State Accreditation of Institutions and their Academic Programmes in RA
- Mapping of RA criteria and Standards towards ESG 2015
- Regulation on the Formation of ANQA Expert Panel]
- Examples of Training of experts
- Examples of feedback on a process /site-visit/evaluation (internal or external)
- Examples of Agenda of the Site-Visit
- Number of experts used in reviews\_ Country of origin
- Results and goals of the KPIs
- IQA Yearly Action Plan\_2015

### **OTHER REFERENCE SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL**

- Web ANQA



**THIS REPORT** presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA) undertaken in 2016.

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## 2017 ENQA AGENCY REVIEW