NATIONAL CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE, FOUNDATION

EXPERT PANEL REPORT

ON INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION CARRIED OUT AT VANADZOR STATE UNIVERSITY AFTER HOVHANNES TOUMANYAN

Yerevan, 2019

INTRODUCTION

The institutional accreditation of Vanadzor State Univerity after H. Toumanyan (hereinafter VSU) is carried out based on the application presented by the Institute. The process of institutional accreditation is organized and coordinated by the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance, Foundation (ANQA).

Whilst carrying out its operations, ANQA is guided by the regulation on "State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs" set by the RA Government on 30 June, 2011 N978 decree as well as by N959-Ն (30 June, 2011) decree on approving RA Standards for Professional Education Accreditation.

The expertise was carried out by the expert panel formed in line with the requirements of ANQA Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel. The expert panel consisted of 4 local and 1 international experts.

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

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

The report reflects the outcomes of the expertise on institutional capacities of the VSU in line with the state criteria and standards for accreditation. Likewise, the report holds the observations of the peer review from the perspective of integration to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

CONTENTS

SUMMARY
EXPERTISE OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES OF THE VSU IN LINE WITH STATE CRITERIA AND STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION

The expertise of the VSU was carried out by an independent[1] expert panel formed in line with the requirements of ANQA Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel. The evaluation was carried out according to 10 criteria set by the RA Government on 30 June, 2011 N 959–Ն decree.

While carrying out the expertise the expert panel took into consideration the fact that in line with its 2014-2018 Strategic Plan and its misión, the VSU strives to "ensure sustainable development, puts the policy of revealing the needs off its stakeholders in the foundation of its academic and research operations, to prepare competent professionals who would have fundamental and applicable knowledge and skills, where the student acts as a subject of academic process, accepting its responsibility towards the society, encourages the continuous development of the individual, creates favourable conditions for formulating a multi-faceted individual".

The VSU underwent accreditation process in 2015 with 10 criteria of institutional accreditation approved by RA Government Decision N 959-N of June 30, 2011. As an outcome, the institution being granted institutional accreditation for a period of 4 years.

Taking into consideration the recommendations of the previous accreditation, the VSU has made improvements in a number of areas.

For the previous reporting years considered by the panel, there is a 2014-2018 Strategic Plan outlining seven development directions with corresponding goals. Throughout the accreditation process, VSU was in a transitional period: due to the changes in the management system in the last year, there was Strategic Plan. However, the VSU had an Operational Plan developed for 2019-2021, but the University Board of Trustees (hereinafter referred to as BoT) did not approve it.

Worrisome is the fact that the current mission of the VSU is generic and does not encompass the specificities of the University, does not emphasize the content of the university academic programs, does not represent the goals of the university. The expert panel has also revealed certain passiveness of external stakeholders as far as VSU management processes are concerned. The

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[1] APPENDIX 1: CVs of Expert Panel Members

implementation of KPIs developed for evaluating the quality of the VSU Strategic Objectives is a positive procedure for evaluating VSU performance and contributes to the evaluation of university progress and revealing problematic areas. The panel is positive that in 2018 the institution performed an Assessment Indicator analysis published on the institution's website. At the same time, the panel considers it risky that existing indicators still need improvement, as they are not adapted to the current situation.

The panel positively evaluates the fact that some improvements have been undertaken in the management system over the last five years to improve the efficiency of the latter. However, it became clear from expert analysis that undertaken changes did not serve their purpose: the effectiveness of the management system has not been evaluated, the analysis of human and financial resources at different levels of management and the study and planning of existing issues hindering the further development of the university have not been identified.

Students and lecturers of VSU have the opportunity to participate in decision directed at them and are informed about the decisions made in the boards. However, lecturers and students do not take the initiative to voice issues directed at them in front of governing bodies: this may hinder the process of revealing the existing and future problems at the university.

The panel is concerned that there is no long-term planning at the university, which is connected with the prolonged elections of the rector. The lack of long-term planning is risky for the university, the lower levels of the university carry out situational management through short-term annual planning without defining strategic priorities. This situation impedes the balanced development of the university.

Although transformation of the VSU into a foundation has created potential opportunities to improve its financial and economic policies, these opportunities are still not being used effectively. The lack of diversification of financial resources impedes the further development of the university.

The official weak involvement of employers and other external stakeholders in the decision-making structures of the VSU and the ineffectiveness of feedback mechanisms may limit the level of awareness as to external requirements and developments. An example of this is the lack of external stakeholders in the university's scientific council. Inadequate environmental scanning will result in further risks related to university's strategic development.

There are 30 BA full- and part-time, 13 MA full-time, 11 researcher APs in 7 research directions in 5 faculties of the University. The panel considers it positive that all APs have

undergone improvement over the last five years as a result of internal audits carried out by the university's Quality Assurance Center.

The implemented internal audit enabled to make significant changes to the programs in line with the mission of the university and the requirements of the labor market, which promotes the employment of graduates. Strategies for resolving identified issues related to APs are not yet clearly defined and coordinated in all chairs. This will jeopardize the modernization of APs and courses in line with labour market demands, and the involvement of novel teaching and learning methods. Internal stakeholders are the ones who are mainly involved in the processes of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the APs. At the same time, it became clear from the expert analysis that there are professions (e.g. chemistry) in the VSU that are not required in the labor market and thus do not ensure an adequate number of applicants. The panel considers it positive that in this case the university also places emphasis on specialties (pedagogical) that have a certain demand in the labor market.

The panel welcomes the inclusion and description of various teaching methods in APs, course descriptions and thematic operational plans, but the problem is that in some cases the choice of the method is not preconditioned by the ILOs and the necessity of revealing corresponding needs. Dissatisfaction of some students with teaching methods, ineffective lectures can hinder the development of a student-centered environment, as well as the achievement of intended outcomes.

It is a positive fact that there is a regulation on Academic Integrity and a procedure on appealing assessment results. At the same time, the analysis of the expert group revealed that the grading system is not correlated with the learning outcomes in a sense that the assessment of the skills included in the learning outcomes is not clearly emphasized in the current system, which may lead to ineffective use of the grading system and the acquisition of practical skills by students.

Implementation of part-time APs is related to a number of issues: in particular, insufficient number of classes which leads to ineffective implementation of academic programmes in the part-time mode of study has been singled out.

Praiseworthy is the fact that certain improvements have been introduced in APs as an outcome of benchmarking. However, the results of benchmarking have not contributed to a sufficient level of mobility (as a hosting institution).

The Panel considers it positive that the VSU has mechanisms for student enrollment, selection and admission, which facilitate transparent and effective admission and access to

information on admission requirements. There is a policy of identifying students' needs at the university, and surveys are conducted among part-time students as well.

These surveys help identify and solve students' problems. Students are involved in governing bodies. The panel welcomes the fact that several VSU regulations include provisions on the organization of additional training and consultations.

There are no clear rules and timetable for students to apply to the administrative staff of the VSU. In case there are certain problems, students can refer to the Deans' Office, Deans at any time. The VSU provides students with a "Student Guide", yet, it became evident throughout the site visit that not all students are familiar with the content of the guide notwithstanding the fact that the guide was provided to the students and was published on the website of the university.

The panel is concerned that although there are some student support services at VSU, there is no career center at VSU as such, there is only one responsible person. This may impede the systematic implementation of student career services.

The panel considers it positive that the VSU encourages the publication of scientific articles, has a student journal where its students are published once a year. However, the VSU Student Scientific Society is neither proactive nor active and is not involved in the research of the university, which may hinder the involvement of students in VSU research.

There is a body in charge of protecting students' rights, a Student Council, however, the panel considers it worrisome that not all students are aware of the Student Council and do not apply to the latter in case of problems. This may impede the process of revealing academic needs of students and solving those.

The expert panel considers positive that there are mechanisms for evaluation and quality assurance of educational, consultation and other services rendered to students at the VSU. The Quality Assurance Center conducts surveys, analyzes those, but results are not sufficiently evaluated.

The Expert panel states that the VSU is equipped with the necessary teaching and support staff to fulfill the AP objectives. Positive is the fact teaching staff recruitment is carried out on competitive basis: the requirements of curricula and job descriptions developed by the HRM department are taken into account. However, the requirements for professional qualifications of the teaching staff per each academic programme are not precisely formulated: this may jeopardize the effective implementation of the AP objectives.

The panel welcomes the fact that there is a policy aimed at rejuvenating the teachign staff. Mentoring policy is applied to ensure the professional development of the young teaching staff. Although the VSU implements different approaches to encouraging young staff (up to 35), there are still few applicants. There is no postgraduate education, low salaries, low level of motivation for young people, which can hamper smooth generation change and rejuvenation processes at the VSU. Moreover, doctoral theses have not been defended since 2014, and there is also a decrease in the number of PhD candidates. The teaching and support staff are not sufficiently involved in the research.

The panel welcomes the fact that the university has a teaching staff incentive system, and that lecturers are provided with credit-based training. Students regularly evaluate the teaching staff. However, a few lecturers undergo professional training, moreover, there is no professional training policy for different professions. This is said to be linked to the VSU's financial resources, low level of foreign language acquisition among the teaching staff and other factors. This may jeopardize the professional development of the teaching staff.

The panel welcomes the fact that actions are being taken to assist the faculty and the staff in the process of internationalization of the VSU. However, there are issues here as well: there are but a few lecturers involved in foreign grant programs, and a few teaching staff who dominates a foreign languages.

Following the recommendations of the previous accreditation expert panel, the VSU reviewed the priority research directions and took steps to promote and improve the quality of research. The panel welcomes the fact that the university has developed mechanisms for encouraging staff research, as well as taking steps to create an interrelationship between the teaching process and research activity. The research directions developed by VSU do not reflect the full scientific potential of the university. Inadequate management of VSU research directions and available resources is also of concern, which may impede the effective implementation of the research objectives of the university. The monitoring of the university's research activities is anchored only on quantitative indicators. University competitions for funding scientific works have been mainly directed to publication of textbooks and methodological manuals rather than for scientific research. This does not contribute to the effective implementation of VSU research objectives. The panel considers as alarming that allocations to conducting scientific-research operations and promoting those, to obtaining material and technical resources (equipment, materials) in natural sciences is limited. The panel also finds it alarming that there are no

mechanisms to support the internationalization of scientific research in the VSU. This hampers the process of rendering research and the outcomes of best practices internationally public.

The panel is concerned that the VSU has a problem with funding scientific research. There is no state funding for basic and thematic research. There are no basic and thematic researches by the state and no internal funding sources. This impedes the realization of VSU research objectives and the development of the research field. The lack of skills in applying to various research grants among the VSU staff also does not encourage participation in research grants. The index of published scientific works of the university staff is not high, there are no articles published in international peer reviewed journals with an impact factor.

Worrisome is the fact young people's involvement in scientific research is low. Even though there is a research center and a scientific-research laboratory, Student Scientific Union, the activity is not high among the students. There are no mechanisms to increase the motivation of the youth to engage in science. There are a few part-time postgraduate applicants, there are no PhD students. This fact impedes the rejuvenation of science in the VSU, as well as jeopardizes the process of training young staff.

Worrisome is the fact that there are no mechanisms for linking research activities and teaching processes. Moreover, few analytical / research works are being conducted by students which impedes the development of research skills among students.

The VSU infrastructures and resources are currently sufficient professional education. The panel positively confirms the improvement and replenishment of the VSU resources as a result of the previous accreditation process. The panel, however, finds that there is a need to improve and enrich the resources. In spite of the existing educational resources (laboratories, computers, projectors, etc.), there is still a need for continuous refurbishment of technical equipment and laboratories, which was also confirmed by the representatives of the institution. Noteworthy is that fact that the lion share of the VSU financial resources is student fees, which threatens the financial stability of the university amid a decrease in the number of students. From this point of view, other external inflows make up only 4% of the university's financial resources, which is why it is important to have a clear concept of diversifying sources of financial inflows. Regulated accountability of the institution provides the opportunity for the BoT to evaluate the effectiveness of its activities. The publication of key indicators, reports, regulations, and the evaluation of the institution's activities ensure the transparency and accessibility of the institution's activities to the public, which is important for the operation of feedback mechanisms and the sustainable

development of the institution through them. The use of digital technologies is a positive and promising approach to assessing the effectiveness of public feedback. Digital technologies will strengthen these links and improve the quality and content of information provided by the institution, and make it more targeted. This contributes to the transparency of the institution's activities and the availability of direct communication with the institution. The University has an important role to play in the transfer of knowledge and values to the public in the region and employs established processes in this regard, which can play an important role in the development of the region.

The panel considers positive the fact that there are certain mechanisms and procedures aimed at establishing external links. The Department of Cooperations and External Relations is in charge of this. All this has a positive impact on the activation of the process of internationalization of the institution. However, the low level of fund allocation may pose risks to the stability and effectiveness of the implementation of internationalization processes.

On the positive side, the VSU's internationalization activities are generally regulated, which contributes to the targeted nature, clarity, co-ordination of accountability and steps leading to improvement. However, mechanisms for encouraging student and teaching staff participation in internationalization have not been developed in the VSU. This may hinder the development of the VSU internationalization. The Department of Cooperation and External Relations has started its operations aimed at regulating all this.

It is positive that the institution is actively collaborating with local, state, international HEIs and institutions as well as looking for new ways of cooperation, which has a positive impact on the internationalization of the institution and the introduction of innovations. However, comprehensive analysis of cooperation agreements and clear planning of cooperation are not yet implemented. This does not allow for assessing their effectiveness and outline future directions for development of cooperation.

The level of mobility in the VSU still needs improvement. The institution undertakes certain steps to boost the level of foreign languages acquisition among its internal stakeholders, which can have a positive impact on promoting the internationalization of the VSU. However, the steps aimed at raising the level of proficiency in foreign languages among the teaching staff in particular are subject to improvement.

The introduction and development of the university's quality assurance system in recent years can create favorable conditions for the formation of quality culture, external and internal

evaluation. The numerous documents and regulations developed by the University's Quality Assurance Center serve as the basis for the implementation of quality assurance functions. Involvement of university lecturers and students in quality assurance processes ensures more targeted and effective activities, yet, their level of activity still needs boosting. The University has an internal quality assurance system, which is still in its development phase, contributing to the continuous improvement of the institution's operations, the formation of a quality culture and strives to ensure the transparency of its operations.

STRENGTHS OF THE VSU

1. the social and educational role of the VSU in the region; especially from the perspective of educating pedagogical staff,

2. provision of the necessary professional qualification to the teaching and support staff. General satisfaction of students with the teaching staff,

3. student assistance and guidance the VSU staff,

4. internally evaluated APs with defined ILOs, continuously improved grading system in line with other similar academic programs in the republic,

5. ensuring a conducive environment for the implementation of the academic process through resource improvement,

6. implementation of mechanisms of knowledge and value transfer to the public,

7. active involvement of the VSU staff in international programs thus strengthening external relations,

8. motivation of the VSU Quality Center staff, student involvement in works

WEAKNESSES OF THE VSU

1. lack of a long-term planning and a short-term planning stemming from the former,

2. lack of evaluation of effectiveness of the organizational structure of the SEU,

3. lack of systematic analysis of the external environment,

4. lack of a clear policy for the development of research activities of the VSU, inconsistency of the research directions of the university with the educational activities of the university,

5. absence of thorough conditions for students with special needs,

6. lack of execution of reports based on clear quantitative and qualitative data,

7. absence of a policy to commercialize research at the VSU,

8. weak interconnectivity between the VSU research and teaching process, lack of student engagement in research and lack of a clear policy to encourage the research of the latter,

9. low level of foreign language knowledge among lecturers and students, lack of publications in high impact factor international journals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mission and Purpose

1. Clarify the mission of the institution and develop a strategic plan for the coming years, emphasizing the specificity of the institution, the development of the region and analyzing the issues of external environment.

2. Involve external stakeholders in the strategic management of the institution in order to respond promptly to the needs of the region.

3. Review KAIs by making them measurable and adjusting to the current status of the institution, enabling an assessment of the current status and progress of the institution.

Governance and administration

4. Reform organizational structure in line with the strategic management principles of the university.

5. Introduce mechanisms to encourage the active involvement of internal and external stakeholders of the VSU in management processes.

6. Improve the Code of Ethics by paying attention to ethical principles of decision-making.

7. Introduce mechanisms to study the factors affecting the VSU operations and apply the information collected for future decision-making.

8. Develop and implement effective mechanisms for collecting, analyzing and evaluating information on the effectiveness of management processes.

9. Introduce long-term, mid-term and short-term planning systems for different processes of the university.

10. Improve the university's financial management system by adapting it to the planned strategic priorities.

11. Introduce a comprehensive human resource management policy.

Academic Programmes

12. External (preferably international) evaluation of APs based on peer review to increase transparency and objectivity.

13. Improve student-centered teaching at the VSU: to align teaching methods to intended outcomes, to complement the teaching with modern information technologies in order to align it with modern requirements.

14. Modernize the teaching methods of all APs.

15. Increase the hours allocated to practical courses and create opportunities for students to do additional internships.

16. Take further steps to enhance the objectivity of the assessment and to ensure academic integrity.

Students

17. Develop a long-term strategy aimed at preventing student drop-outs.

18. Develop and implement effective career support services and mechanisms for VSU students.

19. Increase the effectiveness of operations of the body in charge of protecting students' rights, as well as the level of awareness among other students re the body concerned.

20. Develop and introduce mechanisms to encourage student participation in research.

Teaching and support staff

21. Assist in the organization of professional training for the teaching staff.

22. Introduce clear mechanisms to encourage the involvement of teaching staff in research.

23. Conduct a variety of assessments of the teaching staff and the teaching support staff (not only survey but focus group discussions).

24. Include specific requirements for the professional and pedagogical skills of the teaching staff in line with AP specificities.

Research and Development

25. Clarify the VSU research directions by developing and applying an effective research strategy, as well as taking into account external requirements.

26. Make programs promoting research development precise, taking into account the scientific potential of the chairs, as well as ensuring the quality of the research carried out in the chairs.

27. Develop and apply mechanisms for engaging faculty and students in research.

28. Promote international research activities by focusing on joint projects.

29. Develop and apply mechanisms for linking research activities and teaching processes.

Infrastructures and Resources

30. Assess the applicability, accessibility, and effectiveness of resources provided to the VSU students and teachers.

31. Ensure a variety of external sources of funding for financial independence and stability, increase the number of grant programs, and take measures to provide a sustainable flow of alternative finance income to tuition fees.

32. Implement financial planning and allocation in line with the requirements of the APs.

33. Improve library infrastructures to provide a sufficient amount of professional literature, in particular Armenian-language literature, to meet the demand of students and lecturers, further enhancing the use of new technologies.

34. Develop a range of IT services to support the university's governance system, the introduction of distance learning and other areas.

35. Create appropriate conditions to make the educational environment fully accessible to people with disabilities.

Societal Responsibility

36. Develop mechanisms knowledge transfer to society.

37. Develop and implement effective feedback mechanisms with stakeholders.

External Relations and Internationalization

38. Based on agreements signed with local and international entities, elaborate a uniform programme of cooperation, precise directions of joint operations, a precise timetable.

39. Introduce effective mechanisms to encourage students' involvement in the VSU external relations and internationalization.

40. Develop foreign language versions of the current AP packages to facilitate the flow of foreign students.

41. Introduce mechanisms to encourage students and teacher mobility.

Internal Quality Assurance

42. Develop and implement policies, procedures and mechanisms to encourage the participation of external stakeholders in QA processes.

43. Develop mechanisms for monitoring and analyzing the activities of the QA system and ensure the continuity of professional development of QA people responsible.

44. Improve the process of collecting and analyzing surveys and data at the university by introducing mechanisms to ensure their reliability.

PEER REVIEW FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INTEGRATION INTO EHEA

Vanadzor State University, former Kirovakan State Pedagogical Institute, is a regional institution of higher education. It is very important institution for the Region social and business sectors. It can be expected, that VSU importance will increase together with Regional development and foreign direct investments. General approach and respect to the higher education as well as educated people are not very favorable, but the situation is gradually changing to the better. The modernization of the economy (4.0 including) influencing an increase the value and demand for the educated people first of all in the front-line development sectors. These development processes are not so vibrant in the regions like in the capital cities as usual. But the trend most probably will be the same. Therefore, the University (leadership of the University) should take an active part in the development of the Region and City strategies.

The culture of VSU management is under development. There is still rather centralized management approach. Taking in mind the situation of the University it would be difficult to avoid this centralization because of the limited financial and human resources available. Management culture and traditions usually are changing gradually and not fast. Process of the institutional development within University is also rather slow because of the current Rector's position is provisional. Many development decisions of the University are postponed until the new Rector will be elected/appointed.

University processes have a specific velocity of the "academic cycle". From one hand it should assure certain stability, but from another should assure the room for modernization and improvements. Therefore, strategic management principles and instruments should be introduced, including well-balanced long-term (strategic) and the short-term (operative/annual) planning. System of the monitoring, based on the evidence (KPI's) usually is an integral part of strategic management. The planning period for the strategic management usually is from 3 years until the 5 years, depending on the external processes, like the rules of the State funding (what it is mandatory) and/or the velocity of economic and social development. Now Universities more usual adopting the strategic planning period of 3 years. It is because almost impossible to know and predict how an external environment of the University including the requirements for the competencies of the future graduates and general economic situation of the Region and Country can change during the longer period of time. Planning formats should include necessary principles, dimensions and criteria's (measures). These measured should be in line with the National/Regional and local

development strategies and facilitate their implementation. The background of the University's strategy (strategic context) can be developed from the above strategic objectives. University's strategy should facilitate the implementation of the above strategies.

Secondly, the University strategy should be developed on the system of the main values that the members of the University Community consider are most important for them. Just afterward, having a consensus on the above-mentioned strategic context and values, University Community can start a discussion about positioning themselves in the external and internal environments. There are known tools like SWOT analysis, PEST analysis, and others to evaluate and define the current situation of the University. Later University Community can discuss and define the Mission of the University as well as the short terms (3-5 years) strategic objectives and long term (10 years) visions.

Having the above, the University management (Rector) should propose the structure of the Strategy implementation plan. This plan should be focused on the results, that assure the implementation of the defined strategic objectives. Therefore, this plan should define concrete actions, with their goals and measurable outcomes (can be KPI's) in certain time settings, necessary and realistic resources, and responsible people. Due to possible changes, University's strategy implementation plan can be renewed, upgraded and approved by the Board of Trustees once a year, before the preparation of the annual plans. Respective annual plans should be well aligned and traceable with the strategy implementation plan.

The Administration of the University has a very important and responsible role to manage and implement the strategy of the University. It is impossible without an active dialog and support of the University Community. Therefore, the most active members of the University Community – students, teachers/researchers, and other staff are of essential value to get an opinion, suggestions, feedback, and help. Dialog and decision making takes a certain time, but it is necessary to avoid the resistance, dissatisfaction and conflicts, that can occur later on and cost much more time and confidence loses.

It is very important to give a floor for the active representatives of the University to talk and present the opinions of Community, including the students.

The administration needs the well-functioning system of objective data for decision making. The system of the data collection should be well discussed and defined as well as documented. Such a data system can be coherent/tied with the KPI's system. The adoption of the process management would facilitate better decision making as well as systemic implementation of

the quality assurance system. Process management is the must requirement for the implementation and certification of ISO Quality Management standards as well.

All other documents of the University should also be structured/coded according to the area and relation to the strategy implementation. It is important today for the operative handling of the documents. And it will be very valuable later when University will be able to adapt computerized document management system. All documents should have indication when they were approved and by whom, as well as when they came into the force (also validity deadline, if needed). If documents are losing their validity, administration should make the respective decisions to terminate them and mark these documents as invalid and since when.

University declares is following the principle of the so-called Deming/PDCA cycle and it is positive. But for the system approaches process management should be adopted (mentioned above). Armenia belongs to the Bologna Process/ European Higher Education Area (EHEA) since 2005. Therefore, it means that all Universities of Armenia should follow the decision of the Government of the Country. This is also meaning, that quality assurance systems of the Universities in Armenia, should comply with the requirements of European Standards and Guidelines (ESG 2015). All this should be formalized in the University documents and openly communicated externally and internally. ESG should be explained and well understood by the members of the University Community.

Quality assurance system of the University should cover all aspects of the processes and operations. During the site visit to the VSU, I personally missed a stronger focus on the quality assurance of the academic programmes. I would recommend to discuss this issue first of all within the top management, develop the plan of improvements together with members of Administration and present this plan to your Board of Trustees and Academic Community.

Not the last issue is the organizational structure of the University. I would suggest for the Rector to think and prepare re-organization of the structure. Everywhere Universities are lacking resources, therefore structures of the Universities changing to as flat as possible, with re-arrangement of all administrative functions as well as structural and personal responsibilities. This step is very difficult and creates strong resistance from colleagues. But it depends on what will be the purpose of such changes. People will support changes, if they will be convinced by the Rector and assured by the Board of Trustees, that saved resources will be channeled to the additional motivation of the Academic Community (like an extra payment for teachers), investments to the special necessary equipment and improvement of the working conditions.

University should be very careful by continuing to carry out academic programmes with a very low number of students. Such programmes can be conducted just in case there are external interested bodies (business, local authorities, etc.), co-funding their costs.

Student-centered model, based on the learning outcomes requires periodical renewal and discussion with employers, teachers, and students.

It is recommended to have a Quality assurance system description as one consistent and comprehensive document.

Meeting and discussion with students shoved, that student response to the processes in the University is still rather reserved. Just very few of them were rather open and critical. It seems that students feel not comfortable to argue with teachers. I understand, that it can be long-lasting and rather strict relicts of hierarchical culture, education institutions including. Therefore, the role of the Administration and teachers is to encourage students to be more critical and self-critical to everything that is going around them. Quality of study process and culture of student-teacher communication are important particularly. The initiative of the Chairwoman of the VSU Board of Trustees to meet and talk to students is very appreciated. It is important to achieve, that student participation is all VSU management structures would be not only formal.

Current situation of research at VSU looks underdeveloped. The reason for this situation is understandable because of the former status of Institute of Pedagogy. But the status of the University per se requires that the majority of the Academic programmes should be based on the research conducted by the academic staff/ teachers. Research (even related to the Armenian language, culture, history), is international. Therefore, just international publications (not limited to publications in the scientific journals of Russian Federation) with citation indexes accessible to the wide world research community can objectively represent current research achievements of the people and the University as such. Not only publications, but also examples of the research and technological/software applications, models, prototypes, or other types of innovations can represent the research potential of the University and its Community. This complex issue requires very serious discussion and steps of concrete improvements.

VSU should have clear internationalization strategy, which should be integrated into the strategy of University with certain priorities, defined goals and outcomes, responsible people, deadlines and reasonable resources. Implementation of internationalization strategy is mostly dependent on the proactive top management (personal Rector's example and engagement), and also relevant communication skills of academic staff and students. It is recommended to fund special

English courses for academic staff with exams. Respective requirements for English skills should be part of the job contract and requirement to pass periodic competition for Academic staff. Administrative staff should also demonstrate reasonable English language skills. English learning outcomes for students should be also adequate. All University Community should be involved in the implementation of the above strategy.

23rd December, 2019.

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Vardan Sargsyan

DESCRIPTION OF EXPERTIZE
EXPERT PANEL COMPOSITION

The external expertise of the SER and QA operations of VSU was carried out by the expert panel having the following composition (see appendix 1 for the CVs)[2]

- **Vardan Sargsyan** - Head of Chair of Economic Informatics and Information Systems, Armenian State University of Economics, Professor

- **Vairidotas Viliunas** - Head of Policy Development and Implementation, European Association of Higher Education Institutions (EURASHE),

- **Aram Baghiyan** - Scientific Advisor at Improviz LLC, Ph.D. in technical disciplines,

- **Anna Poladyan** - Yerevan State University, PhD Associate Professor, Faculty of Biology, Department of Biochemistry, Microbiology and Biotechnology,

- **Ofelia Arzumanyan** - Student of Radio Engineering at National Polytechnic University of Armenia.

The composition of the expert group was agreed with the educational institution.

The work of the expert group was coordinated by the ANQA specialist on Institutional and Program Expertise Gayane Ananyan.

The translation was provided by Zaruhi Soghomanyan, Head of the Chair of Foreign Languages of the French University in Armenia.

The panel members, the translator, the coordinator signed privacy and conflict of interest declarations.

Application for state accreditation

The VSU applied for institutional accreditation by submitting to ANQA the application form and the appendices.

The ANQA Secretariat checked the application package, the data presented in the application form, the appendixes and the ANQA electronic questionnaire completed by the Institution.

According to the decision on accepting the application request, a bipartite agreement was signed.

The timetable of activities was prepared and approved.

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[2] APPENDIX 1: resumes of expert panel members

Self-evaluation

Within the deadline set in the schedule, the VSU presented the Armenian and English versions of its self-evaluation report according to the form set by ANQA and also the package of attached documents.

Self-evaluation was conducted between 14.01.2019-19.04.2019.

Preparatory phase

ANQA coordinator observed the report with the aim of revealing its correspondence to the technical requirements of ANQA. Armenian and English versions of the SER and adjacent documents were accepted by the ANQA after the consent of the process coordinator.

Then ANQA secretariat sent the self-evaluation report to the expert panel (for preliminary assessment) the members of which were agreed upon with the Academy and were confirmed by the director of ANQA.

Five training on the following topics were organized for the expert panel members with the aim of preparing the latter and ensuring the effectiveness of the activities:

1. Accreditation process, peculiarities of expert work, rules of ethics and conduct of the expert.

2. Preliminary Assessment of Institutional Self-evaluation Using Practical Examples.

3. Site-visit by means of a role-play

4. Preparation of expert report.

Having observed the self-evaluation and documents of the Academy, the expert panel conducted the initial evaluation. According to the format, the list of questions for different target groups and also the list of additional documents needed for observation have been prepared.

Within the scheduled time the expert panel summarized the results of the initial evaluation and formed a time schedule of the site-visit[3]. According to the ANQA manual on the expertise the intended meetings with all the target groups, close and open meetings, document and resource review, visits to different infrastructures and else were included in the time schedule.

Preliminary visit

The plan-schedule of the site-visit was agreed upon with the VSU throughout September 2-6, 2019, the list of additional documents was presented, discussions and mutual decisions were reached referring to organizational, technical, informative questions of the site visit. Questions related to the conduct and the norms of ethics of meeting participants were also touched upon. The

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[3] Appendix 2. Schedule of site visit at ASPU

rooms prepared for focus groups and expert panel discussions were also discussed, the issues related to the equipment and facilities were clarified.

Site-visit

The site visit of the expert panel took place from September 16 till September 19, 2019. In line with the timetable, the operations of the expert panel initiated with a close meeting the aim of which was to discuss and agree the assessment framework with external panel members, the issues to be clarified, strengths and weaknesses of the Academy per criteria, the procedure of focus groups, and to make further steps more precise.

All expert panel members, including the ANQA coordinator and translator assisted all the meetings.

The site visit initiated and culminated with the meeting with the Rector. Representatives from the teaching staff, students, deans, heads of chairs, employers and alumni were selected randomly from the list provided beforehand. All the meetings foreseen by the schedule, have been carried out. Throughout the site visit the expert panel had document review[4], resource observation[5] and focus group meetings in different infrastructures of the Academy.

During the close meetings of the panel at the end of each working day the interim results of peer review were discussed and at the end of the site visit the main outcomes of the site visit were summarized. The expert panel discussed the main outcomes and reached an agreement first on accreditation standards and criteria.

The final conclusion referring to criteria was reached through open discussions of all expert panel members via consensus.

The assessment has been carried out within the framework of State Criteria and Standards of Accreditation and ANQA procedures. Following the ANQA procedures the assessment has two levels: 1. satisfactory (is in line with criteria requirements) 2. unsatisfactory (does not comply with the requirements of the criteria).

Expert panel report

The head of the panel and ANQA coordinator prepared the draft of expert panel report which was agreed upon with the panel members. The international expert has prepared a separate report on peer review which is included into the text of the report. The preliminary report has been presented to the University on November 14, 2019.

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[4] APPENDIX 3: Site-visit timetable
[5] APPENDIX 4: List of reviewed documents

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Gayane Ananyan

Signature of the coordinator

14 November 2019

History: Vanadzor State University has a history of 50 years. It is the legal successor of the Kirovakan (later Vanadzor) State Pedagogical Institute. Initially, the establishment of the university was aimed at providing pedagogical staff in the northeastern region of Armenia. In its first year of operation (1969), the Institute provided only part-time studies, and the existing mode of study was introduced in 1970. In 1989, the Stepanakert branch of the Institute was organized and operated for about three years. Routine operations of the institution were disruptive by the devastating earthquake which stroke Spitak on December 7th, 1988. During 1988-2000, the Institute continued to operate under difficult conditions just like other entities, that had been struck by the earthquake. Since 2001 it has been named after the great poet Hovhannes Tumanyan. In 2002-2014 the Institute operated as a state non-profit organization. In 2014, it received the status of a University, and in 2016 it was reorganized into the Vanadzor State University Foundation. The vision of the University reflects its ambitions to strive to meet the needs of the labor market by training competent professionals and to become a sustainable education provider in the northern region of Armenia and a leading provider of scientific and research services. On October 15, 2010, the VSU was awarded a 4-year state accreditation, which is mandatory and is the token of the fact that the institution, in accordance with its mission, provides services that are recognized by the state and trusted by its internal and external stakeholders.

Education. According to the basic principles of the Bologna Process, a three-tier system of higher professional education has been introduced at the University. The third cycle of education has been introduced since 2006, and the second cycle from 2008-2009 academic year. Currently, the University has a state licensing to carry out 36 full-time and 32 part-time academic programmes at BA level, 23 full-time and 4 part-time APs at an MA level. The University has the right to carry out PhD education with 7 specializations. In addition to the NQF 6-8 levels, the University is also currently providing education at the 4th and 5th levels. Since 2008, the Zorik Gevorgyan College (now the VSU Base College), which has been functioning since 2002, was affiliated with the VSU. In 2011 the VSU College was founded, which provides secondary vocational education. The most important factor in the implementation of strategic programs is the formation, recruitment, development and smooth generation-change of qualified teaching staff. In Line with the improvement Action Plan alignment of the HR policy to modern needs has been undertaken: the

HRM Department has been launched and the "Policy on HR Management" has beel elaborated. Today about 70% of the region's teachers are university graduates who are highly rated professionals and educational organizers. There are also a large number of alumni of the university (134 members), of which 77 hold degrees and awards.

Continuous professional development of the teaching and support staff, acquisition of new knowledge, abilities and skills is one of the most important issues of the University. A number of projects are being organized at the university: PRINTEL (ERASMUS +): "Change in the classroom. Supporting Innovative Teaching and Learning to Improve the Student Learning Experience in the Eastern Partnership Countries". The University is collaborating with the Catholic, Leuven, Barcelona, Porto, Linshoping and Graz University of Applied Sciences, where 6 your lecturers have been trained. Prior to their departure, an agreement was signed with them and as a result more than 60 lecturers were trained upon their return.

Academic environment: One of the priorities of the strategic development of VSU is to raise the quality of education services, to meet international standards, to improve the educational environment, to redistribute resources, to optimize usage. However, the tasks are not always fully implemented. There is an issue with human resources. There are 1 administrative and 3 academic buildings to cater the academic needs and create a rich educational environment at the University. One of the buildings is registered in St. Gregory the Illuminator address, which is outside the University territory.

Research: Establishing an effective link between science and education is one of the mandatory conditions for the development of the university's field of science. The VSU has determined objectives in its mission: to become a leading center for sustainable development in the northern region of the Republic of Armenia, providing educational services and carrying out scientific research. The outcome of the research is validated in relevant research reports and publications and presented to the academic community in scientific collections, journals and monographs, etc.

Internationalization: The VSU internationalization strategy stems from the University's mission and is predetermined in the following priority areas: active participation for the purpose of integrating in EHEA, expanding and diversifying international relations of the VSU, promoting cooperation with European HEIs and other international institutions in the field of education and science, disseminating information about the international activities of the VSU, searching and developing grant projects, improving consultation services which provide information, developing

MA and PhD academic programs in interdisciplinary areas, developing / introduction of joint / double academic programs, creating favorable living conditions for long-term and short-term invited students and staff, active involvement of teaching-methodical departments, chairs, faculties and individual experts in scientific and educational projects and grants (double / joint diploma, staff and student mobility). The VSU external relations and internationalization process is coordinated by the Department of Cooperation and Relations which has been in operation since 2013.

Quality Assurance: The QAC of the VSU operates in accordance with the QAC Regulation, which regulates the organizational and methodological basis of the Center, its main tasks, functions, structure, composition, work directions, as well as its relationships with University departments and other organizations.

The internal quality assurance system contributes to the continuous improvement of the university's educational, scientific and methodological processes and the formation of a quality culture. At present, internal quality system issues are focused on enhancing the effectiveness of operations aimed at the development and improvement of the University's quality assurance and quality culture dissemination system.

While carrying out the expertise, the expert panel was led by the principle "fitness to purpose" and has regarded the above-given information as ambitions and aims of the VSU.

I.   MISSION AND PURPOSE

CRITERION: The Tertiary Level Institutions' (TLI) policy and practices are in accordance with its mission, which is in accordance with the Armenian National Qualifications Framework (ANQF)

FINDINGS

1.1. The TLI has a clear, well-articulated mission that represents the institution's purposes and goals as well as is in accordance with the ANQF.

VSU 2014-2018 Development Concept includes the mission. The mission reflects three main goals of the University's activities:

1. striving to ensure sustainable development, the institution puts into place policies aimed at meeting the needs of stakeholders;

2. striving to train competent professionals with basic and applied knowledge, practical skills, the institution creates a student-centered environment where the student is the subject of the academic process;

3. acknowledging its responsibility to society, the institution contributes to the continuous development of the individual, and creates a conducive environment for shaping a comprehensively developed individual.

The mission of the institution is general and does not reflect the specificity of the university, does not emphasize the content of the university academic programs, does not represent the specificities of the university. As a regional university, the VSU was not involved in the elaboration of the regional development plan.

According to thethe VSUSER, the institution carried out its academic operations at the 4-8th levels of the NQF (4th and 5th levels provide secondary vocational education and 6-8 - higher education).

There is a VSU Strategy Implementation Plan for 2014-2018, which outlines 7 strategic directions of the institution for the reporting period with their respective goals, actions and indicators. The strategic directions are as follows: strategy on developing academic operations, strategy on developing scientific-research operations, strategy on improving the system of governance, strategy on ensuring the quality of education, strategy on external relations and internationalization, strategy on developing social-educative operations, career and alumni support strategy.

One of the action points highlighted as a result of the previous accreditation process was the revision of the institution's mission. The review of the existing mission has been delegated to the

chairs, but the mission was not changed. The goals and objectives formulated by the institution were not separated and were instead listed in a general list of 'goals and objectives', out of which their differences are not clear. The Strategic Plan for the next 5 years was not developed at the university as of the expert visit. According to the Rector of the University, the University is currently guided by the Operational Plan for 2019-2021, which was not approved by the University Board.

1.2. **TLI mission, aims and objectives reflect the needs of internal and external stakeholders.**

According to the SER, the internal stakeholders of the institution are VSU students, faculty and administrative staff, applicants. The external stakeholders of the institution are employers, alumni, the whole community.

During the expert visit it became clear that the preparation of the mission of the institution was carried out by the Quality Assurance Center of the VSU. The strategic plan reflects mainly the needs of internal stakeholders. The needs of internal stakeholders were taken into account mainly through the involvement of the latter into collegial management bodies. Although external stakeholders are involved in identifying and proposing solutions to the issues related to the institution's activities, their involvement is not of a systematic nature and is mainly carried out on the initiative of deans and employers.

There are cooperation memoranda, but there are no work plans based on them. The involvement of students, faculty, and external stakeholders in the Governing Board is passive, which became clear during the expert visit.

1.3. **The institution has approved mechanisms and procedures to evaluate the achievement of its mission and purpose and to further improve them.**

Since 2016, data collection and analysis with Key Performance Indicators (which are conducted once a year) has been used to evaluate the results of the university's activities. The KPIs cover 6 areas of the University's activities: admission and student community, teaching process, resources and management, infrastructure, science and innovation, external relations and international cooperation. The implementation of thethe VSUStrategic Plan for 2014-2018 was evaluated according to the KPIs. During the visit it became clear that a review of KPIs has been foreseen by the University's 2019-2021 operational plan, since a number of indicators in the documents are not precisely measurable.

Numerous surveys and some analyzes may also be considered as a mechanism for assessing and improving the results of the mission and goals.

In accordance with point 7.2 of the Quality Assurance Center Regulation adopted on 27.05. 2015, the QAC regularly submits the results of the analysis of the University's activities to the Scientific Council. During N 2 session (February 28, 2012) of the Scientific Council of Vanadzor State University after H. Tumanyan the QAC presented the results of the SWOT analysis to clarify the strategic goals.

CONSIDERATIONS: The panel welcomes the VSU efforts in strategic planning and management. For the past 5 years (2014-2018), the institution has effectively implemented its strategic plan, analyzing progress each year and presenting it in the institution's annual reports. The institution is currently guided by the 2019-2021 operational plan, which was not approved by the VSU Board, which is risky for the further development of the institution and impedes the dissemination of the best practices. Implementation of operations foreseen in the Action Plan related to the mission review, precision and targeting of strategic directions will contribute to the development of the university.

It is positive that the internal stakeholders of the university are involved in the process of defining and implementing strategic goals, while external stakeholders' involvement in the process of implementing the strategic plan is not systematic. It should be noted that a more active systematic approach by external stakeholders will contribute to the ability to respond regularly to external environmental issues.

On the positive side, key performance indicators have been developed to assess the quality of the VSU Strategic Goals. The use of key performance indicators is a positive procedure for assessing the performance of the VSU and contributes to the evaluation of the university's progress and to revealing the issues. The panel positively evaluates the fact that throughout 2016-2018, the institution performed analysis utilizing the KPIs published on the institution's website. The panel highlights that the process of upgrading existing KPIs will contribute to increasing the efficiency of the university.

SUMMARY: Taking into consideration the fact that the VSU has implemented effective operations in line with 2014-2018 strategic plan, stakeholders are involved in strategic planning and implementation processes, key performance indicators have been developed, strategic plan assessment based on these indicators has resulted in a mid-term planning for the next three years, the institution clearly recognizes and points to the issues linked to the implementation of the mission, the panel finds that the university **complies with the requirements of Criterion 1.**

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

II. GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

CRITERION The TLIs' system of governance, administrative structures and their practices are effective and intend to the accomplishment of its mission and purposes by keeping the governance code of ethics.

FINDINGS

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

Management of the university is carried out in accordance with the RA legislation and the charter of the university, based on the principles of autonomy, one-person governance and collegiality. The sole management of the university is exercised by the rector, and the collegial governing bodies are the Board of Trustees, the Academic Council and the Rectorate. Internal stakeholders of the university (dean, chair, student, etc.) are represented in the university management bodies. Departments and bodies necessary for the implementation of relevant functions exist at the University. Educational and Methodological Department, Qualification Department, Human Resources Department, Financial Resources Management Division, Centre for Continuing Education, Cooperation and Relations Division, Faculties, Chairs, Library, Student Council, etc. Various committees (Financial and Economic Committee adjacent to the VSU rector, Competition Committee under the VSU Scientific Council) may function in the university management system with the aim of providing operational solutions to different problems (as an additional and temporary management resource), but the results of these committees' activities are not recorded and analyzed.

The university's financial inflows mainly stem from student fees, grants, and international programs. The University budget, strategic plan and staffing list are approved by the Board of Trustees. In 2018 job descriptions of 147 posts were approved, which were developed on the basis of the "Occupation Classifier" approved by the RA Minister of Economy N 873-N of September 19, 2013. Due to the scarcity of financial resources, problems have arisen with the recruitment of library resources, the encouragement of young professionals, the professional training of lecturers, and the intensification of external international relations.

Some structural changes have been made in the last four years. The HRM and Financial Resources Management divisions have been restructured by the decision of the Board of Trustees. However, during the site visit, it became clear that the purpose of these changes was not clear as the above sections did not serve their purpose. For example, the HRM department does not effectively perform staff evaluation combined with planning their progress. The FRM department does not carry out financial resource assessment and strategic planning.

During the site visit it was found out that the organizational structure of the university does not provide effective management system. The university does not have a separate science infrastructure or subdivision that can coordinate scientific activities in the chairs.

As a result of previous accreditation, a Code of Ethics was developed and adopted in 2017, but only a superficial reference is made to the principles of ethical governance in that Code. The norms of ethic when making decisions are not sufficiently described.

2.2 The TLI's system of governance provides students and teachers opportunity to participate in decision-making processes directed to them.

The university governance system ensures the involvement of professors and students in accordance with the Law on Education, other legal acts and the University Charter. 25% student participation is ensured by the relevant regulations of the collegial governing bodies of the University. Faculty composition and students are represented in the University Council by 25% each. The participation of the lecturers in the SC is ensured by the participation of Chair Heads and the few lecturers. The Board of Trustees of the University is composed of 6 members elected by the Founder, Authorized Body, Professors and Students. According to external and internal legal acts and regulations, lecturers and students have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process of the university management system.

Given the participation of VSU lecturers and students, the initiative to raise issues directed at them is low. Students have almost no questions raised in the Scientific Council; there are no recorded cases where decisions were made on the basis of suggestions from faculty or students. Students and faculty can follow the sessions of the University Academic Council online, and decisions are published online.

In order to discuss university governance issues and build a constructive atmosphere, the QAC regularly organizes focus group discussions and surveys with students and faculty, with each person raising questions, expressing views, and making suggestions. Not all members of the teaching

staff participate in the surveys. From the site visit it became clear that the VSU Student Council is quite passive in terms of initiative.

2.3 The TLI develops and implements short, mid, and long term planning consistent with its mission and purposes and has clear monitoring and implementation mechanisms.

During the accreditation process, the VSU only had a new Operational / Mid-Term Plan developed for 2019-2021, which had not yet been ratified by the University Board. VSU departments and faculties carry out their activities according to their short-term / annual / planning. It is unclear whether they are linked to the objectives of the mid-term plan.

The VSU financial planning is carried out at the level of individual departments of the university, not at the level of faculties or individual APs. A budget is developed for each year reflecting the financial revenues and expenses per budget article. The financial planning of lower cycles is integrated into the articles of the general budget.

Planning, implementation and monitoring mechanisms are based solely on the accountability system, no effective monitoring, feedback and improvement procedures and mechanisms have been developed, although the Action Plan elaborated as an outcome of previous accreditation process foresees improvement of feedback mechanisms.

The university does not have an elaborated and ratified Strategic Plan for the coming five years. During the site visit, the expert panel was presented with only a three-year Action Plan for 2019-2021.

2.4 The TLI conducts environmental scanning and draws on reliable data during the decision-making process.

Specific studies of the factors affecting the university's activities are not clearly stated in the VSU SER, but the site visit revealed that the university is conducting a study of the factors affecting its operations mainly through surveys and focus group discussions. Some of the surveys were conducted in the framework of international programs, which raised some issues (the state of services and resources provided, etc.). Visits to schools were conducted to find out the number of potential applicants. It should be noted that there are no clear procedures for planning and conducting research on the factors affecting University operations.

The VSU does not have sufficient applicability in decision-making based on the results of stakeholder surveys as well as those of oral discussions. Except for the surveys, other methods of

studying the factors affecting the university's activities are not used, in particular, comprehensive analysis of the current situation, open discussions, systematic analysis of the labor market or demographics for planning and development of future activities.

The process of introducing and reforming APs is based on the region's labor market requirements. For example, the implementation of educational programs in "Management", "Pharmaceutical Chemistry" is based on the relatively high demand of relevant specialists. The implementation of master programs in some pedagogical directions is also conditioned by the demand of pedagogues in the schools of the region.

2.5 The management of the policies and the processes draws on the quality management principle (plan-do-check-act).

The university's quality management policies and procedures include the functions of quality assurance, quality management, quality improvement, which underlie the planning, implementation, evaluation, improvement /PDCA/.

There are some separate examples of PDCA implementation:

- o During the last five years the legal acts coordinating University activities have been reviewed.
- o A Quality Assurance Manual for students has been developed based on the questions voiced during the works organized to increase student engagement and involvement in quality assurance processes.
- o Within the framework of the MAHATMA program, the AP on Education Management has undergone an external evaluation and has been substantially reformed.
- o Renaming HRM department and redefining functions, development of job descriptions.

In general, the PDCA cycle is not yet closed in all processes and there is insufficient and complete analysis of the evaluations carried out. PDCA functions do not cover all areas of the university development program. In governance processes the main emphasis is on planning and implementation.

2.6 There are mechanisms in place ensuring data collection on the effectiveness of the academic programmes and other processes, analyses and application of the data in decision-making.

The VSU collects statistical information on student numbers, mobility and progress making use of functioning mechanisms. The data are discussed at the SC of the VSU, and are handed over to external statistical agencies. Surveys are conducted among students, AP monitoring is carried out with participation of internal and external stakeholders. Analyzes on APs (on academic and scientific activities, financial, etc.) are carried out and presented in the annual reports. However, the information collected does not fully reflect the full qualitative description of the effectiveness of APs and other processes.

From the prospective of other operations carried out in the VSU /management, resources/ data collection, analyses and implementation procedures on effectiveness of operations are not systematic in nature. There are no mechanisms for the latter.

2.7 There are impartial mechanisms evaluating the quality of quantitative and qualitative information on the academic programmes and qualification awards.

The transparent accountability system, the reports of the chairpersons of the final certification committees are used for quantitative and qualitative assessment of the quality of the qualifications awarded. Yet, those have not been analyzed.

According to the SER, the VSU graduates make up 70% of Lori region's school teachers, who are highly rated professionals and educational organizers. There are also a large number of university graduates (134 members), of whom 77 hold degrees or awards.

The VSU has information dissemination policies and procedures. Studies on QA, monitoring and auditing results are posted internally, on the Web, and sometimes on social networks. There is no systematic and sufficient analysis of employers' opinion. According to the self-evaluation, materials posted on the university website are not being given sufficient attention by external stakeholders. There are publications on the reports, but there are no clear and objective mechanisms in place to evaluate quantitative and qualitative information on the quality of APs and qualifications awarded.

CONSIDERATIONS: The panel positively assesses that some improvements have been made in the management system over the last five years to improve the efficiency of the management system. However, it became clear from expert analysis that the undertaken changes did not serve their purpose; the effectiveness of the management system has not been evaluated, human and financial resources at different levels of management have not been identified, and the research and planning of existing issues hindering the further development of the university.

The organizational structure of the university needs further reforms. Improvement of the organizational structure of the VSU can contribute to the efficiency of the processes of the units. Ineffective allocation of management resources, in particular faculties and chairs, has been observed, which can be a barrier to effective management of academic programs. There is no science unit in the institution, which can play an important role in the process of integration of education and science and contribute to the efficient management of the scientific potential of the university as well as to the activation of internationalization of the university.

The transformation of the VSU into a foundation expands the possibilities of the government system. As a foundation, the university has potential opportunities to improve its financial and economic policies, but these opportunities are not yet used effectively. Lack of financial resources can hamper the effectiveness of the university's management system.

The Code of Ethics developed during the reporting period is a step forward in the way of instilling systematic ethics in the university management system. However, adherence to ethical governance principles can help to increase the effectiveness of the governance system through reasoned, coordinated decisions.

The official weak involvement of employers and other external stakeholders in the decision-making structures of the VSU and the ineffectiveness of feedback may limit the level of awareness of external requirements and developments. An example of this is the absence of external stakeholders in the university's scientific council. Inadequate external environment analysis will lead to further risks in the strategic development of the University. Inadequate initiative and activism of lecturers and especially students in decision making process in turn reduces their ability to identify and solve problems.

The panel is concerned that there is no long-term planning for the next five years at the university. The lack of long-term planning is risky for the university, the lower levels of the university carry out situational/ad hoc management through short-term annual planning without defining strategic priorities. This situation impedes the balanced development of the university.

The system of key performance indicators can help to enhance VSU management capabilities, however, these indicators still need to be improved. The key qualitative and quantitative indicators will provide opportunities for identifying existing issues at the university and continually improving the progress.

The panel positively emphasizes a number of surveys carried out at the university, which raised certain issues. However, in addition to the surveys, the lack of other reliable methods and

scientific analysis of the factors affecting the university's performance considerably narrows the possibilities for a realistic assessment of the situation. There is a need to increase the reliability of the queries.

The university needs to improve its management system by making it more consistent with its strategy and operations, building on the PSCA quality management cycle.

On the positive side, there are functioning mechanisms for gathering statistical information on APs. However, there are no mechanisms in place at the institution for evaluating this information effectively. This can lead to wrong decisions about VSU APs.

SUMMARY: Taking into consideration the fact that the organizational structure is not adapted to the implementation of strategic objectives of the university, there is a problem of optimal allocation of management resources, administration is not implemented in all areas in line with the PDCA cycle, there are no analyzes to enhance the effectiveness of the management system, external stakeholder participation in management processes is not sufficient, feedback mechanisms in the management system are weak, the panel finds that the university **does not comply with the requirements of Criterion 2**.

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

III. ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES

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

3.1 The academic programs are thoroughly formulated according to the intended learning outcomes, which correspond to an academic qualification and are in line with the institution's mission and the state academic standards.

There are 30 BA full- and part-time, 13 MA full-time, 11 researcher APs in 7 research directions in 5 faculties of the University. The university's pedagogical and non-pedagogical APs are generally consistent with the institution's mission.

The VSU APs are generally consistent with the mission of the institution, in that it trains professionals with basic knowledge, practical skills, and creates a student-centered environment. During the site visit, it was found that the AP ILOs are aligned with ANQF, there are are separate tables of AP ANQF Conformity, yet, the latter are not included in the AP packages.

The AP modules are described according to the expected outcomes of the qualifications awarded. After the institution has been transformed to a university, five new undergraduate and graduate APs, which are in line with regional labour market requirements, have been elaborated and implemented. During the visit it became clear that the number of applicants for specializations is not large or generally absent (Environmental Protection, Person's Psychology). At the same time, the university also emphasizes on specialties (pedagogies) that are more in demand in the region's labor market.

According to the developed policy, a relevant benchmarking was implemented, which included Armenian and foreign HEIs.

All APs are elaborated in line with the ratified format, with their specifications and subject descriptions. APs include ILOs, learning methds per discipline, and competencies for conducting scientific research.

AP packages and specialty directories are posted on the VSU website. There is a learner-centered approach to the selection of electives in the process of implementing the APs.

An an outcome of previous accreditation, it was envisaged to make the research component in the Bachelor thesis 50%. However, it became clear from the site visit that the latter had not been implemented. According to the institute's SER, the undergraduate curriculum of the VSU AP allocates 15 credits to research-scientific component, including course paper and graduatation paper.

3.2. The TLI has a policy that ensures alignment between teaching and learning approaches and the intended learning outcomes of academic programs promoting student-centered learning.

Teaching and learning methods are described in the APs. However, there is no policy of teaching and learning method selection in line with intended learning outcomes. The strategy for improving teaching and learning methods in VSU is not clearly defined. The result of the site visit revealed that different innovative teaching methods are applied in the teaching process using modern digital technologies (playing methods, group discussions).

It became clear during the site visit that there were improvements in teaching methods as a result of student surveys, yet, in some cases there were lectur-dictations and other non-effective methods.

To improve teaching and learning methods, the institution participated in the PRINTeL program, and those lecturers who had been trained within the scope of the said program, have elaborated courses on teaching methods. During the site visit it was found out that there is no manual on teaching and learning method selection in line with intended learning outcomes. However, the expert panel has been informed that suchlike document is in the process of elaboration.

The importance of creating a student-centered learning environment is emphasized in the VSU mission. Some elements of a student-centered approach to teaching and learning are implemented at the university. In particular, there is a system of elective disciplines, active teaching methods are used.

The university also conducted student surveys on evaluating professional and pedagogical qualities of the teaching staff, during the analysis of which some guidelines for student-centered learning were outlined, but there are no procedures for updating teaching and learning methods. There are no mechanisms for factual analysis of the identified issues as well as feedback; the reliability of these processes is not guaranteed.

Certain insufficiency of textbooks, manuals, methodological instructions, practical and seminar assignments in the Armenian language has been revealed.

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

The university has a student assessment policy based on learning outcomes. This policy ensures academic honesty.

The University has a "Regulation on Grade-Rating System". In 2015 a Regulation on Academic Integrity has been adopted. As an outcome of AP monitoring, a monitoring of assessment system has also been carried out, yet no changes have been introduced as an outcome of the said process. An appeals procedure for has been developed and applied. student knowledge assessment results has been developed and applied. There are also criteria for evaluatinggraduation papers and master theses. The APs do not describe the link between the outcomes of the course and the forms of assessment.

The university has developed a policy aimed at ensuring academic honesty but lacks sufficient experience in its implementation. Apart from the appeals procedure, there are no effective mechanisms for ensuring academic integrity at the university. Graduation papers do not undergo a holistic anti-plagiarism checks. During the site visit it became clear that the topics of graduation papers mainly reflected and refer to the problems in the region.

3.4. The academic programmes of the TLI are contextually coherent with other relevant programmes and promote internationalization and mobility of students and staff.

There is a unified benchmarking policy in VSU. The Institution carries out benchmarking (Management, Informatics, Biology) among the APs. As a result of benchmarking, the experience of leading universities of the Republic of Armenia has been localized, in particular, National Politechnic University, ASUE, YSU. There are also examples of applying the experience of foreign universities. There is no sufficient study of international experience within the framework of the programs.

The Regulation on Academic Mobility and Credit Recognition has been developed and is being applied at the VSU. With the aim of promoting and facilitiating student and teacher mobility and internationalization different programs are implemented. Since 2012, the University, as a partner country representative, has been involved in EU Erasmus Mundus and Erasmus + mobility grant programs, which have enabled approximately 70 VSU students to study for 1-2 semesters in different European universities. Only student mobility is described, there are no other analyzes of AP compliance. International mobility at the university has been implemented only within the framework of grant programs.

In general, there is no content-wise consistency with Armenian and foreign HEIs. Although some instances of copying of other APs were voiced in the chairs, there are no analyzes reflecting the possibilities of their adaptation.

3.5. The TLI has policy ensuring academic programme monitoring, effectiveness assessment and improvement.

Thethe VSU has adopted a specific policy for the development, approval, monitoring and review of APs, with the aim of training specialists who'd be in line with changing labour market demands. This is forseen to be undertaken via improvements in the APs. Yet, this is not fully implemented at the VSU. In 2017, the "AP Monitoring" procedure was adopted. Forms for carrying out AP monitoring have been developed and tested based on the logical chain of research / algorithm mechanisms, data entry / problem description, development and implementation of key research steps, results / analysis and conclusions, outcomes / compliance to the criteria.

Monitoring is carried out on a four-year cycle for a bachelor's degree and two years for a master's degree program.

Institutional monitoring and auditing processes of the APs apply, which are regulated. During the visit it was found that some changes were made as a result of the monitoring of the APs. For example, in the specialty program "Informatics and Applied Mathematics", a schedule of practical workshops was provided for the "Graphics Theory" subject, an extension of programming language study hours, and a combination of "Research in Practice" and "Optimization" subjects. The subject "Banking" is included in the Management program. These suggestions were presented at the Chair and Faculty meetings.

The panel argues that certain monitoring policies are being implemented within the considered APs and there are some examples, but this policy needs to be made more effective.

The staff and educational environment aimed for the implementation of Aps are regularly studied and analyzed, and the educational needs of the teaching staff and students are identified. Surveys are being conducted among the students and the faculty.

Mainly internal stakeholders involved in the processes of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the APs. Although the regulation provides for the involvement of external stakeholders in the monitoring process, in reality the external stakeholders have been passive in the monitoring process. In addition, there is no external stakeholder involvement in monitoring groups. The conclusions of the Final Certification Committees are not subject to internal evaluation and analysis. Surveys (particularly among graduates) are one of the most important mechanisms for monitoring the university APs. It also became clear during the site visit that in addition to the surveys to assess the effectiveness of the AP implementation, statistical analyzes of subject evaluation are not carried out.

CONSIDERATIONS: The panel considers it positive that the APs of all professions in the university have improved over the last five years as a result of internal audits conducted by the university's Quality Assurance Center.

The internal audit enabled to make significant changes to the programs in line with the mission of the university and the requirements of the labor market, which promotes the employment of graduates. At the same time, it became clear from the expert analysis that there are professions (e.g. chemistry) in the VSU that are not required in the labor market and thus do not provide an adequate number of applicants. The panel considers it positive that in this case the university also places emphasis specialties (e.g. pedagogy) that have a certain demand in the labor market. The panel welcomes the inclusion and description of various teaching methods in curricula, course descriptions and thematic operational plans, but the problem is that in some cases the choice of method is aligned to ILOs and the identification of relevant needs. Some students' dissatisfaction with teaching methods, ineffective lectures can impede the development of a student-centered environment as well as the achievement of intended outcomes.

It fact that there is a regulation on academic integrity and appeals procedure is positive. At the same time, the analysis of the expert group revealed that the grading system is not correlated with the learning outcomes in that the assessment of the skills included in the learning outcomes is not clearly emphasized in the current system, which may lead to ineffective use of the grading system and the acquisition of proactive skills among students.

Implementation of part-time APs is linked to a number of issues, in particular, the insufficient number of classes has been highlighted, which has led to the ineffectiveness of part-time mode of study.

Mechanisms and procedures for monitoring, evaluating and periodically reviewing programs have been developed. It is noteworthy that the university has guidelines for developing such procedures. The ongoing audit of the APs provides opportunities for continuous improvement of the latter. Strategies for resolving identified issues related to APs are not clearly defined and coordinated in all chairs. This will jeopardize the upgrading of programs and courses to market requirements, including new teaching and learning methods. Internal stakeholders are mainly involved in the processes of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the APs.

It is welcomed that there have been some improvements in certain aspects of APs based on benchmarking, but there is a lack of substantive benchmarking and changes resulting from it, which impedes international mobility of students and faculty.

SUMMARY: **Taking into consideration the fact that** all the professions of the university have academic programs elaborated in the accepted format, with their specifications and subject descriptions based on the study of external good practice, the University recognizes the problems of improving teaching methods and takes steps in that direction, there is a regulated process of assessment, certain progress has been made towards ensuring academic integrity, a precise policy on monitoring and reviewing APs is functioning, the panel finds that the **VSU meets the requirements of criterion 3**. At the same time note that there are still no clear principles and approaches for selecting and reforming student-centered teaching methods, the effectiveness of the grading system has not been sufficiently analyzed, academic honesty and struggle against plagiarism are still insufficient and external stakeholder involvement in APs is still weak.

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

IV. STUDENTS

CRITERION: The TLI provides relevant student support services ensuring the effectiveness of the learning environment.

FINDINGS

4.1. The TLI has set mechanisms for promoting equitable recruitment, selection, and admission procedures.

Student recruitment mechanisms at the university are clear. A number of events are being organized to recruit students. The university-school connection is ensured, and the school Olympiads are organized. During the "Faculty Days" event students get acquainted with the university, open lessons are held, information campaigns are organized in other cities of the region. Applicants also receive information through the VSU website.

Free preparatory courses are organized for high school students from exam subjects to prepare for university admission. The University has 23 foreign and Diaspora Armenian students from the Republic of Georgia, the Russian Federation, Greece. In 2017, for the first time in its history, the University had an applicant from the United States of America. Admission to undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs is carried out in accordance with government and ministry decisions, regulations, and procedures.

The percentage of students who are have been re-integrated is higher in the part-time mode of study: this was also observed during previous accreditation. According to the management, the reason is the availability of remunerated tuition fees, the opportunity to work, and the reduction of costs for students coming from villages and other regions. The university also cites a number of other reasons in its SER, for example, the decline in the number of applicants in the Republic of Armenia, the attractiveness of HEIs in the capital, the affordability of non-state HEIs in the region. The site visit made it clear that high-achieving college students are accepted into the part-time mode of study.

The institution has set up mechanisms to recruit students, but has not yet assessed the effectiveness of those mechanisms.

4.2. The TLI has policies and procedures for revealing student educational needs.

Some of the mechanisms for identifying students' educational needs are applied at the university. Students are involved in VSU governing bodies with 25% participation: Board of Trustees, Scientific Board. Students have the opportunity to speak out and offer solutions to improve the educational environment. The site visit revealed that although students are involved in governing bodies, they are not active.

The University uses a SWOT analysis methodology to conduct student needs analysis. According to the SER work has been carried out through focus groups, social surveys. Meetings are regularly organized with the Rector and the Deans of VSU where students voice their questions.

In order to identify the educational needs of VSU, the survey called "The Teacher with the Eyes of the Students" is periodically conducted by the QAC of th VSU. The new web-site of the University has an "on-line consultant" page that provides students with the information they need, guides them in voicing their academic needs and applying to any University staff. The VSU Facebook page plays an important role in making students' voices heard, in addition to the aforementioned processes.

4.3. The TLI provides advising services, opportunities for extra-curricular activities supporting students' effective learning.

In 2016 a Regulation of Academic Consultants of the VSU was elaboeated and ratified. There are also procedures for "Organizing and Performing Student Extracurricular Activities", "Choosing Optional Courses Included in the Curriculum", "Appealing the Outcomes of Student Knowledge Assessment", which facilitate the organization of extracurricular activities and the provision of counseling.

82% of students are aware of counseling services: these data has increased after the previous accreditation. Rector's Order N 203 LA (March 24, 2016) regulates the deadlines for submission/approval of schedules for non-progressive students. Psychological and Legal Counseling centres provide student consultation services.

There is a Legal Advisory Center under the Chair of Philosophy and Political Science at the University, which aims to protect the rights and legitimate interests of other students and professors through the efforts of law students and lecturers. There are additional courses in foreign languages (particularly English) at the university, which, as it became clear during the site visit, are on paid basis (students pay 12,000 drams for three-month courses).

There are no so-called "Bridging Courses" organized in the VSU in case of changes in APs, which otherwise would prepare the students for the changes. Some regulation of the University include articles on organizing additional classes and rendering consulattions ("Academic Credits Accumulation and Transfer System Organization and Student Testing, Assessment, and Accounting", "Appeal Assesment results", "Methodological Guide to Developing Competences for Courses", "VSU Guidebook" revised version), "Format for Research Operations").

4.4. The TLI has set regulation and schedule for students to receive additional support and guidance from the administrative staff of the faculty.

There are no specific rules and timetables for students applying to administrative staff at the institution. However, students may feel free to apply for a dean's office and get help. The rector and vice-rectors have set hours for the reception of students, parents. 70% of VSU students are aware of administrative services, which has been growing since the previous accreditation.

Students are involved in the University Scientific Council, Faculty Boards, various committees and have the opportunity to voice their concerns and come up with suggestions for improving the University's performance.

The VSU has a Regulation on Academic Consultants, which was re-established on 30.06.2016 with some amendments. The VSU carries out advisory / support processes to improve student subject knowledge, legal protection, and various psychological factors. The majority of students (overall 18%) included in additional counseling services (15%) are satisfied with them. The Rector regularly organizes productive consultations with the participation of student councils, students, and senior staff (without teachers and consultants). Each first-year student is given a "Student Guide", which not only describes the university, the educational system, but also provides departmental telephone numbers and administration emails. The guide for senior students is provided via www.OneLoveDrive.com. However, as a result of the site visit it became clear that the level of awareness among the students about the "Student Guide" was not high.

4.5. The TLI has student career support services.

The VSU students receive information about Career Support Services as soon as they enter the university: the information is provided through the Student Guidebook, organized meetings. During the academic year, there are two planned seminars - trainings for all students who wish to gain practical skills in compiling CV, writing motivation letters, interviewing and searching for job. In addition to seminar trainings, individual counseling services are also provided.

The VSU Alumni and Career Support Center, as per its regulations (approved in 2015), is an independent structural unit of the University. The center is intended to conduct research on the effectiveness of alumni, university-employer communication.

During the expertise it became clear that there is no Alumni and Career Support Center as a separate unit at the VSU. There is a person responsible for supporting alumni and their career, 10 volunteers who are involved in the structure of the HR department. The volunteers participated in career orientation works in high schools in Vanadzor and Lori marzes. Alumni recruitment and

recruitment work has been completed, CVS and other university alumni resumes have been accepted and classified.

In cooperation with Vanadzor Employment Center, the event "Job Fair" was organized and implemented. VSU undertakes works with employers as far as student internships, and later on the job placement of the latter is concerned. , student internships, and later job placement. The university has a memorandum signed with VTB Bank, which provides full tuition reimbursement for one student per year.

The VSU has also signed a memorandum with VivaCell-MTS, which also provides full tuition reimbursement to a number of students. But at the same time, only 12% of students are aware of career support services. According to the university, this is due to the fact that the career center is mainly used by university senior students.

4.6. The TLI promotes student involvement in its research activities

There is a Student Scientific Society in the VSU, which operates according to the Charter of Student Scientific Society. The university has a scientific cabinet, specialized cabinets, a complex research laboratory. The latter enables students of the natural sciences to experiment with the latest devices and equipment, to obtain more accurate data. From the expert visit it became clear that the Student Scientific Society is not active in the process of initiating and carrying out scientific work. VSU provides students with an appropriate environment for making publications: magazine "Magistros". Students make publications on a free basis. Collections of student scientific articles are published as a result of collaboration with other universities. Summer studies in Armenology are organized. However, during the expert visit it became clear that the number of students involved in VSU research is not high, especially at an undergraduate level. In 2018, 110 articles were published in total, 47 of which were published in the 7th scientific conference proceedings of the VSU Student Scientific Council, 15 in the scientific bulleting of the VSU (co-authored articles), 7 in the scientific manual of Artsakh State University, 1 in an electronic scientific journay, 39 in the "Magistros" manual. Very few papers have been published in foreign journals (1 in Volgograd).

4.7. The TLI has responsible body for the students' rights protection.

The rights of students at the university are set out in several documents: The VSU Charter, the contract with the student, the Student Council Charter, the internal disciplinary rules, the Student Guide, the documents regulating the educational process as appropriate.

The main body for the protection of students' rights is the Student Council, for the operations of which the University provides financial support. The Student Council has a Facebook page and

blog. The Student Council actively participates in the organization of the "Best Course", "Best Student" awards, appreciating students' social work, active participation in undergraduate life, student self-management. The Student Council also has a separate person who is responsible for part-time students. The Student Council raises issues in two ways: through anonymous surveys and through student meetings. However, for the purpose of identifying the problems of students, there is no clear annual schedule of meetings organized by the Student Council. From the expert visit it became clear that VSU students usually turn to the deans, vice-rectors, and in some cases lecturers as well.

4.8. The TLI has evaluation and quality assurance mechanisms of student educational, advisory and other services.

Assessment of students, counseling and other services provided at the university are mainly carried out through surveys, focus groups, which are mainly organized by the Quality Assurance Center, sometimes the teaching-methodical department, the student council. The surveys are regulated (Regulations on "Conducting Sociological Survey "The Teacher by the Eyes of Students" at Vanadzor State University") and are of regular nature. Student surveys are conducted twice a year and as an outcome analyses are drawn. According to the 2018 survey outcomes, students were generally satisfied with the services provided. Student dissatisfaction was mainly related to internships, lack of professional literature. Taking into account these issues, the VSU plans to take some steps to increase the number of internships and library replenishment.

The university has started using an electronic survey system, which is a very effective tool in terms of time management and results analysis.

CONSIDERATIONS: The panel considers it positive that there are mechanisms for student enrollment, selection and admission in VSUs that facilitate transparent and effective admission and access to information on admission requirements. The university has a policy of identifying students' needs, conducting surveys with students on a part-time mode of study. These surveys help identify and solve students' problems. Students are involved in governing bodies. The panel welcomes the fact that several VSU regulations include provisions on organizing additional training and consulting. There are no clear rules and timetable for students to apply to the administrative staff at VSU. However, students terun to deans and deans' offices at any time in case of problems, which ensures a prompt and proactive reply to student problems. The VSU provides students with a "Student Guide" as well as publishes it on their web page, which promotes student awareness of their rights and responsibilities.

However, the expert visit revealed that not all students were familiar with the content of the guide, which the university could take steps and work on.

The panel is concerned that although there are some student career support services at the VSU, there is no career center as such, there is only one responsible and 10 volunteer students. This may impede the systematic implementation of student career services.

The panel considers it positive that the VSU encourages the publication of scientific articles, has a student magazine, where students can have publications once a year, which fosters links between research and learning among students, as well as student engagement in research. For the protection of Students there is a Student Council operating in the VSU. The Student Council, which contributes/can contribute to the systematic identification of students' needs.

However, the panel finds it worrying that not all students are aware of the Student Council and do not apply to the Student Council when they have problems. This may impede the identification and further resolution of students' educational needs.

The panel welcomes the fact that there are mechanisms for evaluating and providing quality education, counseling and other services rendered to the VSU students. The Quality Assurance Center conducts surveys, survey analyses, which helps to solve solve student problems and meet their needs.

SUMMARY: Taking into consideration the fact that there are existing student recruitment mechanisms, educational needs assessment structures, extracurricular and career support services, student engagement mechanisms, and the Student Scientific Society, Student Council, the panel finds that the **VSU complies with the requirements of criterion 4**. Notworthy is the fact, that it is necessary to increase the level of students' initiative and the quality of services provided to students.

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

V. FACULTY AND STAFF

CRITERION: The TLI has a highly qualified teaching and supporting staff to accomplish the institution's mission and to implement the goals set for academic programmes.

FINDINGS

5.1. The TLI has policies and procedures promoting recruitment of a highly qualified teaching and supporting staff capable of ensuring programme provisions.

Formation, recruitment and generation change of high quality faculty members is part of the implementation of the VSU Strategic Plan. As a result of the previous accreditation Action Plan, the HR policy has been adjusted to the current requirements. A Human Resources Management (HRM) department has been created and a document titled "VSU Human Resource Management Policy" has been developed. Moreover, a Mentoring Institute has been set up to facilitate the recruitment of new employees into the workplace.

There are also rules for the competitive selection and appointment of the VSU teaching staff, as well as procedures for concluding a new employment contract once the previous document has expired (with no need to announce additional competition). There are also job descriptions at use.

The visit revealed that the university is designing and recruiting its teaching staff on a competitive basis, in accordance with the academic programs and job descriptions provided by the HRM department, in accordance with the requirements and provisions of the RA Labor Code, the internal disciplinary rules of the VSU and the collective agreement. Teaching staff recruitment and saturation is being monitored by the Competition Commission under the Scientific Council of the VSU.

Depending on the requirements of the university's APs, the University invites lecturers from other institutions through the conclusion of relevant employment contracts. As a result of the reduction in staff, there is a high level of workload for the teaching staff. As of 2018, the VSU has 15 doctors (1 of which is on a part-time basis) and 123 candidates of sciences (6 of which are on a part-time basis), of whom 13 are professors and 114 are Associates.

5.2 The teaching staff qualifications for each programme are comprehensively stated.

Requirements for professional qualifications of the VSU teaching staff are stipulated in the job descriptions, as well as in the procedures and other documents dedicated to the formation and recruitment of professors of VSU: "Rules on Competition and Selection of Teaching Staff", "Terms of Re-concluding Employment Contracts Without the Necessity of Announcing a Competition",

"Teacher with the Eyes of Students" Regulation on "Sociological Surveys", Regulation on "Conducting Lesson Observations and Organizing Discussions".

However, the requirements for the professional qualifications of the teaching staff for each AP are not clearly defined.

Lecturers who teach core courses have a scientific degree or award, as well as work experience in the relevant field of activity. Elective courses are usually chosen taking into account the direction of the lecturer's scientific interests.

The competition committee adjacent to the Scientific Council of the VSU monitors the lawfulness of recruitment of professors. The competition committee and management are guided by professional qualities of the teaching staff that is being selected.

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

"Teacher Through the Eyes of Students" surveys are periodically organized. The VSU Code of Ethics sets out the standards of ethics and norms that the University expects of its staff. Periodic lesson observations are organized in line with the Regulation on "Conducting Lesson Observations and Organizing Discussions" (approved in 2016). The lectures take place both according to the timetable approved by the Chair and the timeline set by the Rector or Vice-Rector (s) of the University. Mechanisms for resolving the issues identified in the surveys have not been developed.

Feedback mechanisms and procedures are used to ensure the necessary quality of the teaching staff through the monitoring of academic programs, periodic student inquiries, conducting lectures and analysis.

The "Teacher Through Student Eyes" social survey questionnaires are designed to identify the needs of the students, to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of a given lecturer, motivate them to correct their own shortcomings, revise their teaching approaches, apply more effective assessment tools, and so on. However, the mechanisms for addressing the issues raised by the surveys have not been clearly elaborated. Lesson observations are carried out also in line with the timetable established within the Chair, as well as within the time period set by the Rector or Vice-Rector (s) of the University. There is no rating system for the evaluation of the teaching staff.

5.4. The TLI implements teacher professional development in accordance to the needs outlined during regular evaluations (both internal and external).

Assessment of the VSU teaching staff is carried out in accordance with "Teacher Through Student Eyes" social survey questionnaires developed in 2015 and amended in 2019. The results of

the student survey are discussed in the appropriate chair and then at the faculty council meeting. If necessary, relevant recommendations and suggestions are developed based on the discussion to improve the quality of teaching and to correct any shortcomings identified. Students' written opinions are discussed at the Faculty Methodological Council meeting. One month after the discussion, the Head of the Chair presents the steps and the outcomes aimed at improving the quality of teaching of those teachers who had lower scores as an outcome of student evaluation. The outcomes and identified steps are presented to the Faculty Board.

The regulation on "Organizing the professional Development of the Teaching Staff" and the 2019-2021 Operational Plan of the Lifelong Learning Centre has been elaborated at VSU. The undertaken steps are aimed at enhancing employee qualifications. A schedule of teacher training activities has also been developed.

184 lecturers have undergone training within the framework of the five-year (2015-2018) training programme aimed at boosting professional qualities of the teaching staff. The training is carried out throughout a 5-year period with a total of 30 credits. It includes English in the Academic Environment, Legal Preparation, Pedagogical Psychological Preparation, Professional Preparation courses. Publications and conference reports are also being taken into account. The university mainly carries out trainings at the expense of internal resources or in-house trainings in other domestic and foreign centers. It should be noted that 12 lecturers of the Russian Language Chair passed professional training organized and delivered by the Rossotrudnichestvo Agency Armenian office and ASPU (Yerevan. Two lecturers of the Chair of Psychology underwent training at the RA Academy of Management and Yerevan State University, one lecturer from the Chair of Foreign Languages underwent a German language teaching course organized by the Goethe Institute. The teaching staff has a problem with the English language acquisition, when in comes to participating in international programs. This issue is paid heed to by the University and additional courses are organized.

There are some examples of VSU teacher training within the framework of international programs. In recent years there has also been an increase in the number of faculty and staff participating in short-term training courses under the International Academic Mobility Grant Programs.

Within the PRINTeL (ERASMUS +) project called "Change in the Classroom: Supporting Innovative Teaching and Learning to Improve Student Orientation in Eastern Partnership Countries" the university collaborates with the Catholic University of Leuven, University of

Barcelona, Porto, Linshoping and Graz University of Applied Sciences where 6 young lecturers have been trained. Upon return, more than 60 lecturers were trained by them.

5.5. The TLI ensures the sustainability of the teaching staff according to academic programmes.

VSU has developed mechanisms for ensuring the sustainability of the teaching and support staff of APs. There are procedures "for calculating and paying for some types of scientific-organizational, educational-methodical and sport-cultural activities for VSU employees", "Providing, assisting, rewarding and encouraging VSU staff and students", and some regulations for providing the VSU staff with the opportunity to participate in different scientific trips (business trips).

Since 2017, the University has increased the salaries of all its employees by 10%. Every year, depending on budgetary means, the employees of the VSU receive the 13th (depending on the available means, the 14th salary).

There is a large number of university graduates (134 members) among the VSU teaching staff of which 77 hold a degree and scientific awards. As a financial lever, the lecturer receives a bonus based on professional experience. However, the third cyle of education does not properly function at the VSU, which impedes the recruitment of young professors.

The number of lecturers up to 30 years of age is small, and the average age distribution of lecturers has remained unchanged, which can lead to issues connected to smooth generation change. However, there is a decrease in the number of employees working of hourly wages.

The "20% increase in motivation" that has been highlighted in the operational plan compiled as an outcome of previous accreditation has not been registered.

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

The VSU has developed policies and procedures for encouraging and advancing novice teachers, as well as taking care of their mentoring. However, not all of the university's faculty members receive professional advancement.

Various training organized among the teaching staff greatly promote the enhancement and deepening of professional knowledge, capabilities and skills. The said training are conducted in different fields taking into account the issues of strategic development of the University in that particular phase.

At the beginning of the 2018-19 academic year training aimed at implementing distance learning courses have been launched and continue to develop. The institution has official procedures for enhancing the professional qualities of the teaching staff and ensuring progress.

There are no policies and procedures for ensuring the professional development of the teaching staff. The emphasis is solely on training and contributing to certain business trips. There is no separate policy.

5.7. There is necessary technical and administrative staff to achieve the strategic goals.

The University has administrative and educational support staff for the implementation of strategic goals. The outcomes of academic programs and individual courses have been clarified, and clear mechanisms, forms and methods for assessing those outcomes are being developed.

SER did not address the issues of administrative and support staff and did not provide an answer to the required number staffing.

There are no problems with the monitoring and quality assessment of the work of support resources. There is no formal training system for the support saff. The Regulation on Employee Contest Procedure, outlined in the Improvement Plan, has not been developed.

CONSIDERATIONS: The Expert Panel states that the VSU is equipped with the necessary teaching and support staff to fulfill the goals of the APs. The positive is that teaching staff recruitment is carried out on a competitive basis taking into account the requirements of the curricula and the job descriptions developed by the HRM department. All this contributes to the systematic recruitment of necessary teaching staff. The requirements for the professional qualifications of the teaching staff for every AP are not clearly formulated, which may jeopardize the effective implementation of the goals of the PAs.

The panel welcomes the fact that there is a policy aimed at rejuvenating the teaching staff in VSU. Mentoring policy is applied to ensure the professional development of the young teachers. This may contribute to the smooth generation change. Although the VSU implements different approaches to encouraging young staff up to 35 years of age, problems with the postgraduate education system impede the rejuvenation of staff. Inadequate pay raises a low level of motivation for young people. In recent years, the number of teaching staff holding scientific degrees has decreased, which may jeopardize professional progress of the teaching staff.

The panel welcomes the fact that the university has a teaching staff incentive system, credit-based professional training is being carried out and a regular evaluation of the teaching staff by student surveys is organized. All of this contributes to the effective implementation of the VSU APs and to the enhancement of the qualitative characteristics of the teaching staff. There are a few lecturers undergoing professional training, moreover, there is no clear professional training policy for different professions.

This may hinder the process of effective review APs. This is related to the financial resources of the VSU, low level of foreign language teaching and other factors.

The panel welcomes the fact that activities are being undertaken for the involvement of the VSU teaching and support staff in international programs. This contributes to the process of internationalization of the university.

SUMMARY: **Taking into consideration the fact** that there are policies and procedures for the selection of teaching and support staff, the survey "Teacher Through the Eyes of Students" is being conducted, trainings, business trips and co-operation events aimed at improving teacher performance are being implemented, the VSU underlines the importance of rejuvenation of its teaching staff, the expert group finds that the VSU **complies with the requirements of Criterion 5**. However, the expert panel would like to highlight, that the process of professional training of the teaching staff is not yet sufficient, there are issues related to foreign language skills and teaching staff rejuvenation.

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

VI. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

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

FINDINGS

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

In its 2014-2018 strategic plan the VSU has set ambitions: to become a leading center for sustainable development of the northern region of Armenia, providing educational services and carrying out scientific research. Taking into account the recommendations of the expert panel of the previous accreditation process, the VSU has reworded its scientific priorities: defining Armenology and Area Studies as priority areas of study.

Changes to the Priorities were made by the Scientific Council, on April 28, 2016 at Session 4 and reaffirmed in the Scientific Developmental Priorities for 2016-2019 as included in the Strategic Planning of the University. The University's research strategic directions do not reflect the holistic strategy of VSU research development, especially given that there are a number of professional departments in the university and their scientific potential is not included in the research system.

There is currently no clear strategy outlining the University's interests and ambitions in the research area (although it was stated in the Action Plan drafted as an outcome of the previous accreditation of the institution) and only individual activities, in particular conferences, research projects are implemented.

From the expert analysis it became clear that the scientific work carried out at the VSU is not always in line with the development goals of the region (in particular the areas of informatics and management).

Over the last three years, the university has allocated $ 103 million for research and development in 2016 (13% of budget), in 2017 - 115 million (14%) and in 2018 - 92 million (12%). The figures generally comprise 22.2% of teaching staff salaries, incentive funds, business trips, printing and other expenses and do not directly relate to pedagogical activities, in particular, the acquisition of laboratory equipment, participation in international conferences.

From the expert analysis it became clear that the financial allocations for replenishment of material and technical base (labs and other resources) at the university are not made from the VSU budget.

6.2. The TLI has a long-term strategy as well as mid and short-term programmes that address its research interests and ambitions.

According to the VSU SER, prior to the accreditation, the chairs were planning research activities based on the preferences of the professors. Since 2016, taking into account the comments and recommendations of the previous panel, the chairs have presented and approved research programs with corresponding timelines. Throughout the VSU Scientific Council meeting (February 22, 2018) the relevance of the research work of the chairs to the strategy and timetable of VSU have been discussed.

However, it became clear from the expert analysis that the minutes of the the said session included research topics and timetables, and that these topics did not always reflect the research directions of the university. It is also unclear based on what long-term research programs have been defined, given the fact that the VSU Strategic Plan (which includes research directions for 2014-2018) was completed in 2018.

2015 has been accepted and since 2016 "Vanadzor H. Tumanyan State University "Grant of Inter-University Grant for Scientific Activities of SNCO". As a result of the 9 examinations, 3 works were selected and 2.5 million drams were provided.

The Regulation on "Intra-University Grant Allocation for carrying out scientific operations" was adopted in 2015, and entered into force from 2016. Out of 9 works, 3 works were selected and 2.5 million drams were provided. In April 2017, a 6-month-long intra-university grant competition was announced. The competition was awarded to 10 research projects. There were 40 people involved in all grant projects. AMD 30 million was spent on their implementation. 3 natural science applications were encouraged. It should be noted that only 3 out of the 9 grants were aimed at creating a scientific output, and some programs created teaching and learning materials.

Summary and analysis of grants has shown that there are some disadvantages to the application of the procedure in terms of tendering, allocation of funds, and publication of results. Therefore, in 2018 the application of the procedure has been suspended.

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

Since 2017 the procedures "for calculating and paying for some types of scientific-organizational, educational-methodical and sport-cultural activities" for VSU employees has been

implemented at the University. The University has regulations on "Publishing the Scientific Bulletin of Vanadzor State University after H. Tumanyan", a Regulation on "Organizing and Conducting Scientific Conferences". The said regulation stipulates requirements to articles and peer reviews. A and B publications of Vanadzor State University Scientific Bulletins have been included into the list of publications accepted by the Supreme Certifying Committee of the RA. From 2019 it is foreseen that the bulleting will be published twice per year. Throughout 2015-2018 5 international scientific conferences have been organized in the VSU. 264 participants from 17 countries took part in those. The conferences were devoted to fundamental issues of language and modern literature. Research-scientific works that are being published at the University undergo anti-plagiarism checks.

Various regulations provide provisions for encouraging young scientists (up to 36 years). Effectiveness analysis of scientific research is performed regularly; at the beginning of each academic year, summarizing the results of the academic year, the university has developed an approach for the analysis of the effectiveness of research activities based on the academic performance coefficient of the chairs. The latter is determined by a special formula based on 3 quantitative indices / C = A - B; A - the number of published works is divided by the number of staff in the chair (if 50% or more of the staff are published), B - the number of non-published staff is divided by the number of staff /. However, this quantitative approach does not qualitatively characterize the published research and the quality of the work done has not been evaluated.

Throughout 2015-2018, only 11 part-time applicants were registered in different departments of the University, there are no full-time PhD students. The site visit revealed that the main obstacle to the development of postgraduate education at the VSU is the barrier to passing the TOEFL ibt (IELTS, Alliance Francaise, DAF) which is a prerequisite for admission to the ….

Academic honesty is ensured by the Regulation on "Academic Honesty", "Code of Ethics of Vanadzor H. Tumanyan State University", as well as by other regulations ("Publishing Scientific Bulletin of Vanadzor State University after H. Tumanyan", "Order on Organizing and Conducting Conferences at Tumanyan State University").

6.4. The TLI emphasizes the internationalization of its research.

According to the institution's SER monetary incentives are foreseen for publications in periodicals, international conference materials, as well as scientific journals included in SCOPUS and WEB OF SCIENCE journals.

The number of international publications of VSU Lecturers throughout 2015-2018 reaches 82, but this is a small number compared to the total number of lecturers. However, they are not published in high-rated international magazines. International scientific programs, joint topics with corresponding chairs of foreign universities are non-existent.

There is also a procedure for granting foreign scientific trips to VSU employees. The VSU has contracts and collaborates with 17 organizations but there is no cooperation in the field of research. The site visit revealed that VSU staff does not actively participate in local and foreign scholarships and does not have individual scientific grants. Lecturers do not have enough knowledge on procedures and existing opportunities to be published in international peer-reviewed journals.

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

In some cases, there are examples of introduction of scientific research in the academic process. There are some co-authored publications with students. However, the site visit revealed that the interdependence between the research activity and the teaching process was weak. The principles of designing, selecting and executing master's thesis topics are not described. There is no student participation in research commissioned or directed by external stakeholders.

There are some mechanisms of connecting research and teaching at the university, but there are no implemented examples. The research component in students' graduation works is emphasized: from 2015-2016 academic year 48 credit have been allocated to research component in graduate academic programmes (40%). From the site visit it became clear that at the end of the master's program the research papers of the students are published in the form of an article ("Master's Magazine"), which is evaluated during the defense of the master's thesis. It should also be noted that only a part of the Master's Degree students are concerned with the research topics of the Chairs.

However, the analysis of the expert group revealed that the results of the research done by the lecturers are not always applied in the teaching process.

CONSIDERATIONS: Taking into account the advice of the previous accreditation expert group, the VSU reviewed the priority areas of research and took steps to promote and improve the quality of research. However, the approved directions do not fully encompass the full scientific potential of the university, which poses risks to the decline in motivation for research in other areas. This is not in line with the logic of systematic university research. Moreover, there are no analytical work underlying the changes made.

The panel welcomes the fact that the university has developed mechanisms for encouraging staff research, as well as taking steps to link the teaching process and the research activity. However, the inadequate management of VSU research directions and available resources is of concern, which impedes the effective development of the research system at the institution. Monitoring of the university's research activities is focused only on quantitative indicators, which does not allow to record qualitative developments in the field of research of VSU. Intra-university competitions funding scientific works have been mainly for the publication of textbooks and methodological manuals rather than for scientific research. This does not contribute to the effective implementation of VSU research goals.

The panel considers as alarming that as far as natural sciences are concerned, the allocation of material and technical resources (equipment, materials) is limited and does not encourage the undertaking of research-scientific works. The panel also finds it alarming that there are no mechanisms to support the internationalization of scientific research in the VSU. This hampers the publicity of the research conducted at the VSU and the best practices resulting from it.

The panel is concerned that the VSU has a problem with funding for scientific research. There are no topics covered by the state in the framework of basic and thematic research, and internal funding resources are insufficient. This may hinder the realization of the VSU research goals and the development of the research field. The lack of skills in applying to various research grants among VSU staff also does not encourage participation in research grants. The index of published scientific work of the university staff is not high, there are no articles published in international reviewed journals and the ones with impact factor. This does not contribute to the internationalization of research at the university.

It is worrisome that young people's involvement in scientific research is low. Even though there is a research center and a scientific-research laboratory, Student Scientific Centre, the activity is not high. There are no mechanisms to increase the motivation of the youth to engage in science. There are a few part-time and no full-time post-graduate students. This fact impedes the rejuvenation of science in VSU, as well as jeopardizes the process of training young staff.
It is worrying that there are no mechanisms for linking research activities and teaching processes in the VSU. Moreover, the lack of analytical/research works carried out by students impedes the development of research skills among students.

SUMMARY: **Taking into consideration the fact that** there are no research strategies and ambitions in the university, the priority research areas do not include the full scientific potential of the

university, there are no long-term, mid-term and short-term developmental directions for the university, the internationalization and commercialization level of research results, limited student participation in research, the lack of mechanisms for linking research and academic process, the expert panel finds that the VSU **does not comply with the requirements of Criterion 6**.

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

VII INFRASTRUCTURES AND RESOURCES

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

FINDINGS

7.1. The TLI has an appropriate learning environment for the implementation of academic programmes.

There are 1 administrative and 3 educational buildings in order to satisfy academic needs and create a rich academic environment, one of which is registered at Gr. At Illuminator 47, outside the main campus.

There are information and technology classrooms, a gym, informatics and language classrooms, some well-equipped teaching and research laboratories. The university's laboratories, cabinets, 10 classrooms are equipped with computers and other IT equipment. Throughout the reporting period, the academic environment of the university has significantly improved. During the last two years the capacities of Computer Center after S. Mergelyan (25%), Botany and Geography cabinets, Laboratory No. 3 have been improved. A computer classroom # 8 has been created to serve the academic needs of the "Actuarial and Financial Mathematics" AP. During the reporting period one laboratory was added. 90% of the university area has a free Wi-Fi cpverage.

Internet access is available in 24 laboratories and offices, as well as in different departments of all branches, but it still does not fully meet the requirements of the students (55.4% of respondents indicated the problem in the last survey conducted in January 2019).

For the purpose of assessing the academic environment, the university conducted a survey among students and based on the data obtained, modified some of the library conditions.

64% of students and 56% of teachers are satisfied with the resources provided.

The university has a library, which is partially provided with the necessary literature and is replenished with new books every year (about 2000 units a year, about 60% of which are specialized). Irrespective of this, the library has a shortage of literature, especially for relatively

newly opened, non-pedagogical APs. The expert visit revealed that there was a need to upgrade the library.

A system of electronic lectures and teaching materials (e-library) has been introduced at the University, which significantly alleviates the lack of required literature. Cardholders have been digitized, there is a system for ordering books online, tracking book traffic, collecting statistics, which has dramatically reduced the percentage of book losses. During the reporting period a new canteen was rebuilt and put into operation.

The department of e-learning technology management and service plans to introduce distance education. In this regard, the MOODLE system is in the process of being introduced, for which ten lecturers have already been trained and two blocks of servers have been added. Some equipment has been purchased through EU grant programs MAHATMA, SSRULI, VERITAS, PRINTeL, BOOST.

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

There is an annual financial planning: funds are generated from budgetary and extra-budgetary receipts. In 2018 approximately 74% of the university's financial resources (revenues) are made up of student fees, about 22% from state budget allocations, and about 4% from other sources. Tuition fees make up the bulk of VSU's budgetary input. Other sources of funding do not constitute a significant portion.

The funds of the University are distributed according to the needs of different departments and bodies of the University. In terms of financial allocation policy, the university has annual financial planning and accountability. Expenses of University's funds are made according to the following areas: salary - about 75%, scholarships - about 2-3%, etc. Sufficient funds are not allocated for activating research. In fact, no funds are allocated for scientific research, which was also confirmed by the representatives of the university.

According to the KPI analysis, the costs per capita (student) have increased, whereas financial flows have started to decline.

Substantial renovation of the buildings has been carried out. Additional financial flows are ensured on the account of the Lifelong Learning Centre.

Annual expenses are allocated for acquiring literature. Certain publishing costs are incurred to activate students' research.

There is a shortage of financial resources when it comes to internationalization process with th aim of ensuring additional resources. The issue of increasing computer saturation has been clarified during expert meetings.

The salary at the VSU does not fall behind that of other Universities.

7.3 The TLI has sound financial distribution policy and capacity to sustain and ensure the integrity and continuity of the academic programmes offered at the institution.

The university has a financial resource allocation policy and procedure based on priorities and needs. The budget is drafted by the Rector, Vice-Rectors and the Financial Services of the University, based on the steps targeting University development, pre-calculated revenues, total expenses to be incurred, as well as applications coming from the needs of the University departments, at the same time based on actual performance of previous years.

The draft budget is being discussed at the University Scientific Council and, if approved, submitted to the Board of Trustees for approval. The existence of a financial allocation procedure is a favorable circumstance in terms of ensuring proper, targeted use, and traceability of funds. However, the mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of current financial planning and allocation policies have not yet been evaluated.

There is no explicit policy for allocating funds for the implementation of separate APs and is not reflected in the cost estimate. In the budget structure there is no direct appropriations for the APs. Budgeting goals do not serve the purpose of improving the APs. There are problems with recruiting young teachers because of low pay.

At the end of each financial year an external audit is performed in accordance with the procedure in force in the Republic of Armenia. The audit report is submitted to the Board of Trustees, posted on the website.

7.4 The TLI's resource base supports the implementation of institution's academic programmes and TLI strategic plan, which promotes for sustainability and continuous quality enhancement.

In general, the resource base of the university enables to carry out the academic processes of the university and to ensure their normal course. From this point of view, theoretical courses are sufficient, and there is still work to be done in terms of enriching the resource base for courses of practical nature. Some improvements have been made in recent years to improve the university's resource base, which was noted during the expert visit and was also noted by internal and external stakeholders.

Analyses on financial and resource implementation outcomes and effectiveness of the latter are not presented, and the added value of investment on continuous development of quality is not emphasized.

By becoming a foundation, the university increases its financial autonomy by providing additional flows.

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

Document flow is anchored on administrative order and the Regulation of General Department of "Vanadzor State Peragogical Institute of H. Tumanyan". Implementation of the eBuh University Management System has been underway within the GOVERN Grant Program since 2017.

The site provides access to information on reports, regulations and APs. 2018-2019 reports of infrastructures are posted on the website. All the rules, regulations, procedures, as well as the VSU Charter, Strategic Plan and other basic documents are posted on the site (after the Rector's order has been ratified). Opportunities provided by the website are also used for vacancy announcements. The HRM department has a data-base of staff, and there is also a graduate database.

There is a problem of technology maintenance of document circulation. Not enough server capacity.

There is a problem of technology maintenance of document circulation. Not enough server capacity. Procedures for managing information and documentation processes through IT resources are not presented.

7.6 The TLI creates safe and secure environment through health and safety mechanisms that also consider special needs of students.

VSU has an medical centre, which provides first aid to the staff members (1 nurse employed). The said centre needs to be improved.

All freshmen undergo mandatory medical examinations. The same applies to all staff as well. Each budget year allocates a separate line of funding both to provide the centre with essential medicines and to organize medical examinations.

Insufficient state of playground cannot satisfy students. There have been some developments in recent years with regard to students with special needs, in particular for those with mobility problems, all buildings have access ramps with access to the first floors, but there is a need for further improvement. The absence of elevators does not allow the above-mentioned students to climb up to the 2nd and other floors if necessary. Certain reforms are needed for students

with hearing and visual impairments. For security reasons, there is a security service at the university and a checkpoint with card system. They have fire service.

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

Assessment of the applicability, accessibility and effectiveness of resources and services provided to students is mainly done through various surveys. The surveys identified some problems with the applicability and accessibility of resources (state of the art labs and laboratories, library, computer saturation). It should be noted that the surveys do not include a full assessment of applicability, accessibility and effectiveness of the resources provided, and the effectiveness of the investment of financial resources has not been considered.

There are no analytical mechanisms other than surveys, such as periodic monitoring, etc. The panel did not spot any requests for resources from other internal stakeholders of the university. No evaluation was made among the teachers. Such an assessment is planned for November-December. There is no sufficient financial analysis, which could be an indicator of internal valuation.

The university is making efforts to mitigate the negative impacts of financial cuts (the issue has been discussed with the Board of Trustees).

CONSIDERATIONS: There are resources available to meet the academic needs of the VSU and to create a saturated educational environment, but despite the existing academic resources (laboratories, computers, projectors, etc.), there is still a need for re-saturating technical facilities and laboratories, which will be highly effective.

Over the past four years, adhering to the improvement plan, the University has implemented a number of measures to enrich the resource base and bring it to the appropriate level, thereby creating sufficient basis for the University's progress.

The fact that most of the financial resources of the university are student fees makes the university dependent on the number of students, especially in the face of declining student numbers, and endangers the financial stability of the university. From this point of view, other financial inflows supplement only 4% of the university's financial resources, which is why the university, as a foundation, must have a clear mechanism for diversifying sources of financial inflows, especially increasing the percentage of other sources.

On the positive side, there is a well-established mechanism of financial allocation at the university, which increases the efficiency of its use. The annual budget of the university provides

for certain expenditures to achieve the goals of the university, but the costs are not detailed per APs and individual laboratories, which will make financial investments more targeted.

The high percentage of salaries (about 75%) in the budget does not encourage other expenditures for university development to be sufficient.

In recent years, the institution has introduced a mechanism for assessing academic environment. This may be helpful in identifying needs and further improving the academic environment. However, the resource evaluation activity is still insufficient, as the surveys were conducted only among graduates. More active involvement of external stakeholders and participation in the process of evaluating and improving the academic environment will strengthen a more effective implementation of resources, and may provide additional resource-based approaches.

There are no full-fledged conditions in the university that will facilitate the effective organization of studies for students with special needs, and there is still much work to be done in this regard.

The VSU employee-student ratio is currently one to 5.7 (according to the 2018 SP analysis by KPIs), which indicates a rather small number of students. Such a large number of staff can limit investment in other key areas (e.g. research, library, internationalization) and weaken the effectiveness of strategic planning.

Insufficient student and teacher satisfaction (64% and 56%) with existing resources can be considered as a risk factor for the effective implementation of the activities foreseen by the APs other university functions.

A gradual decline in financial inflows due to a lack of applicants may lead to financial instability.

Given the number of classrooms and cabinets available at the university, the resources that support the implementation of the academic process (library, gym, medical centre, etc.), as well as the fact that the university has made efforts in recent years to make visible improvements to the university's resources, **Criterion 7 is considered satisfactory.** In the meanwhile, there are problems as far as the creation of a decent academic environment for students with special needs is concerned, as well as with the direct funding of APs just in terms of planning.

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

VIII. SOCIETAL RESPONSIBILITY

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

FINDINGS

8.1 The TLI has clear policy on institutional accountability.

The VSU reporting process is regulated by the RA Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education and a number of inter-university legal documents.

According to the established procedure, the director (rector) of the foundation submits a report to the highest management body, the Board of Trustees of the VSU, at the end of each calendar year.

The accountability of the Rector of the institution is based on the KPIs of University activity evaluation and the reports submitted by the units, which are also posted on the VSU website. There is a need to improve accountability mechanisms.

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

VSU has an official website. The relevant sections of the official website of the University provide self-analyzes, reports on recent academic, scientific, and financial activities of the University.

In the last 4 years, steps have been taken to increase the effectiveness and availability of accountability.

Throughout 2018-2019 certain operations aimed at upgrading the University website have been undertaken: social networks are actively used, the university also has its own Internet domain on Facebook as well as a Youtube channel where information is also made available to users through videos.

VSU provides information to its internal and external stakeholders through the Vanadzor State University biweekly, the local Fortuna TV channel, the Lori Marz regional newspaper and, of course, the official website. Meetings of the Board of Trustees are broadcast live.

8.3 The TLI has sustainable feedback mechanisms for establishing relations with society.

During the expert visit, it was found out that the institute collects information about visits to its Facebook page thanks to technologies used in social networks and possesses certain statistics.

However, VSU SER points to feedback imperfections and some problems. Inefficiency and reliability of feedback need to be improved.

It was also revealed during the visit that individuals applying for training provided by the institution were asked about the source of information about those trainings. The feedback mechanisms that contribute to the formation of public relations are mainly in the developmental phase and are not yet fully coordinated and implemented.

8.4. The TLI has mechanisms that ensure knowledge transfer to the society.

The following mechanisms are in place for the transfer of knowledge (values) to the public. There is a Lifelong Learning Centre which provides training and additional courses. There is also a Department of Cooperation and Relations which conducts seminars, Olympiads, competitions, knowledge fairs and quizzes. There is also a Cultural Center in the institution which organizes and implements cultural events.

The transfer of knowledge and values in the region is also evidenced by the fact that about 70% of the region's teachers are graduates of th VSU. The university also cooperates with H1, Yerkir, Shoghakat republican and Fortuna regional TV companies. The university's leadership participates in television roundtables, debates, press conferences.

CONSIDERATIONS: Regulated accountability of the institution provides the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the VSU operations by the highest management body. Publications of key indicators, reports, regulations, and evaluation of the institution's activities ensure the transparency and accessibility of the institution's activities to the public, which is important for the operation of feedback mechanisms and the sustainable development of the institution through them. The use of digital technologies is a positive and promising approach to assessing the effectiveness of public feedback, which will strengthen these links and improve the quality and content of information provided by the institution, as well as its targeted use by the public. This contributes to the transparency of the institution's activities and the availability of direct communication with the institution. The university has an important role to play in the transfer of knowledge and values to the public in the region and employs established processes in this regard, which can play an important role in the development of the region.

SUMMARY: Taking into account the approaches to the transparency of VSU operations, the steps taken to develop digital technologies used to create effective public relations, as well as

the role of the VSU in transferring knowledge and values in the region, the panel finds that **the institution complies with the requirements of Criterion 8**.

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

IX. EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND INTERNATIONALIZATION

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

FINDINGS

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

In 2016, the VSU implemented an Internationalization Strategy. There is also a draft 2019-2021 internationalization plan. The VSU External Relations and Internationalization process is coordinated by the Cooperation and Relations Department, which has been in operation since 2013. The reports of the said Department mention about the need to involve additional human resources and resources to enhance the effectiveness of internationalization processes. Due to the establishment of the department and the targeted application of grants, the university managed to get involved in five Tempus projects and four Erasmus Mundus mobility projects in 2013-14.

Since 2017, the Regulation Academic Process Organization Through the System of Accumulation and Transfer of Academic Credits has been in force at the institution, which is based on the basic concepts of the pan-European ECTS credit system. Since 2015, the Regulation on Organization of International Mobility of the VSU Students, Admission and Registration of Credits Obtained at Foreign Universities have been in force.

The process of internationalization is mainly implemented within the framework of programs with external funding sources. There are no clear policies and procedures for encouraging the establishment of external relations. The only procedure is the one on granting the opportunity of foreign scientific trips to VSU employees. According to the mentioned procedure, the travel expenses of those sent to participate in international, scientific conferences, seminars may not be more than 200 000 AMD.

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

The activities of the Department of Cooperation and Relations of VSU have two directions: international and domestic cooperation and strengthening of university-school relations. The department staff includes the head of department, a senior specialist promoting international cooperation and a university-school communication specialist.

The department operates in accordance with the charter of the Department of Cooperation and Relations of VSU, which has been in operation since 2016.

In the field of international cooperation, the Department of Cooperation and Relations performs a number of clearly formulated functions. The annual plans of the Department are approved by the Vice-Rector on Scientific Affairs. Reports on the works undertaken are available on the VSU website.

The expert visit revealed that the Department of Cooperation and Relations is currently elaborating a procedure for applying to international student and lecturer programs, a credit recognition guide, as well as a national model for APs. However, there are no clear steps for the institution to allocate its own resources for the implementation of internationalization processes.

9.3. The TLI promotes fruitful and effective collaboration with local and international counterparts.

VSU cooperates with foreign universities within the framework of international programs. The university has bilateral mobility agreements with 7 EU universities. Locally, the VSU cooperates with about 19 HEIs of Armenia. But the effectiveness of the contracts signed is not thoroughly analyzed; only the results of student and faculty mobility are reflected. During the visit it became clear that the VSU cooperation with other HEIs in the region is not active as they are considered as competing HEIs for the VSU. VSU cooperates with HEIs of EU, CIS countries, China.

Since 2013, the university has had 77 outgoing students. 31 representatives of the administrative and teaching staff have been trained and taught at EU universities.

Six young lecturers of the university participated in the courses organized by European University specialists. Afterwards, the participants shared their experience and knowledge more than 60 lecturers of the VSU.

An impediment to mobility is the low level of knowledge of the employees' foreign language acquisition, particularly the English language, which makes it difficult for the host party to promote mobility.

Not all the departments of the university actively participate in internationalization work, but work is being done in this direction, in particular to ensure mobility in the applied mathematics and informatics professions.

Financial resources are insufficient and the activities are carried out only at the expense of grants.

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

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of University staff who dominate foreign languages. The VSU is a member of the consortium of BOOST / Armenian Universities Internationalization Strategy and Marketing Promotion / Grant Program. Benchmarking was

carried out in the field of internationalization in the framework of the project based on the experience of internationalization processes in Swedish, Spanish, Estonian and Portuguese universities. A comparative analysis was carried out on the basis of the capacity building and international activities of universities affiliated with the VSU within the framework of international credit mobility.

The Department of Cooperation and Relations collaborates with the German DAAD agency and other international organizations to increase the level of foreign language proficiency of students and to enable them to continue their education in foreign languages abroad.

The university's Lifelong Learning Centre also provides foreign language courses for teachers, and foreign language courses for students are discounted by 50%.

The number of foreign language courses offered to foreign learners is not sufficient. In 2018, this indicator was 0, which is due to the level of foreign language acquisition of the teaching staff, the low number of subjects taught in English and the problem of compliance with the requirements of foreign language courses.

CONSIDERATIONS: The panel welcomes the fact that there are some mechanisms and procedures aimed at establishment of external ties. The Department of Cooperation and Relations is in charge of this. All this has a positive impact on the activation of the process of internationalization of the institution. However, the low level of own funds allocation may pose risks to the stability and effectiveness of the implementation of internationalization processes.

On the positive side, the VSU internationalization activities are generally regulated, which contributes to goal setting, clarity, systematic accountability and improvement. However, sufficient mechanisms to encourage student and teaching staff internationalization are not developed. This may hinder the development of internationalization. However, the Department of Cooperation and Relations has started to work on regulating all this.

It is positive that the institution is actively collaborating with local, state, international HEIs and institutions as well as looking for new ways of cooperation, which has a positive impact on the internationalization of the institution and the introduction of innovations. However, comprehensive analysis of cooperation agreements and clear planning of cooperation is not yet implemented. This does not allow them to assess their effectiveness and to identify future directions for development of cooperation.

The level of mobility in the VSU still needs to be improved. The institution performs certain functions to increase the knowledge of the foreign language of the internal stakeholders, which can

have a positive impact by promoting internationalization. However, steps to raise the level of proficiency in foreign languages, in particular that of the teaching staff, are subject to improvement. This will enhance internationalization processes at the university.

SUMMARY: Given the active involvement of the institution in internationalization processes, the satisfactory level of cooperation with local and international HEIs, the regulated and accountable activities of the specialized subdivision in this area, the panel considers that the institution **complies with the requirements of criterion 9**. However, there is still need to analyze existing cooperation, improve the regulation of internationalization processes and the level of foreign language proficiency.

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

X. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

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

FINDINGS

10.1. The TLI has internal quality assurance policies and procedures.

The University has a Quality Assurance Center. The goal of the Center is to ensure quality control, accountability and continuous improvement of the educational, research and management processes of the University. The VSU Quality Assurance Policy is implemented in accordance with the procedures developed in line with the regulations developed in the University's Quality Assurance System, in particular the Quality Assurance System Regulation adopted in 2015. Over the past four years, the University has developed a number of documents regulating quality assurance functions, such as the Quality Assurance Self-Assessment and Review Regulations and Procedures, Quality Assurance Concepts, Quality Assurance Guidelines for Students, Quality Assurance Policies, Procedure of Internal Audit of APs, etc. According to VSU's self-assessment report, Quality Assurance and Development Strategy is aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of quality processes in all areas of the University's activities, developing a quality culture by involving all stakeholders, and enhancing motivation to participation and efficiency. According to the regulations, the VSU QA Centre works in a number of directions: organizational, analytical, methodical, consulting, informational and so on.

The QA Centre has provided audit reports on a number of APs, which have been carried out in accordance with the relevant procedure and contain some analysis. The internal and external stakeholders of the VSU participated in the process having the opportunity to voice their problems and suggestions.

There are some cases where existing procedures and regulations are not fully implemented.

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

The University generally provides material, human and financial resources for the purpose of implementing the QA system to accomplish its mission and goals, as well as to manage internal quality assurance processes. As a result of 2017 financial analysis, one position was cut from the QA system. Currently, the QA Centre has 4 employees / 3 full-time positions/. In order to decentralize the work of the QA Centre and increase its effectiveness, Faculty Quality Assurance Working Groups (QAFs) have been set up, which work through people responsible for QA in the chars and

with the students, in coordination with the people responsible for faculty quality assurance. Data from surveys and analyses conducted regularly by these workgroups, students, faculty, and other stakeholders are discussed on-site and are summarized at the QA Center. Volunteering employees are also involved, which is motivating for different stakeholders.

Acquisition of material resources is based on the needs identified by the Center in accordance with the financial opportunities provided by the University for the given year. A number of programs aimed at improving the quality of education and staff training have been implemented throughout the university's international programs to develop QA culture, quality management and quality culture. The efficiency of resources allocated to quality functions has not been analyzed and revealed.

The internal quality assurance system incorporates both human, logistical, and financial resources provided by the HEI, as well as acquired through international programs. The development of the internal quality assurance system has been substantially promoted by some international programs, which have ensured that the quality assurance functions have been provided with the necessary logistics. In recent years, various programs have provided additional financial inflows through various projects, at the expense of which the center has been equipped with technical means and equipment.

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

QA Responsible Working Groups in the Faculties enable internal stakeholders to have some involvement in QA processes (educational programs, learning, QA, etc.). In collaboration with the Faculty QA Working Groups, the QA Centre regularly conducts joint research, analysis, studies, and discussions with external and internal stakeholders (faculty, administrative and teaching staff, students and faculty, students, employers).

Internal and external stakeholders are involved in HEI quality assurance, monitoring, auditing, productive internships, summative attestation, as well as in the development and review of APs. It became clear from the expert visit that the employers who participated in the AP audit were paid by the university. During meetings and discussions with students kahoot.it surveys are used to enable immediate response to voiced questions. However, the level of IT use in the needs identification process is still low (online surveys are still scarce).

QA Centre cooperates with the quality assurance team of the Student Council of the University, also ensuring certain student participation in quality assurance processes. The working

group that carried out the SAR included deans, department heads, lecturers, as well as students. There is a low degree of involvement and activity of part-time students.

According to internal quality assurance procedures, external stakeholders should also participate in QA processes, but this level of participation is not yet sufficient. Cooperation with external stakeholders is not of a coordinated nature. It became clear from the expert visit that QA Centre surveys and focus group discussions among teaching and support staff were not carried out periodically. In order to overcome this problem, the University emphasizes the need to improve the mechanisms for ensuring awareness and involvement of internal and external stakeholders.

10.4. The internal quality assurance system is periodically reviewed.

The VSU QA Centre functions were organized on the basis of continuous improvement, following the PDCA cycle. The activities of the QA Center are currently focused on the planning and implementation of processes at the university. In some QA processes, the PDCA cycle is not yet closed, and there is a need to develop procedures to ensure evaluation and improvement processes.

There have been some reforms in the quality assurance system over the reporting period and a number of documents have been developed. Regulation and Procedure for Self Assessment and Review of Quality Assurance 02.04.2019 Order No. 205 L / C. Envisaged by the VSU Action Plan. QA system review was carried out. QA policy, and quality assurance and management policies, improvement mechanisms and tools are reviewed.

The quality assurance manual for VSU students has been developed based on the issues and problems raised by them, which are important in the process of developing a relevant quality assurance culture. At the same time, it aims to increase student engagement and increase their involvement in QA processes.

The involvement of external stakeholders in the QA process is not sufficiently justified.

10.5. The internal quality assurance system provides valid and sufficient background for the success of the external quality assurance processes.

Certain activities (surveys, SWOT analysis, self-analysis) have been carried out within the internal QA system to organize the external evaluation process. External evaluation of institutional capacity has been undertaken to ensure access to information and transparency of activities, as well as to collect, process and analyze necessary data.

In order to enhance the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes, for the purpose of organizing the external evaluation process, the VSU systematically performs self-

assessment of various infrastructures of the University's activities according to the formats developed by the QA. The latter is the basis for external evaluation.

The panel considers it important to emphasize that some parts of the self-analysis do not reflect the complete situation of the institution. A number of facts, including positive ones, were clarified through the efforts of the panel during the visit. Analyzes were lacking in the SER, (analytical section is weak), some criteria were not presented according to the content and requirement of the standard, specific examples were not sufficiently described.

The QAC has developed a computerized database of documents (on the SEA website), which lists all regulations and procedures. Data collection, dissemination and management processes are generally coordinated, but their effectiveness has not yet been studied by the VSU.

No specific approaches have been developed in the internal quality assurance system to ensure that external evaluation processes, such as specific procedures for the participation of external stakeholders.

10.6 The internal quality assurance system ensures the transparency of the processes unfolding in the TLI through providing information on the quality of the processes to the internal and external stakeholders.

The transparency of its internal quality assurance system is ensured through the website www.vsu.am, reports, discussions and discussions.

Through the Quality Assurance Social Network, which has about two thousand followers, information on the work is being disseminated. It is effective in raising awareness and attracting external stakeholders. The QAC regularly provides information to the Media and Communications Division. The information provided is accessible to internal and external stakeholders, and generally provides a complete understanding of the university's quality assurance processes.

From the expert visit it became clear that the internal and external stakeholders of the VSU do not actively use the information presented on the system. Sufficient information is not published on the progress and results of the QAC operations.

There is a problem with the proper provision of information on the recorded improvement plan.

CONSIDERATION: The introduction and development of the university's quality assurance system in recent years may create favorable conditions for the further development of quality culture, external and internal evaluation. The panel stresses that the decentralization of quality

assurance activities (the creation of faculty working groups) can have a positive impact on work efficiency.

Documents and regulations developed by the University's Quality Assurance Center are the basis for the implementation of quality assurance functions. Positive is the fact that the QA policy has been reviewed based on recommendations from pervious accreditation process. Involvement of university lecturers and students in quality assurance processes ensures more targeted and effective activities, but their level of activity still needs to be increased.

The panel considers the AP audit conducted by the QA center and the analysis carried out as a result of it positive. This may also be effective in the future, when APs will undergo external audit.

The panel considers the university's participation in a number of international projects effective within the scope of the quality assurance process. The human, financial, and logistical resources involved in quality processes generally provide for the performance of relevant functions, but the degree of effectiveness of the use of those resources has not been studied, which may be an obstacle to the implementation of quality assurance functions.

The current inadequate involvement of external stakeholders in the quality assurance system can undermine the effectiveness of the quality assurance system and the university has some work to do in this regard.

Steps to ensure transparency of information on quality functions contribute to raising awareness of internal and external stakeholders.

Considering that the University has an internally developed quality assurance system, which is in the development phase, contributing to the continuous improvement of the institution's operations, the formation of a quality culture and striving to ensure the transparency of its operations, the panel finds that the VSU complies with the requirements of criterion 10, at the same time noting that the degree of relevant involvement of external stakeholders is still insufficient in quality assurance processes, as well as a number of processes are still in the planning and implementation phase of the PDCA cycle.

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

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

CRITERIA	CONCLUSION
I. Mission and Purpose	Satisfactory
II. Governance and Administration	Unsatisfactory
III. Academic Programs	Satisfactory
IV. Students	Satisfactory
V. Teaching and Support Staffs	Satisfactory
VI.Research and Development	Unsatisfactory
VII. Infrastructure and Resources	Satisfactory
VIII. Social Responsibility	Satisfactory
IX. External Relations and Internationalization	Satisfactory
X. Internl Quality Assurane System	Satisfactory

23, December 2019

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Vardan Sargsyan

Panel Chair

Vardan Sargsyan: graduated from Yerevan Economic Institute in 1984 (at present State University of Economic of Armenia) being awarded a diploma of an engineer-economist. In 1989 was awarded the degree of a candidate and in 2009 the degree of a doctor in economics. In 1993 was awarded the degree of an associate professor. Currently he is the Head of the Chair of Economic Computer Science and Information Systems Armenian State University of Economics, professor. He has participated in an array of exchange programmes and conferences. He is an author of approximately 60 articles, books, manual, including 16 articles published in Europe and the USA, 4 manuals and 6 course books.

Vairidotas Viliunas - In 1979 he graduated from Kaunas University of Technology (Lithuania) with a degree in Chemical Engineering. Since 1987 - Doctor of Science, Doctor of Chemistry. Since 1991 he has been Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Organic Chemistry at Kaunas University of Technology. In 1995 he held the position of Vice-rector of Kaunas University of Technology, then in 1999 he was the Director of the International Office of Kaunas University of Technology. Since 2011, he has held the position of Director of the Student Affairs Office at Vitautas Magnus University. Since 2018 Head of Policy Development and Program Implementation at the European Association of Higher Education Institutions (EURASHE).

Aram Baghiyan - Graduated from Zhukovsky Air Force Military Engineering Academy of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation with the gold medal in 2008, specializing in "Robotics Aviation Systems" with an engineering qualification. In 2014 he was awarded the degree of a candidate of technical sciences with the thesis "Development of a Robotic System for Monitoring Terrestrial Objects from Aircraft". Throughout 2012-2017 was a senior lecturer at Military Aviation Institute (University) after RA marshal Khamperyants. Since 2017 up to present he holds the position of Scientific Advisor of "Improviz" LLC. From 2016 to 2018 he was a member of the Professional Council 032 "Management and Automation" of the SCC. He is the author of more than 40 scientific and scientific-technical works, 2 educational and 2 methodical manuals. He participated in lectures and training of Partnership for Peace Consortium and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Kh. Abovyan Armenian State Pedagogical University and else.

Anna Poladyan - Graduated from the Biophysics Department of the Faculty of Biology of Yerevan State University in 1994. Between 1994-96 she was a an experimental researcher and a junior researcher. In 2000 she became senior researcher in 2000-2018. Since 2000 he has been a PhD in Biological Sciences. From 2016-2017 she was an individual consultant at YSU Innovative Center for Microbiological

Biotechnologies and Biofuels. 2012 - present - Yerevan State University, Faculty of Biology, Chair of Biochemistry, Microbiology and Biotechnology Associate Professor. She has participated in exchange programs and a number of conferences. She is an author of about 22 published scientific articles, books and textbooks, has participated in about 12 grants and has been awarded a number of awards.

Ofelia Arzumanyan is a 2nd year student of the Department of Radio Engineering of ICT Institute of ASPU. She participated in trainings of student-experts within the ANQA Student Voice Program.

Expert panel site-visits to Vanadzor State University named after Hovhannes Tumanyan with the aim of institutional accreditation

16.09.2019–19.09.2019

	16.09.2019	*Start*	*Finish*	*Duration*
1	Meeting University Rector	09:00	09:45	45 minutes
2	Meeting the representatives of the Governing Board	10:00	11:00	60 minutes
3	Meeting Vice-Rectors	11:10	12:10	60 minutes
4	Meeting SAR working-group	12:20	13:20	60 minutes
5	Break, panel discussions	13:30	14:30	60 minutes
6	Meeting faculty deans	14:50	16:00	70 minutes
7	Meeting employers (8-10 people)	16:10	17:10	60 minutes
8	Document review Closed panel meeting	17:20	18:00	60 minutes

	17.09.2019	*Start*	*Finish*	*Duration*
1	Meeting Chair head, including those of three APs	09:00	10:00	60 minutes
2	Meeting teachers (8-10 people)	10:15	11:30	75 minutes
3	Meeting BA students (10-12 people)	11:40	12:40	60 minutes
4	Break, panel discussions	13:00	13:45	45 minutes
5	Meeting MA students (10-12 people)	14.00	15:00	60 minutes
	Meeting part-time students (10-12 people)	15:10	16:10	60 minutes
6	Meeting graduates (10-12 people)	16:20	17:20	60 minutes
7	Closed panel meeting	17:30	18:00	30 minutes

	18.09.2019	*Start*	*Finish*	*Duration*
1	Meeting Student Council, and Student scientific Council representatives (10-12 people)	09:00	10:15	60 minutes
2	Lessons observations	10:30	11.30	75 minutes
3	Documents and resource review, visits to chairs, infrastructures, centres, units, library, medical centre, sports hall.	11:45	13:15	90 minutes
4	Break, panel discussions	13:30	14:30	60 minutes
5	Meeting infrastructure heads	14:30	15:45	75 minutes
6	Open meeting with the exert panel	16:00	16:30	30 minutes
7	Closed panel meeting	16:30	18:00	90 minutes

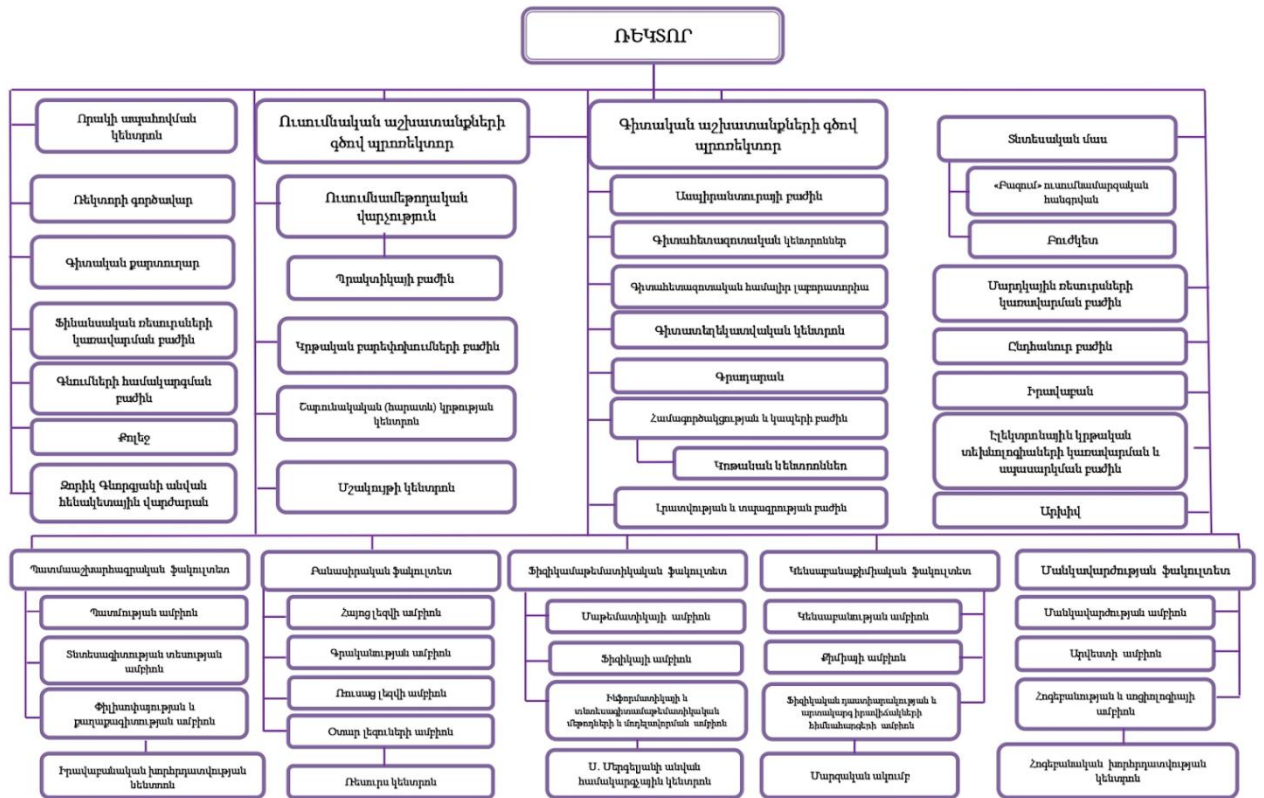|	19.09.2019р.	Start	Finish	Duration
1	Meeting QA team	09:00	10:15	75 minutes
2	Document review	10:30	12:00	90 minutes
3	Closed panel meeting	12:00	12:60	60 minutes
4	Break, panel discussions	13:00	13:45	45 minutes
5	Document review	14:00	14:30	30 minutes
6	Meeting the staff chosen by the expert panel	14:30	15:15	45 minutes
7	Meeting University Rector	15:30	16:00	30 minutes
8	Closed panel meeting	16:15	18:00	105 minutes

APPENDIX 3. REVIEWED DOCUMENTS

N	Name of the Document	Criteria/Standard
1.	Draft Strategic Plan of VSU	1.1
2.	Analysis of the influence of external and internal factors influencing the management of the university	2.4
3.	The results of the evaluation of the effectiveness of the implementation of mid-term programs / institutions, departments /	2
4.	Job description / Academic Staff staff, Heads of Chairs, SSS staff /	2
5.	Analysis of the quality assurance cycle of management (PDCA cycle)	2.5
6.	Annual planning or description of the Chairs that 3 represented Academi programmes belong to	5
7.	Schedule and plans of the trainings of Academic staff members	5.4
8.	Benchmarking implementation policy	3
9.	Lists of thesis topics /for the last 4 years /	3
10	Curricula of the Aademic programs	
11.	Presentation of the reports on monitoring process of the Academic programs during the Scientific Council meeting	3.2
12.	Examples of master's theses / done for last 4 years /	3.5
13.	Examples of the Internship diaries	3
14.	Questionnaire of the effectiveness evaluation of the training	3
15.	Minutes of the thesis defense commissions (part-time)	3
16.	Statistics /analysis on the level of employment of the graduates	4.5
17..	List of the main teaching staff members for each Academic program	5.2
18.	Number of the young teaching staff members /KPIs/	5.5
19.	The average age of the Academic staff /KPIs/	5.5
20.	Ratio of lecturer-student / data from the last 4 years /	5
21.	Examples of lecturer's annual workload	5
22.	Descriptions of subjects taught in a foreign language	9.4
23.	Documents certifying the mobility of students of the institution / incoming, outgoing /, / local, international /	9

24.	Documents certifying the mobility of the institution's lecturers (incoming, outgoing), / local, international /	9
25.	Anayses of the surveys conducted among students, faculty members, employers	10
26.	Regulation of competitive selection of VSU Academic staff members	5
27.	Vacancy announcement examlpe	2
28.	Internationalization strategy of the VSU	9

APPENDIX 4. OBSERVED RESOURCES

1. Auditoriums
2. Chairs
3. Computer Labs
4. Library
5. Halls
6. Centre of Regional Studies
7. Research-Scientific Centre "Psychology of Managerial Operations"
8. Research Centre on Science Management
9. Creative Zone meant for stdent communication

APPENDIX 5. ORGANIGRAM

ՌԵԿՏՈՐ

Column 1:
- Որակի ապահովման կենտրոն
- Ռեկտորի գործավար
- Գիտական քարտուղար
- Ֆինանսական ռեսուրսների կառավարման բաժին
- Գնումների համակարգման բաժին
- Քոլեջ
- Զորիկ Գեորգյանի անվան հենակետային վարժարան

Column 2 — Ուսումնական աշխատանքների գծով պրոռեկտոր
- Ուսումնամեթոդական վարչություն
  - Դրակտիկայի բաժին
  - Կրթական բարեվոխումների բաժին
  - Շարունակական (հարստ) կրթության կենտրոն
  - Մշակույթի կենտրոն

Column 3 — Գիտական աշխատանքների գծով պրոռեկտոր
- Ասպիրանտուրայի բաժին
- Գիտահետազոտական կենտրոններ
- Գիտահետազոտական համալիր լաբորատորիա
- Գիտատեղեկատվական կենտրոն
- Գրադարան
- Համագործակցության և կապերի բաժին
  - Կոտական կենտրոններ
- Լրատվության և տպագրության բաժին

Column 4 — Տնտեսական մաս
- «Բացում» ուսումնախորհրդական հանգրվան
- Բուժկետ
- Մարդկային ռեսուրսների կառավարման բաժին
- Ընդհանուր բաժին
- Իրավաբան
- Էլեկտրոնային կրթական տեխնոլոգիաների կառավարման և սպասարկման բաժին
- Արխիվ

Պատմաշխարհագրական ֆակուլտետ
- Պատմության ամբիոն
- Տնտեսագիտության տեսության ամբիոն
- Փիլիսոփայության և քաղաքագիտության ամբիոն
- Իրավաբանական խորհրդատվության կենտրոն

Բանասիրական ֆակուլտետ
- Հայոց լեզվի ամբիոն
- Գրականության ամբիոն
- Ռուսաց լեզվի ամբիոն
- Օտար լեզուների ամբիոն
- Ռեսուրս կենտրոն

Ֆիզիկամաթեմատիկական ֆակուլտետ
- Մաթեմատիկայի ամբիոն
- Ֆիզիկայի ամբիոն
- Ինֆորմատիկայի և տեղեկատվական տեխնոլոգիական մեթոդների և մոդելավորման ամբիոն
- Ս. Մերգելյանի անվան համակարգչային կենտրոն

Կենսաբանաքիմիական ֆակուլտետ
- Կենսաբանության ամբիոն
- Քիմիայի ամբիոն
- Ֆիզիկական դաստիարակության և արտակարգ իրավիճակների հիմնահարցերի ամբիոն
- Մարզական ակումբ

Մանկավարժության ֆակուլտետ
- Մանկավարժության ամբիոն
- Արվեստի ամբիոն
- Հոգեբանության և սոցիոլոգիայի ամբիոն
- Հոգեբանական խորհրդատվության կենտրոն

APPENDIX 6: LIST OF ACRONYMS

1. **EHEA** – European Higher Education Area
2. **VSU** – Vanadzor State University
3. **ECTS –** European Credit Transfer System
4. **RA –** Republic of Armenia
5. **AP** – Academic Programmes
6. **TLI –** Tertiary Level Institution
7. **QA** – Quality Assurance
8. **ANQA** – National Centre for Professiona Education Quality Assurance
9. **ESGQA** - **European Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance**
10. **NQF** – National Qualification Framework
11. **TS –** Teaching Staff
12. **PDCA** – plan, do, check, act
13. **SP** – Stargetic Plan
14. **SC – Student Council**