SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

Since its establishment in 2008, the "National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance" foundation (hereinafter: "ANQA" or "agency") has been attaching great importance to the creation of continuous quality enhancement culture and promotion of educational reforms at tertiary level institutions (hereinafter TLIs) in the Republic of Armenia (hereinafter RA). ANQA's development and core activities strive to encourage visibility and competitiveness of the TLIs at the national and international levels.

ANQA's first self-assessment was conducted in 2016 and the strategic directions that reflected the stakeholders' needs and the national and international demand provided grounds for further progress in the past five years. As a result of the first external review, in 2017, ANQA became a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (hereinafter ENQA) and was registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (hereinafter EQAR). The outcomes of the external review and corresponding recommendations of the ENQA review experts contributed to ANQA's further development.

In 2018 the first cycle of institutional accreditation was completed in the RA with the coverage of 96% students studying at institutionally accredited HEI's. At that stage internal quality assurance systems were embedded in all accredited HEIs. The respective improvement plans supporting the institutions' strategic directions were developed and implemented by higher education institutions. The HEIs reviewed their academic programmes. All the programmes were redeveloped and described using the outcome-based approach. Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle became the main tool for planning the review of academic programmes. The HEIs embedded valuable resources to the cyclical reviewing of all internal processes supported by appropriate policies, procedures and strategies.

Hence, the first two ANQA strategic planes for the first ten years after establishment have been reached with the first cycle of the institutional accreditation.

ANQA has launched the second cycle of institutional accreditation with a strong focus on the review of academic programmes, thus promoting the reforms at the level of programmes. The new policy on decision making of institutional accreditation by Accreditation Committee requires that the TLIs ensure the credibility of qualifications award aligned with NQF, implement result-oriented governance, and guarantee long-term progressive development.

The new RA law on Higher Education and Science as amended in 2021 clearly presents the requirements for mandatory programme accreditation during the period of one cycle of institutional accreditation. The deadline for the first cycle of programme accreditation is envisioned in 2025[1].

By RA Government requirement, ANQA has strengthened the monitoring of follow-up development in the accredited HEIs.

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[1] The new Law on "Higher Education and Science" is in the final adoption phase by the RA National Assembly.

Tremendous efforts have been carried out to increase the engagement of vocational education institutions (hereinafter VET) into the quality assurance processes while considering European approaches. In 2019, accreditation processes were launched for VET institutions. Currently, 11 VET institutions have undergone the institutional accreditation.

Valuing collaboration with its stakeholders, ANQA has strengthened its communication with various stakeholder groups. Special attention has been given to aging and regeneration problem. Young teachers and researchers were invited into the quality dialogue through trainings and thematic discussions and they were also engaged in the accreditation as external experts.

ANQA has increased student participation in the internal and external quality assurance processes, by strengthening the "Students Voice" project activities. In particular, ANQA has ensured students' participation from regions of RA and involvement of students from diverse academic disciplines.

ANQA has strengthened its internationalization agenda with continuing the policy of active involvement of international (mostly European) peers in the accreditation. Many experienced representatives from EHEA have had an active participation in accreditation procedures. At the same time European partners have been inviting ANQA to proactively participate in the development of EHEA.

As a result of the mentioned accomplishments, the continuous enhancement culture has been developed at TLIs. Acquisition of expertise capacity at TLI's is a valuable achievement as an internal driver for improvements in the country. Moreover, trust in ANQA developments has increased.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

For the implementation of the self-assessment report (SAR), ANQA has established a team of five people (including an external expert and a student, who have experience participating as a panel member in ANQA accreditation procedures).

As a first step, the SAR team has conducted brainstorming according to each ESG among internal and external stakeholders to reveal the strong points and areas for development to meet the standard requirements. Afterwards, two members of the SAR team drafted the text according to ESG. The text was circulated among the SAR team members, feedback was received and afterwards the content was again discussed, reviewed and finalized.

It is worth mentioning that besides the self-assessment implementation team, all the staff members of the Agency and the key stakeholders took an active part in the process. The self-assessment report was reviewed based on the provided feedback. The current report summarizes the outcomes of implementation of ANQA's follow-up plan developed based on the recommendations of the ENQA review experts, the data collected from external and internal stakeholders, and a comprehensive analysis.

3. HIGHER EDUCATION AND QA OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AGENCY

3.1 HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN ARMENIA

Armenian Higher Education has a three-level degree system offering the following qualifications: Bachelor's at first level, Master's at the second level and Researcher's and Candidate of Sciences (Postgraduate/Doctoral) at the third level.

Continuous education and professional development of qualifications, varying by disciplines, are offered through periodic training programmes and in-service education to assure that specialists stay up to date with developments in their fields and professions.

Two principal laws regulate Armenian higher education: the Law on Education (1999) and the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education[2] (2004). The latter sets forth the structure, main principles of organization, and funding mechanisms. The laws are supported by a range of regulations that cover areas such as the degree system, quality assurance, National Qualifications Framework, academic credits and their transfer, student mobility etc.

To provide access to higher education and lifelong learning, higher education is offered in Armenia on a full-time basis, part-time basis, by distance learning, through externships[3].

The higher education system in Armenia consists of public, private, and transnational higher education institutions. Higher education is provided by two major types of institutions: universities and other institutions such as institutes, academies, foundations and a conservatorium.

The number of educational institutions functioning in Armenia and the number of students and staff is shown below.

	State HEIs	Private HEIs	Transnational HEIs		
			HEIs founded by interstate agreements and state participation	Branches of foreign private universities	Branches of foreign state universities
Number of HEIs	23	25	6	3	5
Number of students of HEIs	68987		10603	911	

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2 The Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education has been amended as a Law on Higher Education and Science and is in the final stage of adopted by RA National Assembly.
3 Reforms in the higher education in Armenia in the context of Bologna process
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330486084_YEREVAN_2015

Number of teaching staff	10831

Table 1. The number of education institutions, students and staff (2020)[4]

The share of primary and secondary vocational education, and higher and postgraduate education programmes in the expenditures allocated to education in the Republic of Armenia for the last five years was 8.06% and 8.70%, respectively. Figure 1 shows in more detail the expenditures allocated to primary and secondary vocational education, and to higher and postgraduate education programmes by specific weights.

Figure 1. Primary (vocational) and secondary professional education and Higher and postgraduate professional education programs in the Republic of Armenia State funding for 2016-2020, %
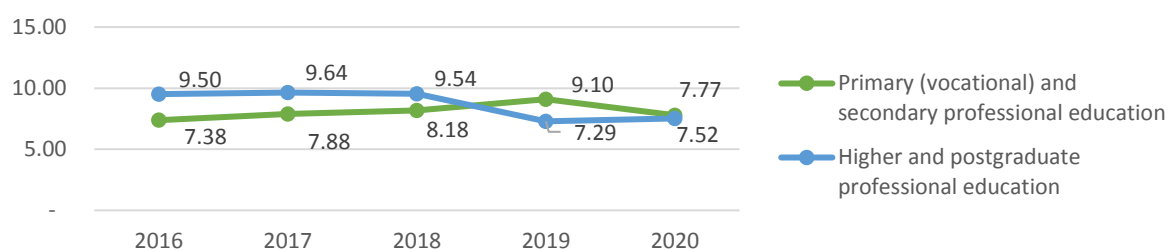
Public spending on education in 2016-2020 averaged 2.2% of GDP. The dynamics of the education/GDP performance ratio by years is presented in Figure 2 below[5].

Figure 2. Budget Financing for Education in Armenia/GDP Ratio 2016-2020, %

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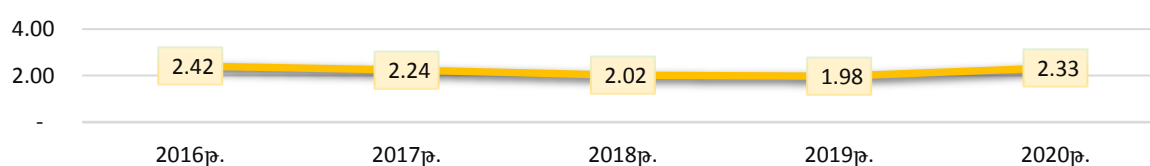
[4] The data was gathered from the official website of Statistical committee of the Republic of Armenia (https://armstat.am/en) and MoESCS (https://escs.am/am/)

[5] All the figures of the SAR were developed by ANQA.

3.2   HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS AND EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

The higher education system underwent significant and structural reforms after Armenia formally joined the Bologna process in 2005. Since then, the three-cycle education system has been introduced, the National Qualifications Framework has been adopted and the HEIs have started implementation of the ECTS system.

Under the auspices of Bologna reforms ANQA was established in 2008. Being the only external quality assurance agency in Armenia, the mission of ANQA is to promote continuous quality enhancement in the tertiary education system, contributing to autonomy and accountability.

The cyclical institutional accreditation process was piloted in 2010 and put into practice afterwards. Currently all state and major private HEIs are experiencing the second cycle of institutional accreditation.

With the introduction of institutional accreditation, when the HEIs started implementing regular self-evaluation of their core dimensions, they had the possibility to evaluate the obstacles and outcomes of the improvements and reforms. With the external experts' report the HEIs received guidance and recommendations on the improvement of diverse processes. According to the HEIs feedback, the first cycle of institutional accreditation resulted in the following reforms:

- outcome-based approach to academic programmes;
- increased engagement of employers in educational process as organizations;
- improvement of strategic governance;
- increased number of international students;
- embedding internal quality assurance system (data collection and analysis);
- etc.

Furthermore, The Government programme (2021-2026) indicates the directions based on which the higher education system will be further developed. Based on the Government plan, ANQA will develop the following lines:

- monitoring of the alignment of HEIs strategic plans to the Government strategy;
- promotion of continuous improvements of the academic programmes, and their internationalization;
- stimulating strengthening of the research component in the academic programmes;
- guaranteeing international recognition of qualifications;
- stimulating optimization of the number of academic programmes;
- piloting and embedding new models for HEIs governance;
- etc.

Moreover, according to the study of the World Bank's Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER), which benchmarks education systems at the country

level, the quality assurance system in Armenia was evaluated as an established system with appropriate procedures and consequences.

The new Law on Higher Education and Science, which is in the final stage of adopted by the RA National Assembly by the end of March 2022 will regulate stricter requirements of mandatory programme accreditation, consequences of negative accreditation, and linking the accreditation and licensing requirements of cyclical accreditation to private institutions that were granted infinite accreditation by previous versions of the Law on HE.

4. HISTORY, PROFILE AND ACTIVITIES OF THE AGENCY
4.1 HISTORY OF ANQA

Before the establishment of the ANQA, Armenia had an outdated legal basis for quality assurance, which hindered its activities for four years until 2008. The evidence showed that only controlling quality focusing on the final attestation exams of graduates (required by the previous regulation) and not on a cyclical basis was not an effective mechanism for reforms.

ANQA was established in 2008 as a government-funded organization receiving minimal resources, with the Board of Trustees consisting of employers (representatives of well-developed independent sector organizations), representatives of employers' unions, academics from private and state institutions, students, and representatives from the RA Government. The main goal of ANQA was imagined as being a promoter of reforms in the tertiary education sector (VET and HE).

With the support of the World Bank, ANQA's first steps towards external quality assurance were implemented in 2010.

Afterwards, in 2011 the new framework of external quality assurance was developed with the close participation of stakeholders which prioritizes institutional governance policy development with a special emphasis on strategic management and quality assurance and supporting data-driven decision-making. Academic programmes were at the heart of institutional development. A formative approach of institutional evaluation based on the peer review method with feedback and development of follow-up was embedded.

Institutions were evaluated considering the effectiveness of governance promoting programme development policies, outcome-based approaches to teaching and learning, as well as continuous curriculum development. The promotion of the best practice of teachers, the effective use of resources for programme implementation and stimulation of student progress to the award of qualification were also important. The peer evaluation with a site visit and face-to-face interviewing of stakeholders at institutional premises were carried out within the framework of institutional accreditation.

In the SER, the TLIs showed their experience of enhancing institutional governance with continuous improvement based on Plan-Do-Check-Act (hereinafter PDCA) cycle in all developments.

At this stage, programme accreditation is performed on a voluntary basis and only after the first cycle of institutional accreditation, the HEIs became prepared to implement systematic cyclical programme evaluation with their own capacities (adopted as a mandatory approach in the new Law on Higher Education and Science).

Under the new law on Higher Education and Science, Armenia will continue to use the formative approach of institutional accreditation recommending TLIs to take leadership for programme evaluations based on the peer review approach and self-review framework. At the same time, ANQA will continue to guide the experts to focus on programme development and enhancement, considering the context of the HEIs and their unique policies.

With the embedment of external quality assurance system in Armenia, ANQA has been attaching great importance to the preparation of experts' capacities. The international experts are involved in each expert panel which is required by the "Statute on Accreditation of TLIs and Their Academic Programmes" (hereinafter Statute on Accreditation). An international expert carries out European benchmarking through dialogues with local experts and TLIs during accreditation. All the expert reports constitute a special part about the result of benchmarking from the EHEA perspective.

ANQA promotes dialog among institutions' administration, IQA units, teachers and students through yearly organized conferences and "Quality week" events.

Trainings of experts give a possibility to find out the best practices implemented in different TLIs and policies for the implementation of country reforms. Students also participate in the dialogue with different involved stakeholder groups.

Some of best practices of ANQA were presented at the European level. During EQAF 2017, ANQA presented the developed institution and employer mediated communication mechanism. The aim of the mechanism is to enrich the assessment of students in institutions with practical tools used by the employers in daily practice as part of the production life cycle. This tool aims at promoting student-centered and work-integrated learning.

The "Students Voice" project (initiated in 2011) was recognized as a best practice in the EHEA for engaging students in the internal and external quality assurance processes.

A UNESCO-supported project (2021) for capacity development of institutions on how to internally organize the self-review was initiated and implemented by ANQA. Increasing the capacity of internal stockholders on how to review their university development in the position of an external reviewer was the focus of the project. A high importance was given to human resource capacity development.

Thus, the improvements have been ongoing in parallel with reviewing the current state of education reforms and alignment with the Bologna requirements and European good practice.

In 2020, ANQA finalized the implementation of its second strategic plan and started the third one.

The third strategic plan is directed to the development of ANQA as the main reliable counterpart for institutions and the RA Government in strengthening the quality culture in the Armenian HE sectors and making it transparent for the society.

4.2   ANQA MISSION AND STRUCTURE

The constantly changing environment in Armenia and around the world requires intensive reforms in the tertiary education system to develop more flexible tools for adaptation to an ever-changing context. ANQA's 2021-2025 strategy is aimed at promoting continuous quality enhancement and disseminating quality culture in the tertiary education system, with a purpose of meeting the current and expected challenges.

The strategy is based on five key values that are derived from ANQA's activities: **trust**, **innovation**, **equity**, **accountability,** and **collaboration**.

With its mission ANQA promotes continuous quality enhancement in the tertiary education system contributing to autonomy and accountability.

In order to achieve its goals by 2025, ANQA will maintain its position as a reliable and full guarantor of the quality of tertiary education in the Republic of Armenia, guided by the following strategic goals:

- to promote and foster the continuous enhancement culture of tertiary education quality;
- to continuously develop experts' capacities in the Republic of Armenia;
- To promote proactive, continuous communication and cooperation with the stakeholders;
- to ensure the alignment of acting legal regulations for the formation of quality education environment;
- to disseminate international best practices and culture;
- to continuously develop ANQA's capacities attaching importance to the principles of the lean organization.

The strategic plan is designed with the goal to continue strengthening ANQA as an organization supporting the enhancement of tertiary education quality, internationally recognized and reliable for all its stakeholders.

ANQA is a non-membership and non-commercial organization established on the basis of voluntary property payments of the founder and it aims to make studies, analyses, recommendations and evaluations in the sphere of tertiary education. ANQA has been set up as a small and flexible organization, with qualified staff to

perform a wide range of external quality assurance responsibilities. The organization has the following key elements:
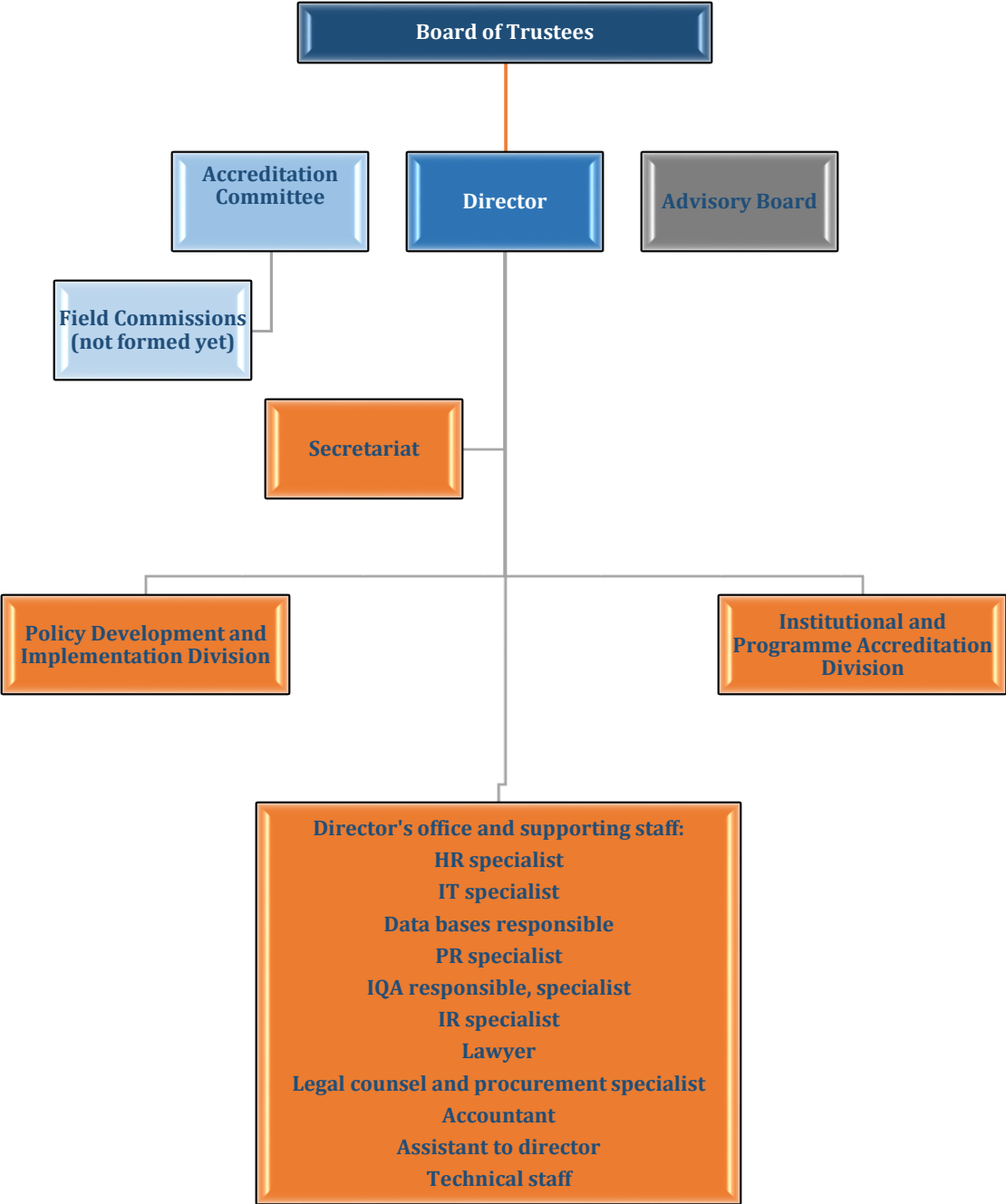

Figure 3: ANQA Organizational Chart

In the figure the organizational chart presents the institutional and operational management of ANQA.

- **The Board of Trustees (hereinafter Board)** is the highest and controlling governing body of ANQA, which consists of 12 representatives from different stakeholders: employers, state bodies, TLIs, and students. The term of the

Board is of four years. The Board is responsible for the ANQA organization and operation at the high level. As a result of public competition, the Board appoints the director and yearly evaluates the performance of the agency. The board approves the strategic plan, sub-regulations, organizational chart of ANQA, staff list and yearly budget, and manages accreditation appeals. It also approves the realization of the budget, changes and financial reports.

- **The Accreditation Committee (hereinafter Committee)** is a permanent independent, collegial body, which carries out its responsibilities defined by the "Statute on State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programmes" and by the "Procedure on Accreditation Committee Formation and Operation" adopted by the Board of Trustees. The Accreditation Committee is responsible for:
  - o defining decision-making approaches and principles of accreditation;
  - o making decision on institutional and programme accreditation;
  - o making suggestions to ANQA for the improvement of the accreditation procedure.

  The total number of Commission members is 13, 10 of which are from higher education institution stakeholders, and 3 from vocational education institution stakeholders.

- **Field Commissions have been proposed but not fully established.** In recent years, educational reforms have been taking place in the Republic of Armenia in which ANQA is actively involved. Due to the need of a high degree involvement of stakeholders in these reforms in close cooperation of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, ANQA, TLIs and employers, it was decided to create a new platform of field commissions. Using this platform those organizations are developing cooperatively the Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks (hereinafter SQF). Currently the field commissions are not formed formally.

- **The Advisory Board** is to provide consultations to the Board of Trustees and the Director of ANQA on strategic development when necessary. The Advisory Board provides its consultation when asked by the Director or the Board.

- **The Director** is responsible for the leadership and current management of ANQA. The Director is responsible for setting the policy direction, financial management and for communicating with stakeholders. The Director of the Foundation is elected through a public competition for a period of 4 years.

ANQA has three functional divisions:

- **Policy Development and Implementation division**: responsible for the development and implementation of ANQA's policies and procedures, the production of supporting regulatory documents, and ensuring communication with stakeholders.

- **Institutional and Programme Accreditation division**: responsible for operating the external evaluation processes in TLIs and providing the

Accreditation Committee with data and documents to make consistent accreditation decisions.

- **Secretariat**: responsible for providing technical assistance to ANQA in external communication as well as in communication with ANQA Accreditation Committee.

ANQA Director's office includes:
- Human Resource specialist;
- International Relation specialist;
- Internal Quality Assurance specialist;
- Lawyer;
- Legal counsel and procurement specialist;
- Information Technology specialist;
- Data bases specialist;
- Public Relations specialist;
- Accountant;
- Assistant to Director;
- Technical staff.

4.3 QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITIES IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION CARRIED OUT BY ANQA

In Armenia quality assurance culture is promoted by two basic principles: accountability and continuous enhancement. The aim of the external quality assurance is to bring higher education system into conformity with the needs of students, stakeholders, and society.

The external quality assurance of higher education sector is carried out through accreditation. The external quality assurance entails two types of accreditation: institutional and programme and is based on the "fitness for purpose" principle evaluating how quality assurance mechanisms promote the development of this principle. The accreditation process is performed by ANQA, the only quality assurance agency in Armenia.

External quality assurance primarily focuses on the achievement of the objectives set by educational institutions and determines the level of their compliance with the quality assurance criteria and standards adopted by the RA Government. Also, external quality assurance activities determine the priorities in education development, and public needs.

Institutional accreditation: Institutional accreditation focuses on the governance of HEIs as well as management of the academic programmes and effective

implementation of teaching, learning and assessment activities. It is within the scope of the ESG.

Institutional accreditation is mandatory both for state and private HEIs operating in the territory of the RA. The main purpose of the institutional accreditation is to evaluate the effectiveness of HEIs' operations, as well as to find out whether the HEI is in compliance with its mission, whether it follows the policy of continuous improvement and enhances its academic programmes, materials and human resources, thus ensuring the credible award of a qualifications.

Since 2011, ANQA has been carrying out institutional accreditation processes. Currently, all the state and sustainable private HEIs are in the second cycle of institutional accreditation.

The table 2 shows the number of institutional accreditation processes implemented during the last five years.

Type of procedure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
HEI's institutional accreditation	3	7	3	2	13

Table 2. Number of institutional accreditation procedures

Programme accreditation: The aim of programme accreditation is the recognition of the separate progarmme quality. The programme accreditation allows to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of each academic programme, as well as to monitor whether it thoroughly ensures the achievement of intended learning outcomes. It is within the scope of the ESG.

As for now, the programme accreditation is on a voluntary basis. With the initiative of ANQA, the mandatory programme accreditation with the possibility for the HEIs to implement self-review of programmes and present the result to the ANQA Accreditation Committee, was included in the new Law on Higher Education and Science. After the final approval of the new Law, the programme accreditation will be mandatory for all the academic programmes functioning in the RA and all programmes have to be accredited before 2025.

To prepare the HEIs for the programme accreditation, ANQA is strengthening the programme review components in the second cycle of institutional accreditation. ANQA's trainings for HEIs and experts also emphasize capacity development and creation of community for the reforms of academic programmes (detailed evaluation of the situation is presented in ESG 3.1). ANQA considers training and similar functions as important support for ESG implementation.

During the last five years, ANQA has conducted a number of pilot programme reviews both at the national and regional level within the framework of the ERASMUS plus projects. In particular, six academic programmes were reviewed in

the perspective of piloting the developed mechanisms for the academic programme alignment to the NQF. Three academic programmes were reviewed in the transnational education institutions to pilot the procedure and framework for the transnational quality assurance. Four PhD programmes were reviewed to pilot the framework for the doctoral education quality assurance.

ANQA has conducted external programme reviews at the regional level (Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Mongolia). ANQA experts are involved in accreditations of HEIs of the Russian Federation.

The institutional and programme accreditation methodology and process of TLIs are described in the Accreditation Manual (2015, revised draft Armenian version in 2021).

4.4   ANQA ACTIVITIES DELEGATED BY CHARTER

Monitoring of HEIs

The overall aim of the monitoring is to promote the continuous enhancement of HEIs at different dimensions: academic programmes, governance, quality assurance system, etc. ANQA conducts monitoring of HEIs according to its Charter and delegated by the RA Government.

At accredited HEIs, the focus of the monitoring is on the implementation of the progress of follow-up plan realisation. For the non-accredited HEIs, the monitoring has an aim to review the state of art of the internal quality assurance system development.

ANQA implements the monitoring of separate academic programmes to promote the reforms at the level of programmes.

The monitoring does not have a formal outcome.

The process of monitoring is described in the "Policy and procedure on monitoring of tertiary level institutions and their academic programmes of the "National Center for Professional Quality Assurance" Foundation".

The table below shows the number of monitoring of HEIs for the last five years.

Type of procedure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
HEI's institutional monitoring	5	13	15	14	10
HEI's programme monitoring	5	5	5	10	10

Table 3. Number of monitoring of HEIs

Accreditation of VET sector

The first steps related to quality assurance at the VET system level were initiated in 2009. In 2011-2017, pilot institutional accreditation processes were carried out at several VET institutions. This step was a preparatory phase for developing a new quality culture. The goal of the launched accreditation is establishing a culture of self-evaluation, autonomy of governance and accountability in the VET sector (which is still under development).

Regular workshops and trainings for the high-level management and administrative and teaching staff were implemented to support preparation of internal quality assurance systems at VET institutions.

In 2018, ANQA commenced institutional accreditation processes at 4 agricultural colleges, which was a condition of the EU Budget support programme "Better Skills for Better Jobs". Since 2019 state financing has been available for implementation of institutional accreditation processes in state institutions. Within the state financing programme, five VET institutions have conducted institutional accreditation processes and five institutions are in the process of doing so. It is envisioned by the government strategy that by 2025 all the VET institutions should have undertaken institutional accreditation.

Non-state VET institutions are also motivated to conduct institutional accreditation processes using their own resources and currently two medical VET institutions have carried out the accreditation process.

ANQA developed a concept paper on ["ANQA approaches to institutional accreditation of VET institutions and expected results"](#) that indicates the main emphasis of the institutional accreditation at VET sector.

ANQA also conducts monitoring of VET institutions for the purpose of promoting VET institutions to establish culture of self-evaluation of programmes.

Since 2020, ANQA has had joint activities to the European Training Foundation (ETF) and is actively participating in the activities and development of the network. The table below shows the number of external quality assurance and related activities in the VET sector.

Type of procedure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
VET institutions' institutional accreditation	0	0	0	1	10
VET institutions' monitoring	6	5	5	10	10

Table 4. Number of VET accreditation and monitoring processes

4.5   INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF ANQA

Continuous quality enhancement is an essential part of ANQA's activities. ANQA attaches great importance to regular data collection on all its internal and external processes, feedback of stakeholders and regular enhancement of various processes. The goal of the internal QA system of ANQA is to effectively and efficiently manage the agency's activities; enable delivery of external QA services to the TLIs that have the highest level of professionalism and soundness, objectivity and credibility; and to allow gradual improvement and enhancement of the external quality assurance system. The internal quality assurance system of the agency contributes to the full implementation of ANQA's strategic directions.

The quality assurance system of the agency manages nine quality areas, which define the indicators and quality assurance activities of each area. The following quality areas are identified:

1. Leadership, Policy, Strategy and HR;
2. Institutional and Programme Accreditation;
3. Monitoring of TLIs
4. Secretariat and Accreditation Committee;
5. Internal Quality Assurance;
6. International Affairs;
7. Communication and PR;
8. Legal Affairs;
9. Information Technologies and resources.

The data is collected through internal meetings, discussions with stakeholders including expert, surveys and focus group discussions.

The model for ANQA IQA is described below (for full description see "ANQA Internal Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures"). The model considers that QA and quality assessment for all the activities are addressed to the mission and goals, which secure their complete integrity as well as reflect the requirements of the stakeholders.
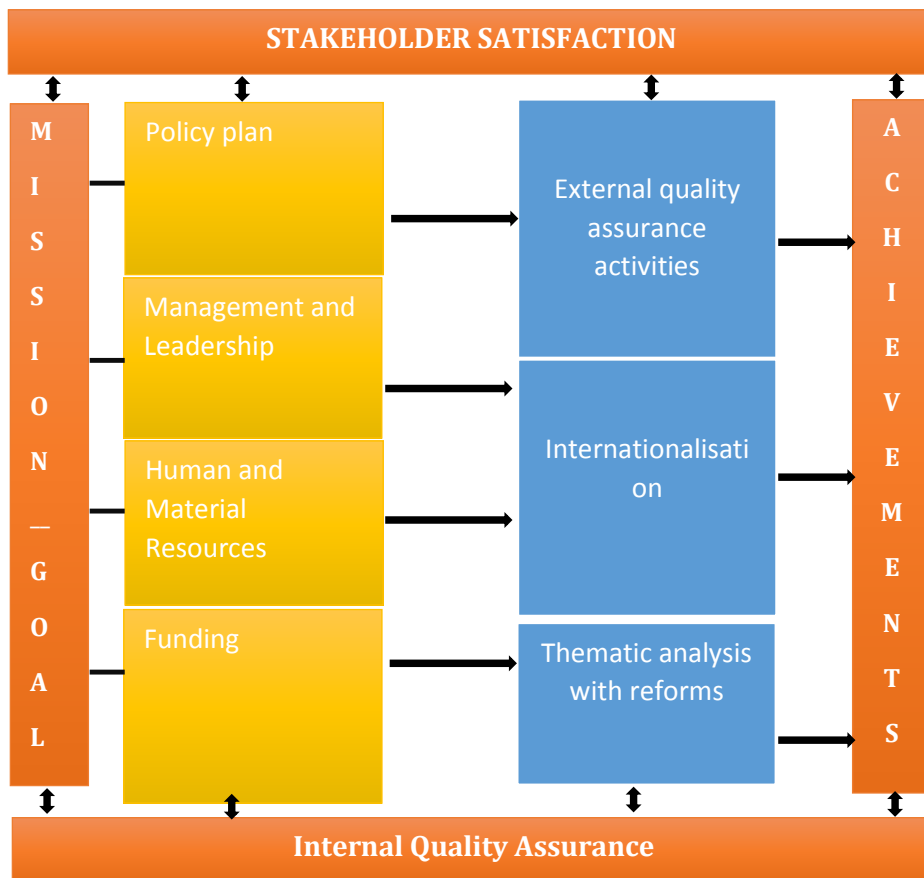
Figure 4: ANQA IQA model

Quality is defined as achieving the formulated mission and goals, assuming that this reflects the requirements of the stakeholders (Column 1). The second column shows how the agency is planning to achieve the goals:

- translation of the goals into a policy document and policy strategy;
- the management structure and management style of the agency;
- human resource management: input of staff to achieve the goals;
- facilities.

The third column shows the core activities of the agency:

- External quality assurance activities;
- Internationalization and recognition of the outcomes;
- Thematic analysis with reforms.

All these activities are analyzed with more specific models based on the quality areas.

The IQA system of ANQA is analyzed in more detail under standard 3.6.

4.6   INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF ANQA

ANQA's international activities have been and continue to be one of the priorities of the agency since its establishment. ANQA has taken active steps to internationalize its activities and gain recognition by international organizations and networks, thus contributing to the strengthening the position of tertiary education in Armenia at the international level and familiarizing itself with the latest international trends and making them applicable at the national level.

The scope of ANQA international activities are divided into several dimensions:

- cooperation with relevant organizations at the international level in order to understand best practices more thoroughly; provide platform for the exchange of ideas and acquire them at the local context;
- promotion of the recognition of Armenian quality assurance system and providing its full support to Armenian tertiary education at international level.

The activities aimed at internationalization of ANQA evolve around:

- membership of international networks;
- international projects;
- regional cooperation;
- ANQA staff capacity building activities.

Membership in international networks: Since 2011 ANQA has been a full member of INQAAHE and has been presented in the board of the directors. In 2017, ANQA became a full member of ENQA and was admitted to EQAR. In 2019, the ANQA Director was elected a board member of ENQA.

ANQA is a member of CEENQA and CHEA International Quality Group (CIQG).

Within the framework of the membership activities, ANQA staff members participate in conferences, webinars, discussions, and capacity building activities. Also, ANQA staff members present the good practice of the agency during different international events. In particular, [ANQA's framework for employer engagement](#) and [preparation of students for internal and external quality assurance activities,](#) as well as the mechanisms for [the quality assurance of doctoral education](#) have been presented during ENQA general assembly meetings.

In 2017, ANQA presented the [employer engagement framework](#) during the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) meeting.

The ANQA Director presents the agency developments during INQAAHE annual meetings.

Since 2019 ANQA has been a member of the Bologna Peer Support Group on Quality Assurance and is actively involved in the activities of the Group.

International projects: Since its establishment ANQA has been involved and has invested in the development, management, and implementation of various

international projects, such World Bank and UNESCO supported projects, TEMPUS and ERASMUS PLUS, and Twinning projects.

So far, ANQA has implemented 13 Tempus, three World Bank, and three Twinning projects.

Currently, ANQA is involved in the EUniQ European project. Within the framework of the project, ANQA participated in the development of the framework for the European Approach for Comprehensive QA of (European) University Networks. In cooperation with the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ), ANQA jointly coordinated an external evaluation process at a network of European universities in the field of Innovation, Technology and Engineering, which includes universities in Finland, France, Sweden, Italy, Germany, Portugal, and Spain.

ANQA is involved in the DEQAR CONNECT project-Enhancing the Coverage and Connectivity of QA in the EHEA through DEQAR. Within the framework of the project, ANQA has developed a new Register for Accreditation which is automatically connected with DEQAR and ensures automatic updates of data from the National Register. ANQA has so far uploaded 21 expert reports to DEQAR.

In 2021, ANQA implemented a UNESCO-supported project on "Capacity building in the QA of HEIs in Armenia". The project aimed at supporting the HEIs towards the reinforcement of the internal quality assurance system through developing internal experts who will review their own procedures, using external evaluation policies.

Currently, ANQA is involved in the ERASMUS plus SMARTi project (Support for Innovative Methodology, Approaches and Tools for Teaching through the Medium of English). Within the framework of the project, ANQA is responsible for developing methodologies for the reviews of the EMI academic programmes.

Regional cooperation: ANQA emphasizes strengthening regional cooperation. ANQA has cooperation agreements with the agencies from Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine. Within the scope of Erasmus plus projects, ANQA has several cooperation relationships with the Georgian agency and the HEIs. Within the framework of the cooperation, experts regularly exchange and share experience.

Capacity building of ANQA staff: ANQA staff members are encouraged to participate regularly in capacity building trainings, conferences, meetings and webinars according to their field of study and to present good practice and papers at the events.

5. PROFILE, FUNCTIONING AND (EQA) ACTIVITIES OF THE AGENCY (COMPLIANCE WITH PART 3 OF THE ESG)

5.1 ESG STANDARD 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

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

Strategic plan development

ANQA's mission, vision and strategic goals are defined in the Strategic plan. The mission of ANQA is to promote continuous quality enhancement in the tertiary education system contributing to autonomy and accountability.

ANQA developed its third strategic plan and the Board of Trustees has approved ANQA's 2021-2025 Strategy and the roadmap. The roadmap shows continuity of EQA development in Armenia and promotes wider involvement of stakeholders in the Armenian tertiary education system quality assurance.

The new strategy considers the priorities of the RA Government where ANQA's role is emphasized as a **guarantor** of professional education quality **assurance** in the Republic of Armenia and stimulator of strengthening quality culture in Armenian TLIs.

ANQA's institutional approach

All the activities run by the agency are broken down into policy areas based on which the Protocols have been developed. The Protocols monitor the progress of all developments of the agency and Strategy implementation. The Protocols elaborate on the targets, indicators, activity plan and quality assurance tools of each quality area of the agency. These protocols have a specific reference to ESG. In 2020, the Protocols were reviewed considering the renewed strategy and taking into account the experience of achieved outcomes in regular communication with ANQA stakeholders.

ANQA Protocol	ESG standards referenced
Leadership, policy, strategy and Human resources management	2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.7, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7
Institutional and programme accreditation	2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 3.1
Monitoring of TLIs	2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 3.1

Internal quality assurance	2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7
International affairs	2.1, 2.4, 3.4, 3.7
Information technology and Resources	3.3, 3.5, 3.6
Legal affairs	2.7, 3.2, 3.3
Communication and PR	2.2, 2.4, 2.6, 3.4, 3.6
Accreditation committee and Secretariat	2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 3.6

Table 5: ESG standards' reflection in ANQA protocols

Current developments of the agency are traditionally implemented in close communication with all stakeholders. In 2020, ANQA reviewed the outcomes of the first cycle of institutional accreditation. The results were discussed with external and internal stakeholders (Board of Trustees, Accreditation Committee, accreditation experts, HEI leadership, IQA representatives, students and ANQA staff, international experts) and ANQA new strategic plan was developed.

Institutional accreditation of TLIs in Armenia and follow-up monitoring
ANQA carries out external quality assurance activities on a regular basis through mandatory institutional and voluntary programme accreditations. Since 2011 ANQA has been implementing cyclical institutional accreditation processes for higher education institutions. In 2018 ANQA completed the first cycle of institutional accreditation processes and as a result of the first cycle, internal quality assurance systems have been embedded at all higher education institutions.
The next cycle of institutional accreditation is in the progress with the emphasis on encouraging the HEIs to ensure awarding of credible qualifications, result-oriented governance and implement mechanisms for further development of their education services.
According to its Charter and Government requirement, ANQA conducts monitoring at accredited TLIs to evaluate the progress of the follow-up and at non-accredited TLIs to monitor the state of the art of IQA system.
In 2019, ANQA launched the institutional accreditation of VET institutions. Since then, 16 VET institutions undergone institutional accreditation process.

Development of cyclical programme review culture at HEIs
Institutional accreditation is the prerequisite for programme accreditation according to the Statute on Accreditation approved by the Government. In recent years ANQA has made efforts to introduce programme accreditation as a mandatory component in external quality assurance processes. In particular:
- In the new law on "Higher education and Science" programme accreditation is presented as mandatory with the opportunity for the HEIs to implement self-review and presenting the proof of results to ANQA's Accreditation Committee.

- The cluster accreditation approach (criteria and standards, templates for SER, composition of clusters) has been developed in close participation of high-level management of HEIs.
- Regular monitoring of academic programmes is implemented in the accredited HEIs with the purpose of revealing the good practice of quality assurance at the programme level as well as helping the institution to be prepared for the programme review. Monitoring is also a good mechanism for continuous quality improvement of TLI activities.
- For in depth evaluation of academic programmes within the frames of institutional accreditation process, ANQA has introduced a method of reviewing the assignments of core courses by the expert panel members and meeting with specific programme directors, teachers and students during the site visit with the scope of "Professional talk" format. The review of assignments and those meetings support evaluating the progress of students and their professional thinking. Also, the method was found as effective for revealing the challenges and best practice of the programmes.
- Also, ANQA enlarged its electronic questionnaire for the second cycle of institutional accreditation including quantitative data to be presented by the HEIs for all programmes. This helps the experts have a deeper review of the data on all academic programmes before the site visit and "Professional talk" meetings.
- Since 2019, the capacity building training sessions focus on the programme development and quality assurance mechanisms for the teachers and programme chairs.
- The training for experts' emphasis is on academic programme evaluation.

Promoting quality culture

With regard to the involvement of stakeholders, their engagement is ensured through participation on the ANQA Board of Trustees and in the Accreditation Committee. The stakeholders participate in the development of policy and regulatory documents, providing feedback for further improvement of the agency's processes. Regular conferences, thematic discussions and events as well as the training sessions become the platform for the continuous quality dialogue.

The involvement of the students is ensured through the ["Students Voice" project](). The project has been developed and supported by ANQA since 2011. Every year two-three calls are published and all students who want to participate in training can apply. The long-term goal of the "Student Voice" project is to train students who will participate in the external and internal assurance processes, becoming students' experts and joining in the internal quality assurance activities at TLIs.

The success of ANQA student experts during 2011-2020 is reflected in the table 6.

N.	Description	Number of students
1.	Participated in the accreditation processes	100
2.	Have become ANQA staff members	9
3.	Have become staff in an internal quality assurance departments of HEIs	8
4.	Have become a member of European Students Associate student database	8
5.	Participate in the annual conferences organized by ANQA	200

Table 6: Success of "Students Voice" project students for 2011-2020

5.2   ESG STANDARD 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

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

ANQA was established on November 27, 2008 under the Government Decree (No. 1486N), thus it complies with the legislative regulations of Armenia. As stated in the Government decision, ANQA is the primary provider of quality assurance services and the body responsible of external review for Armenian tertiary education, particularly middle level professional education and higher education. ANQA's position and tasks are stipulated in the Charter.

ANQA was established based on the founder's voluntary property payments as a non-membership, non-commercial organization aimed at implementing thematic analyses, capacity building activities for the development of the quality assurance system and evaluation in the field of tertiary level education, conducting institutional and programme accreditation, monitoring, and assuring participation of the RA in international and European projects, and in European networks.

ANQA has a proactive position to consult with the legislative and executive bodies on policymaking. The cooperation of ANQA with the state authorities includes preparing proposals towards changes in legal acts regarding regulating tertiary education system, inclusion of the agency's staff in the development of policy documents (sectorial qualifications framework, regulation on licensing of higher education institutions etc.).

Recently, ANQA finished the draft of the new version of "Statute on state accreditation of HEIs in the RA and their academic programmes" in compliance with the new "Law on Higher Education and Science" (which has been approved by the Parliament of RA but is in the adjustment phase for some clarifications). The new Statute sets new approaches of accreditation processes: legal consequences of

accreditations and monitoring, accreditation types by terms, national nostrification of international accreditation results.

For the state recognition of Accreditation Committee decisions, the MoESCS ratifies the accreditation certificate thus ensuring the full recognition of accreditation results by the state authorities.

The recognition of accreditation decisions by the state is ensured according to the [Statute on Accreditation of TLIs and Their Academic Programmes](#) and other regulatory documents by stipulating consequences for accreditation. Particularly, only accredited HEIs receive financing from state budget. The students from non-accredited HEIs cannot have mobility to accredited HEIs and vice versa. In case of conditional institutional accreditation, the HEI cannot open a new academic programme.

Stakeholders are key participants in all the policy development and implementation processes of the agency. Apart from involvement in policy-making on specific subjects, ANQA established procedures to communicate with different stakeholders on a permanent basis such as regular meetings, forums, conferences and focus groups which are in place to ensure effective communication with the stakeholders and their proactive involvement in ANQA activities.

According to the stakeholders' opinion, ANQA serves as a platform for sharing good practices, looking for innovative solutions to the challenges and communicating on the current trends in the quality assurance system.

ANQA treats equally all the institutions functioning in RA: the same information and capacity building trainings is provided to all the institutions.

5.3   ESG STANDARD 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

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

Organizational independence

According to its Charter. ANQA is a foundation independent from tertiary level institutions, the MoESCS and third parties. Organizational independence of ANQA is determined by its legal status of foundation institutionally governed by the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees is composed of 12 members from different stakeholders: employers, government representatives, university academics, employer unions, and students thus ensuring the independence of the whole structure based on the system of counterbalances used to form the Board of Trustees. The candidates of the Board of Trustees are suggested by state authorities, HEIs, employer unions and other organizations. The list of candidates is discussed and approved by the Prime Minister office of Republic of Armenia. To organize its work and to chair board sessions the president of the Board is elected by the Board

members at the first Board meeting. The roles and responsibilities of the Board of Trustees are stipulated in the Charter.

To strengthen Board's independence, it is its practice to engage international advisers for consultations with the Board of Trustees and the Director of ANQA on strategic developments when it is necessary. The Advisors provide consultations when asked by the Director or the Board. The international perspective is provided to the agency by the feedback from international experts engaged in the accreditation panels by presenting a special part in each report that analyzes the international perspective expected from each accredited institution.

As for the executive management of the agency, the Director of the Foundation is elected by a public competition.

The legal status (regulated by the RA Law on Foundations) and the Charter of ANQA include the right to acquire and own property for use in compliance with defined goals and objectives. Combined with the financial policy of ANQA, this enhances the financial independence by diversifying its financial sources.

The agency receives financing from the state, being the only state accreditation body in Armenia, from the accreditation fees out of which there is an amount ensuring the agency's sustainability, from international projects, and from organized workshops. The accumulated amount, which is equal to the agency's annual budget, is put in the bank as an endowment fund.

Operational Independence

ANQA is independent in selection and recruitment of its staff and experts for external evaluations. All staff positions are filled in an open call or based on observing possible candidates who have participated in QA public meetings or students' workshops.

The recruitment and selection of staff is conducted based on ANQA's Human resources management policy and procedure. External experts are recruited and selected based from ANQA's experts' database.

ANQA's Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct indicates the principles of ethical behavior and independence from third parties both for the agency staff and external experts.

ANQA, being the main policy-maker in the field of quality assurance in the Republic of Armenia, is responsible for defining and developing criteria and standards for the external evaluation of institutions and their academic programmes, and documents regulating the quality assurance system, which are approved by the Government and become national regulations.

ANQA consults with the wide community of QA stakeholders during the development of regulatory documents. Also, ANQA's Board of Trustees is authorized to approve or adopt sub-regulations for EQA implementation.

Expert panels consist of academics, employers, students and international experts who are selected from the trained expert database of ANQA according to clearly defined procedures (see ESG 2.4). International experts' induction is done during a

special meeting of the panel and where a document package presenting the Armenian context of QA is presented.

For each accreditation process, ANQA submits a selected shortlist of experts to the Accreditation Committee for adoption and then the expert panel is selected from the agreed list. Afterwards the expert panel is agreed with the institution under review. ANQA ensures the independence of experts by a strict conflict-of-interest policy. At the beginning of the process all the panel members sign a Commitment on confidentiality and Declaration on exclusion of conflict of interest, which is included into the contract of experts.

There is a quality assurance mechanism in place where the external experts engaged in the accreditation process evaluate their independence during the accreditation and reporting. According to the results the experts were highly independent in conducting the expertise and making judgments.

The results are summarized in the Comprehensive analysis conducted by the agency.

Independence of formal outcomes

Each accreditation procedure ends with the decisions of ANQA Accreditation Committee, which is an independent body. The activities of the Accreditation Committee are regulated by the Procedure on "Formation and Operations of ANQA Accreditation Committee" which was revised and amended in 2020 based on a new policy approach for decisions.

According to the revised regulation, the Accreditation Committee is composed of the academics and professors, former experts of accreditation processes (13 members: 10 representing higher education system and 3 VET system).

The candidates of the Accreditation Committee are suggested by the TLIs (public and private), and professional unions (including unions of employers). The ANQA Board of Trustees approves the list of Accreditation Committee members ensuring the Committee has the expertise capacity needed for making impartial accreditation decision and safeguarding the interests of different stakeholder groups.

The rights and responsibilities of the Accreditation Committee members are described in the Procedure on "Formation and Operations of ANQA Accreditation Committee". Also, legally maintaining the avoidance of any conflict of interests and other ethical context, ANQA signs a contract with each committee member defining their rights and responsibilities.

ANQA Accreditation Committee makes an accreditation decision as a formal outcome. To strengthen the independence of the formal outcomes, ANQA introduced a scrutiny of each accreditation package by the Accreditation Committee members. According to the new approach before making the decision on accreditation, the president of the Accreditation Committee (elected by the Committee members on the first day of the Committee meeting) organizes selection of three members of the Committee for conducting the scrutiny. The three members review the documents of the process (especially the institutions self-evaluation report, expert review

report and institutions preliminary follow-up plan where the expert recommendations have been taken into account), meet with the expert panel members and the HEI representatives separately to clarify the issues, and write a summary of the results according to the required template. All the Committee members also review the documents of the process. During the decision taking meeting of the Accreditation Committee, the three members present their findings, and afterwards a decision is made as a result of open voting.

5.4 ESG STANDARD 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

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

ANQA puts a high value on the implementation of thematic analysis on a regular basis and provides necessary financial and human resources for it. The ANQA development policy is focused on the support of reforms in HE and according to this goal, ANQA accumulates the feedback on the system and shares outcomes with stakeholders.

The data for the analysis is derived from diverse sources such as surveys, focus group meetings, round table discussions with stakeholders, events and forums, and accreditation processes. The selection of themes for the analysis is based on discussions with stakeholders and tendencies identified from the accreditation processes.

The gathered data and analysis that summarizes the challenges and trends of the tertiary education system supports the development and enhancement of the policy documents both at the agency and at the system level, proving recommendations to the state authorities, and identifying directions for the different international projects. This information is of high importance in a decision making at the agency and system levels.

Several directions of thematic analysis are:

- **Accreditation.** Comprehensive analysis is conducted on a three-year basis, which summarizes the results of the accreditation processes and provides data on the process effectiveness to ensure that the accreditation process is a reliable tool for improvement.
- **Students' evaluations.** Analysis conducted by the students from the "Students Voice" project. The students choose the themes based on the trends and challenges of the education system. The reports serve as a guiding information for further development of the agency.
- **International projects**. The staff of the agency is engaged within different international projects with QA a component. The policy of the agency is to guide the development of the projects to ensure sustainability of project implementation. The outcomes of projects in the form of the reports and

analysis are published. The analysis and reports are directed to the enhancement of the external quality assurance system in Armenia.

Some of the directions are around the following themes:
- o academic programme's alignment with the NQF and its quality assurance;
- o development of a sectorial qualifications framework of ICT with employer engagement into academic developments;
- o quality assurance of the third (doctoral) level of the education system;
- o quality assurance of the transnational education system;
- o quality assurance of English medium instruction (EMI) programmes.
- **Evaluation of VET system**. The results of the pilot accreditation process and communication with stakeholders were summarized and a policy document that guides the institutional accreditation of VET institutions was developed. The data on the VET accreditation system is regularly evaluated and presented on the agency's website.
- **Evaluations suggested by the Government**. A benchmark study has been conducted on the Key Performance Indicators and Performance-based Financing Agreements. The Results were presented to the RA Government within the YES project.

The system-wide analyses are other mechanisms for collecting data on the impact of the accreditation on the tertiary education system. ANQA has conducted two system-wide analyses. It is envisioned to implement the third system-wide analysis in 2022 according to the timeline.

The outcomes of the analysis conducted on a regular basis are disseminated in various formats: presentations during conferences, publications on the ANQA website, discussion with relevant stakeholders, and recommendation to the authorized bodies.

Within its new strategic plan, ANQA prioritizes broadening of knowledge of tertiary education and providing accurate and reliable indicators of quality outcomes to the public.

The table 7 shows the publications and conferences/forums for the last five years:

N.	Year	Event/Analysis	Goal	Availability of the results
Publications				
1.	2021	Comprehensive analysis of ANQA accreditation processes effectiveness implemented during 2018-2020	The Comprehensive analysis indicates the effectiveness of the accreditation process for the 2018-2020.	WEB

2.	2020	ANQA's approaches and excepted results from the institutional accreditation VET institutions	The policy defines the expectations of ANQA from the accreditation of VET institutions and indicates the outcomes of accreditation.	WEB
3.	2020	Impact of the Pandemic on the education process at Armenian TLIs	The aim of this research is to reveal the weaknesses, main problems and difficulties in organizing online education at higher and vocational institutions. The research was done within the framework of the "Students Voice" project.	WEB
4.	2019	Manual for the Introduction of Key Performance Indicators and Performance-Based Agreements in Armenian Higher Education	The benchmark study summarizes in depth analysis of the experience of other countries that have recently undergone changes in their Higher Education sector and who have introduced system of Key Performance Indicators and Performance-based Agreements.	WEB
5.	2018	System problems in Armenian HEI's: comparative analysis of accredited higher education institutions' expert reports.	The analysis is based on the experts' reports and follow-up plans and identifies the issues and the good practices of the HEIs. The analysis was conducted by "Students Voice project".	WEB
6.	2018	Comprehensive analysis of ANQA	The Comprehensive analysis indicates the	WEB

		accreditation processes effectiveness implemented during 2015-2017	effectiveness of the accreditation process for the 2015-2017.	
7.	2018	Criteria/standards and guideline for quality assurance of doctoral education in the republic of Armenia	The analysis gives a comprehensive description of the quality assurance framework of doctoral education.	WEB
8.	2017	Guidelines for developing policies, criteria and procedures for quality assurance of transnational higher education in Armenia and Georgia	The document: identifies the framework of the EQA implementation of transnational education	WEB
9.	2017	Internationalization of academic programmes. A concept paper	The paper summarizes the issues of internationalization evaluated from the accreditation experts' reports.	WEB
10.	2017	Analysis of the results of the pilot institutional accreditation process at regional state colleges.	The study summarizes the results of the pilot institutional accreditation process at regional state colleges. It includes the state of the colleges, the recommendations for further improvement.	WEB
11.	2017	Mahatma project as an experience of cluster accreditation in Armenia and in Georgia.	The comparative research has been conducted based on the results of pilot programme accreditations.	WEB
12.	2017	Bringing employer context to education:	The article addresses the significance of	WEB

		employer engagement framework.	developing a framework for a better dialogue between employers and higher education institutions with the aim to improve the assessment of students and to ensure the necessary progress and the achievement of expected learning outcomes.	
13.	2017	A guideline for aligning academic programmes to the Armenian national qualifications framework	The guideline provides recommendations regarding the methodological and procedural aspects of programme alignment and contains several tools that may facilitate the process of alignment and assessment of the achieved alignment.	WEB
Events				
1.	2021	Thematic discussion with the Representatives of the Monitored HEIs	The aim of the meeting was to assess the impact of monitoring on the processes of enhancement of internal quality assurance systems and academic programmes of education institutions.	WEB
2.	2021	Thematic discussion with the Representatives of the Monitored VETs	The aim of the meeting was to assess the impact of monitoring on the processes of the enhancement of internal quality assurance systems and	WEB

			educational programmes of secondary vocational education institutions.	
3.	2020	A thematic meeting with the students of medical universities	The advantages and disadvantages of online education were discussed with the students of medical universities.	[WEB](#)
4.	2020	The quality assurance of online education	The issues of online education and the quality assurance were discussed with QA specialists of TLIs.	[WEB](#)
5.	2019	"The credible awarding of qualifications" conference taking place in Artsakh	The aim of the conference was to discuss the issues of the qualification awarding and the implementation of academic programmes.	[WEB](#)
6.	2019	A conference on "Credible Award of Qualifications" took place	The aim of the meeting was to assess the impact of monitoring on the processes of the enhancement of internal quality assurance systems and educational programmes of secondary vocational education institutions.	[WEB](#)
7.	2019	"VET-employer cooperation: a formula of a joint strategy" conference	The aim of the conference was to discuss and reveal the framework of employer-VET institutions cooperation.	[WEB](#)
8.	2019	ANQA's Initiative: the issues of HEI's were	The National Centre for Professional Education	[WEB](#)

		discussed around the tea-table.	Quality Assurance (ANQA) launched its 10th Anniversary events with a tea-discussion which took place at the Matenadaran. It was the first time that the Minister of Education and Science, the Director of ANQA and the Heads of Boards of Trustees discussed the issues of HEIs around the tea-table.	
9.	2018	"Education and specialist: Professional Education Today and Tomorrow" Quality Assurance Forum	The aim is to make a subject of discussion the issue of recognition of qualifications awarded by institutions.	WEB
10.	2018	A conference dedicated to QA system's implementation VET institutions	During the conference organized by ANQA, the implementation of the internal quality assurance system in vocational education institutions, the problems and opportunities were discussed.	WEB
11.	2018	Workshop for young lecturers, career leaders and students	The aim of the event was to create a basis for ongoing communication between young lecturers, students, employers and career centers.	WEB
12.	2017	"Quality in the Classroom: Improving the Assessment System"	During the conference, the current issues of quality assurance,	WEB

			future challenges were addressed.	
13.	2017	Education "Quality Week"	The aim of the Q-week, which was organized already for the third time, was to focus the attention of the representatives of education sphere, governing bodies and public on quality assurance, to discuss the current issues of the sphere, as well as to share the best practice and form a general vision for the future.	[WEB](#)

Table 7: The publications and conferences/forums for the last five years

5.5   ESG STANDARD 3.5 RESOURCES

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

Material Resources
ANQA has sufficient resources to perform its strategic goals and external quality assurance processes. One of the strategic priorities of ANQA is the continuous enhancement of the agency's capacities as an external quality assurance body applying the principle of lean organisation.

Since its establishment, ANQA has occupied a 750 m² area given for use by the Government. It is enough space for organizing all its activities (daily activities, training sessions, expert panel meetings, Accreditation Committee meetings, premises for "Students Voice" project).

All the offices are well-equipped and have the necessary facilities to effectively organize the work. On a yearly basis, ANQA conducts an inventory of technical and computer base and updates both the hardware and software resources based on the needs.

There is an environment to organize the agency's daily work and external quality assurance activities online. The Zoom platform is available with webinar and

translation features. The staff of the agency is trained to effectively use the platform. The agency gives possibility for the staff to work from home providing notebooks. ANQA has currently implementing the management of its documentation through the Office 365. The agency has yearly subscription and licence for Office 365. Since 2018 the staff of the agency has effectively used the system.

According to the survey evaluation results, the staff of the agency is satisfied with the material resources and find that they have the effective environment to perform the tasks derived from the strategic plan of the agency.

Human Resources

ANQA attaches great importance to recruitment of motivated and qualified staff members who will be committed to the continuous enhancement of tertiary education quality in Armenia. The agency takes care of the staff planning and staff professionalization to effectively and efficiently manage the development of adopted strategy. ANQA is looking for effective management of the human resources following its policy and managing possible risks because of restricted resources. The main approach is to manage the permanent staff with a multitasking approach on one side to ensure the capacities for cyclical accreditation processes coordination, on another side to perform processes ensuring agency sustainable work delegated by statute and yearly agreement with government. The purpose is effective staff number management depending on the estimation of load and possible risks.

On a two-year basis, ANQA estimates the necessary number of the staff, coordinators, experts and student-experts.

In parallel to the staff planning, a plan for the professional development of staff is developed. At the same time for proper risk management, a new staff gradual induction mechanism is applied.

ANQA recruits its staff from diverse sources:

- "Students Voice" project as the supplier of motivated human resources to ANQA. The active students who receive training sessions in the SV project and have practice in the quantitative and qualitative research projects are invited to have an internship in ANQA and participate in the accreditation process as an observer. The ANQA director has yearly meetings with potential and current members of SV to motivate them for involvement in ANQA's team and looking for talent who are motivated with research in education.

- The graduates and students from the Education Management academic master programmes. ANQA yearly organizes meetings with the students and graduates of the academic programme to discuss current trends and challenges of the education system as well as the career opportunities at ANQA. The students have the opportunity to conduct a thesis/research paper at the agency and be engaged in the accreditation procedure as assistants to coordinators. The learning by doing method is applied.

- Training sessions organized for teachers and HEI QA staff and independent experts. After the training sessions ANQA evaluates the participants' competencies according to the developed assessment grid and those who are committed and motivated are invited either to be engaged in the accreditation process as experts or integrate to ANQA developments as sub-contractors and participate in the development of the policy documents according to the needs of the agency.
- Open announcements in different HR professional networks.

Because of the small number of staff and diverse responsibilities, while implementing its core activities, the agency uses the flexible staff engagement method. The work at the agency is planned by projects with one responsible and others as developers or consultants to development. Each staff member has core responsibility in the agency's departments, beside that each staff member can be engaged in another work project based on the workload and level of expertise beneficial for the project. Beside the core activities the projects within the divisions are:
- Institutional accreditation of HEIs;
- Institutional accreditation of VET;
- Programme Accreditation;
- Monitoring of TLIs;
- Stakeholder relations;
- Internal quality assurance;
- "Students Voice"project;
- New developments.

For each project ANQA requires application of the PDCA cycle to ensure specific indicators for the effective evaluation of each project.

Currently, there are 18 employees working in the agency. ANQA has a policy of involving external experts in different projects and activities through paid service contracts. This approach enables the fulfilment of the functions deriving from the positions provided in the staff list, at the same time using the salary fund more efficiently, using a regular incentive system as a means of increasing the employees' work efficiency.

At present 8 staff members has capacity and experience of accreditation process coordinators, and each can manage 5-6 procedures per year. Thus, there is enough capacity to manage about 50 procedures per year.

Professional Development of Staff

ANQA pays great attention to the regular professional development of its staff members thus encouraging and providing opportunities to be engaged in different staff development activities such as trainings abroad, participating in webinars and discussions. An internal seminar method is also applied at the agency for the discussion of diverse themes and exchange of experience.

The staff members are in regular communication with the local and international experts for the exchange of experience.

With launch of the second cycle of institutional accreditation, ANQA considered it necessary to guide the accreditation process coordinators in professional fields (medical, engineering, economic, military etc.) with aim of collecting good practice in different fields and promoting the staff's engagement in the development of sectorial qualifications frameworks. Currently, the process coordinators are engaged in the working groups of SQF development.

To ensure the sustainability of the staff, ANQA has set the rate of average salary higher than that of the country's average salary. More details in the table below:

| Average monthly nominal salary - equivalent payments	In the Republic of Armenia		At ANQA		Deviation +, - (3-2)		Deviation in % (4:2*100)
1	*2*		*3*		*4*		*6*
	AMD	EUR[6]	AMD	EUR	AMD	EUR	
2016	174,445	318	254,161	463	+79,716	145	+45.70
2017	177,817	324	242,046	441	+64,229	117	+36.12
2018	172,727	315	258,384	471	+85,657	156	+49.59
2019	182,673	333	250,361	456	+67,688	123	+37.05
2020	189,716	346	250,828	457	+61,112	111	+32.21

Table 8: Average salary rate of the ANQA staff members compared to country's average salary rate

The data in the Table 7 shows that the average monthly nominal salary paid in ANQA over the past 5 years is on average 40% higher than the average monthly nominal salary paid in Armenia.

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[6] Calculated on the average exchange rate of the Central Bank of Armenia which is 548.95 AMD

Figure 5. Comparison of the average monthly nominal salary paid in the Republic of Armenia and in ANQA in 2016-2020, AMD
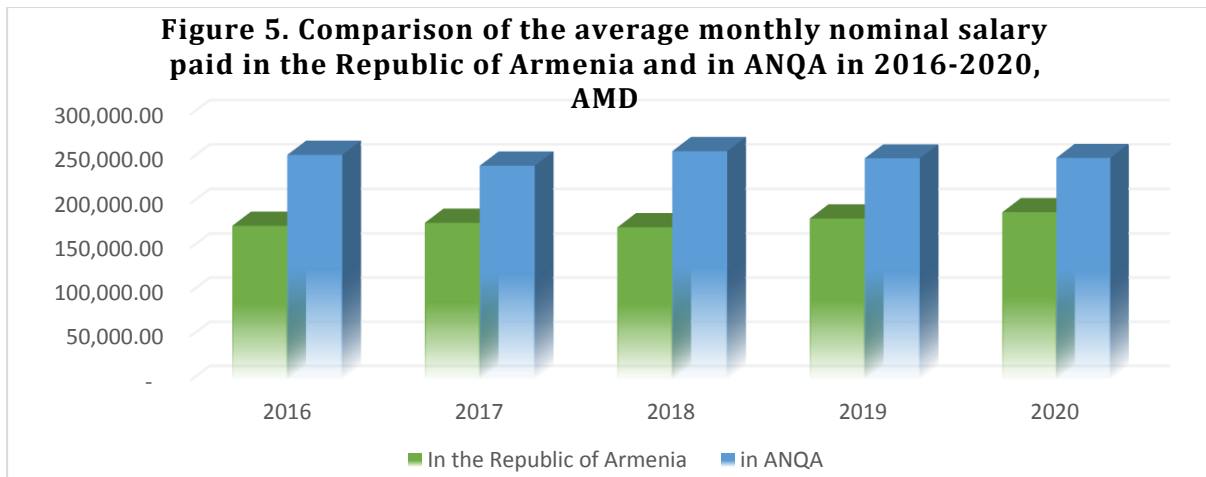
The graph above shows the dynamics of the salaries received from state funding. ANQA pays extra salary based on performance of yearly plan progress and other services. The salary increase is about 30%

Based on ANQA IQA and HR policies regular surveys are conducted to evaluate the satisfaction of staff members with the working ethos and general management of the agency. The analysis shows that the staff members trust the leadership of ANQA and appreciate the working ethos of the agency and are motivated by the career development promotion perspectives.

Most of ANQA's previous employees left ANQA for career improvement in HEIs or in international organizations.

Staff Appraisal

According to the HR policy ANQA conducts staff appraisal based on the developed competency framework. The ANQA Director conducts SWOT analysis with each staff member and reveals the strong areas and the training needs of the staff members and discusses the results with the head of the departments on a yearly basis. This exercise helps the staff members to present their strong skills not yet applied in ANQA. According to the 2020 SWOT exercise results two staff members were promoted in their positions and one staff member was engaged in an international project.

Another staff appraisal mechanism is the survey results filled by the experts after each accreditation process. Both local and international experts evaluate the work of the accreditation process coordinator. The results show the high-level professionalism of the coordinators. The experts mention the strong communication and teamwork skills of the coordinators and the European approach promoted during the accreditation processes.

Financial Resources

ANQA prioritizes financial stability and qualified human resources. Founded by the state and at the same time keeping its independence, ANQA developed and

implements a financial diversification policy to ensure the agency's financial independence and stability.

ANQA's financial policy and the Charter define the directions in which ANQA financial flows are formed:

- state funding of quality assurance measures for higher and vocational education;
- income from entrepreneurial activities: accreditations, training;
- financial flows from international grant projects.

SOURCE OF INCOME	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
	Share				
State budget	56.6	52.2	59.8	41.2	64.78
Accreditation fees	15.2	19.5	27.8	43.1	30.00
Trainings	2.5	1.95	1.6	8.5	0.38
International projects	25.7	24.4	6.8	6.2	3.15
Other income	0	1.95	4	1.0	1.68

Table 9: Sources of Income

The progress of diversification of income sources is shown on Table 8. Compared to the previous years, the financial means received from the state in 2020 have increased based on the state financing to implement the accreditation process at vocational education institutions. As shown in the Table the financial flows of training have decreased due to the COVID19 situation. International projects decreased but are in focus of ANQA development. ANQA joined DEQAR CONNECT, EUniQ, and Erasmus+ SMARTi and implemented a UNESCO capacity building project for francophone universities.

ANQA has savings which are used as an endowment fund cooperating with Armenian Banks. It is a special line in budget and is used for development of ANQA's capacity.

Financial independence is one of the priorities of the agency. For that purpose, ANQA strives to develop and implement project based financial management based on clear outcomes.

ANQA has a stable increase of its reserve fund from each accreditation process of the HEIs and VET institutions. The reserve fund is primarily used for the necessary developments done by the agency staff as well as by the outsourced staff. Over the last 10 years ANQA accumulated fund equal to one-year budget from the Government which can be used only in any extraordinary situation to continue development of the main mission of EQA in Armenia and possible reorganizations[7].

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[7] Financial and annual reports of the agency: http://www.anqa.am/en/about-us/#Budget

5.6 ESG STANDARD 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

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

Since its establishment, ANQA has attached great importance to the regular development and review for enhancement of its internal and external processes applying the PDCA cycle. ANQA has adopted an input-process-output-outcome based approach to its internal quality assurance system.

All the activities run by ANQA are divided between quality areas. For each quality area a special protocol is managed by the responsible person of the area. With the introduction of ANQA's 2021-2025 Strategic plan and based on reviewed experience ANQA revised the protocols.

Currently protocols are optimized; some areas are jointly managed, for example ICT and Resources, Leadership and HR, Secretariat and Accreditation Committee. As monitoring became a regular process, a separate protocol is managed for this area.

Currently, nine quality areas are managed:
1. Leadership, Policy, Strategy and HR;
2. Institutional and programme accreditation of TLIs;
3. Monitoring of TLIs;
4. Secretariat and Accreditation Committee;
5. Legal affairs;
6. International affairs;
7. Communication and; public relations;
8. Resources and ICT;
9. Internal quality assurance.

The protocols define the objectives of the quality area, correspondent core actions and the effectiveness evaluation indicators, tools, and quality actions.

The data sources are the regular staff meetings, and meetings with internal and external stakeholders /ANQA Governing Board, Accreditation Committee, experts, students, representatives of university management, administrative staff, heads of chairs and teachers/, and surveys and focus group discussions.

Data and progress indicators are regularly collected to keep alignment with ESG. The outcomes of the evaluation of the collected data are summarized in the annual report of the agency.

Recently, ANQA decided to reduce the number of surveys and increase the face to face communication, brainstorming and focus group discussions methods.

ANQA staff members fill in only one survey where they have the possibility to conduct a SWOT analysis for each dimension of the agency development and make suggestions. The method of SWOT gives the overall big picture of the agency's activities and builds a good basis for effectiveness evaluation. Recommendations come after analyses in this way, keeping the original context and becoming actions of follow-up.

The internal quality assurance activities resulted in:

- Improvement of institutional accreditations: as a result of surveys conducted after each accreditation process among all the stakeholder groups and focus group discussions, ANQA reinforced the evaluation of three academic programmes within institutional accreditations. The review of assignments by the experts and professional discussions with the academic programme staff during the site visit was introduced into the process.
  - With the outbreak of pandemic, ANQA launched online and hybrid institutional accreditation processes. Analyzing the risks, international good practice and with regular consultations with the MoESCS, the representatives of the TLIs, and experts, ANQA introduced a "Procedure on organization and conduct of accreditation in the state emergency".
- Improvement of regulatory documents: ANQA finalized the procedure steps for coordinators, induction packages for translators and process coordinators, templates for the desk-review etc.
- Improvement of the accreditation decision regulations and experts' reports: the improvement of decisions and experts' reports is evaluated through the monitoring of TLIs. As a result of the evaluations the template for decisions has been reviewed and the expert training sessions have been enhanced.
- Improvement of coordinators' work: for each process: the head of the Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division monitors the work of the coordinators and regularly gives them feedback. The local and international experts give feedback on the coordinator's work. Based on the results the induction package for the coordinators has been improved.
- Improvement of experts' selection and recruitment processes: the procedure for the selection and recruitment of the experts is improved. Now, a role play assignment for potential experts has been implemented. Group discussions give the opportunity to candidates showing their capacity as expert to find strong and week points in the developments of others and be in the role of defender by reflecting on questions. This allows the coordinators to evaluate in practice the qualities of candidate-experts and fill in an assessment grid for further selection.

The model of the internal quality assurance system is described in ANQA IQA Policy and Procedures.

The agency's work is guided by the Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct. The induction package of internal staff members and external experts includes the

introduction of the ethical norms and the rules for conduct. ANQA coordinators are responsible for keeping the ethical norms during accreditation processes. ANQA Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct defines the rules to professionally and ethically manage the interpersonal relations among the staff members, with the experts, Board members, Accreditation Committee members and with the representatives of HEIs. ANQA leadership ensures the professional and effective work of each employee and expert, and the level of intolerance and discrimination within the staff through regular meetings and discussions. The results of the surveys and discussions show that there are no cases of any discrimination or violation of ethical rules.

5.7   ESG STANDARD 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

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

ANQA attaches great importance to the process of undergoing external reviews on a cyclical basis. The agency's Strategic plan and "ANQA Internal Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures" require ANQA to undertake external evaluation to ensure the transparency of the accreditation results in Europe.

This is ANQA's second effort to undergo external review against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area. In 2014, ANQA set appropriate mechanisms for data collection and analysis as well as for the improvement of ongoing activities and processes in order to provide a basis for external review. The mechanisms have been reviewed and improved based on the recommendations of the first external review. IQA Protocols follow the compliance of the agency's various activities to ESG.

6. DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGENCY'S EQA ACTIVITIES (COMPLIANCE WITH PART 2 OF THE ESG)

6.1 ESG STANDARD 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

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

The ANQA policy of EQA promotes continuous enhancement of internal quality assurance system at TLIs. The external quality assurance processes and other communications with TLI high level management and administrative staff, IQA representatives, and teachers are focused on the improvement of the institution's development through an effective and outcome-driven internal quality assurance system.

The external quality assurance framework in Armenia entails institutional accreditation which is mandatory for all types of TLIs and voluntary programme accreditation. Institutional accreditation is a prerequisite for the programme accreditation stipulated by the Statute on Accreditation. The institutional policy of programme development is thoroughly reviewed by the expert's panels within institutional accreditation.

To stimulate the enhancement of the academic programmes and to promote the student-centered learning at TLIs, ANQA introduced an EQA tool where the experts evaluate to what extent the intended students' progress is achieved and reviewed from the angle of quality assurance and to what extent the formative assessment of students leads to the gradual achievement of the learning outcomes. This approach is applied with the launch of the second cycle of the institutional accreditation process.

Student-centered learning is an essential aspect of the institutional accreditation. The expert reports contain analysis on the TLIs' efforts engaging students in the development of their learning paths as well as to what extent the TLIs have mechanisms for the quality assurance of students' achievements and reliability of qualifications awarding in general.

In 2016 ANQA developed a document "Harmonization of the criteria for institutional and Programme accreditation with Part 1: European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance in the institutions of higher education". The mapping shows the compliance of institutional and programme accreditation criteria and standards to the ESG part one.

The agency considers the peculiarities of ESG part one when reviewing and improving the concept of the external quality assurance processes and is guided by the following mapping during evaluations and experts' trainings.

Table 10 shows how effectively the internal quality assurance addresses ESG Part 1 during institutional and programme Accreditation organized by ANQA.

ESG Part 1 standards	ANQA criteria and standards for institutional accreditation	ANQA criteria and standards for academic programme accreditation
1.1. Policy for quality assurance	1 (1.1; 1.2; 1.3), 2 (2.1; 2.2; 2.3; 2.5); 4 (4.8); 5 (5.7); 10 (10.1; 10.2; 10.3; 10.4)	7 (7.1; 7.2; 7.4)

The development and implementation of internal quality system:

The evaluation is focused on whether the HEIs implement the internal quality policy and strategy related to all areas of the institutions' development. The internal quality assurance policy is developed with the involvement of internal and external stakeholders, highlights their interests, and is published on the website. The quality assurance activities provide necessary data on students' achievement. The system supports the continuous development of quality culture within the HEI. The quality culture is outcome-oriented and leads to the systematic enhancement of institutional quality assurance activities at different aspects.

The trust of the HEI management on the internal quality assurance system:

The HEI management trusts the data driven decision making and rely on the result of the internal quality assurance activities and use the data in decision making. The governance system supports the quality assurance and its development.

1.2. Design and approval of programmes	3 (3.1; 3.2; 3.3; 3.4); 6 (6.4); 9 (9.5)	1 (1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4); 3 (3.1; 3.2); 5 (5.1; 5.2; 5.3; 5.4)

The quality planning and management of the academic programmes:

The academic programmes are outcome-based and reflect the needs of students and teaching staff: all the programmes and course descriptions have clearly defined learning outcomes linked with programme outcomes and proper assessment methods. The planning process is implemented with the active involvement of internal and external stakeholders.

In the planning process the main focus is the alignment of academic programmes learning outcomes with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The mechanisms to check the alignment are in place. The students' workload is defined accordingly to the principles of the ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System).

The link of education with research and internationalization of the programmes:

Research, development, and internationalization activities are part of the academic programmes. The links between education and research are ensured, the programmes consider international good practice. Benchmarking activities are implemented to ensure the competitiveness of the programme.

1.3. Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment	3 (3.2; 3.3); 4 (4.2; 4.6)	3 (3.1; 3.2); 4 (4.1; 4.2; 4.3; 4.4; 4.5)

Student-centered learning:

The HEIs have policies to ensure the student-centered learning at all programmes. The mechanisms and tools are in place to ensure the students proactive participation in the teaching and learning process. The students regularly receive feedback about their learning which ensures the progress and the achievement of learning outcomes.

Learning, teaching and assessment methods ensure that all of them are based on learning outcomes, students' active involvement in learning and fair assessment are appreciated.

1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	3 (3.1); 4 (4.1; 4.2; 4.5); 5th and 7th	1 (1.2)

Regulations on student admission, progression, recognition and certification:

The HEIs have and implement regulations for effective management of student admission, recognition of achievements, and certification processes.

The HEIs have regulations to record students' admission and progression managed by Registrar.

Qualifications award:

The academic programmes, teaching staff, and resources are effectively managed to ensure credible award qualifications. The awarded qualifications reflect the requirements of both the professional field and the NQF as well as meet the requirements for research skills. The list of assignments for teaching and learning motivate the professional thinking of students and stimulate professional progress.

A strategy for continuous enhancement of the quality of all implemented academic programmes is in place to ensure the credible awarding of qualifications.

Career paths of students:

The HEIs have appropriate mechanisms to guarantee the intended career paths of graduates. The HEIs collect data of graduates' employment by profession as well as track their career paths.

1.5. Teaching staff	5 (5.1; 5.2; 5.3; 5.4; 5.5; 5.6)	2 (2.1; 2.2; 2.3; 2.4)

The HEIs ensure the effective recruitment of teaching staff prioritizing their competencies considering the fitness to the peculiarities of academic programmes and their commitment to implement the programmes. The teaching staff from professional field are a part of the teaching process.

The mechanisms for the continuous evaluation of teaching staff needs are in place. Teachers' professional development, mechanisms to motivate all the teaching staff to conduct research activities and evaluation of their workload are essential parts of the quality assurance system at HEIs.

1.6. Learning resources and student support	2 (2.1); 4 (4.2; 4.3; 4.4; 4.5; 4.7); 7 (7.1; 7.2; 7.3; 7.4; 7.6)	6 (6.1; 6.2; 6.3)

The HEIs have sufficient infrastructure and resources to effectively implement the academic programmes. The academic programmes, teaching staff, and technical resources build the environment to provide up-to-date, practical skills, and prepare graduates in accordance with the requirements of the NQF and employer needs.

Financial capacities of an institution ensure its stability and abilities to overcome existing challenges. The availability of learning resources for students with limited abilities is also considered. The needs of staff and students are regularly evaluated, and appropriate measures planned and implemented.		
1.7. Information management	2 (2.4; 2.5; 2.6; 2.7); 4 (4.2; 4.8); 7 (7.5; 7.7); 8 (8.3)	2 (2.2); 3 (3.3); 7 (7.3)
The HEIs have appropriate mechanisms and tools for the collection and management of data on the effectiveness of academic programmes including student success, graduates career paths etc. QA surveys are available to measure the level of satisfaction among students, alumni and other stakeholders, as well as other methods of collecting information and its use for improvements. The HEIs have mechanisms to collect and analyze data on the credible awarding of qualifications.		
1.8. Public information	8 (8.1; 8.2; 8.3; 8.4); 10 (10.6)	
The HEIs have informative websites and ensure regular updates about the programmes, students' life, success stories and the documents about the institutions. The HEIs ensure the publicity and transparency of qualitative and quantitative information on all the activities keeping focus on the permanent availability of full and reliable information for the stakeholders.		
1.9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	3 (3.4; 3.5); 4 (4.2; 4.8)	1 (1.5; 1.6; 1.7); 3 (3.3); 7 (7.3; 7.5)
The HEIs have and properly implement the monitoring of academic programmes. The needs and feedback from students, teaching staff and employers are regularly evaluated and are considered while reviewing the programmes. The HEIs regularly monitor alignment of gradual increasing of student learning autonomy with distribution of assignments according to the expected progress of students. The properly and regularly carried out benchmarking is a priority. Internal QA systems have working procedures for the efficient review of programmes.		
1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance	10 (10.5)	
Armenian external quality assurance regulations require a mandatory institutional accreditation for all the HEIs and mandatory programme accreditation processes (new law in the adoption process will require mandatory cyclical evaluation of programmes). Also, one of the institutional accreditation standards requires that the IQA system should provide valid and sufficient background for the successful of the external QA evaluation.		

Table 10: Addressing of accreditation criteria and standards towards ESG 2015

6.2 ESG STANDARD 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

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

External quality assurance processes aim at the continuous enhancement of quality at HEIs thus promoting transparency and accountability of all activities to the internal and external stakeholders.

Institutional accreditation

With the first cycle of institutional accreditation processes, ANQA aimed at building a quality culture at HEIs, engaging stakeholders in the quality dialogue where stakeholders will communicate on the education issues, as well as building a system which will be understandable and acceptable for the stakeholders.

The follow-up visits to the accredited HEIs, the regular planned meetings with stakeholders and surveys conducted among them show the high impact of external quality assurance processes on the further strategic development of HEIs.

According to the results of the evaluations, it is obvious that the institutional accreditation promotes the reforms in the HEIs.

In particular:
- strategic planning and management have been improved;
- review of academic programmes has become a daily task;
- high priority is given to increasing the effectiveness of student assessment and progress;
- research method in teaching and learning is prioritized;
- internationalization of outcomes is in focus;
- data collection and evaluation mechanisms are introduced and have become part of the culture;
- measures are initiated to promote the professional development of teaching staff;
- follow-up plans guide the strategic developments directions for all the institutional processes.

The evaluations and focus group discussions with stakeholders' and Accreditation Committee members show that the accreditation decisions and the improvements at HEIs are understandable and acceptable mostly for the internal stakeholders. However, the wider society still accepts accreditation decision per se.

Considering the feedback from stakeholders and examining the field, ANQA in close cooperation with Accreditation Committee members developed the new Policy on Accreditation Decision Making by Accreditation Committee for the second cycle of

the institutional accreditation. Accreditation criteria are grouped into bigger dimensions to make the outcomes more visible for the society at large and to increase participation in TLIs development.

Specifically, the following 3 criteria are observed in terms of **ensuring the credible award of qualifications**:

- Academic programmes;
- Teaching and support staff;
- Infrastructure and resources.

The following 3 criteria are considered in terms of the TLI's opportunities **for data driven decision making**:

- Mission and purposes;
- Governance and administration;
- Internal quality assurance system.

The following 4 criteria are considered in terms of further **development and enhancement:**

- Students;
- Research and development;
- Societal responsibility;
- External relations and internationalization.

Also, the accreditation decisions are prepared to prove the outcomes expected by the TLIs according to each group of criteria with correspondent recommendations required for follow-up. The wording is specified to ensure the decisions are comprehensible for the wider community and to promote stakeholder's participation.

The new Policy of Accreditation Decision Making by Accreditation Committee is available on the ANQA website.

Programme accreditation

Statute on accreditation defines Programme accreditation quality standards. Institutional accreditation is mandatory and a perquisite for programme accreditation. In Armenia, programme accreditation is not required as mandatory yet. HEIs apply for institutional accreditation, but do not apply for programme accreditation, because of the big number of programmes. HEIs could not cover accreditation expenses for all programmes because of the financial situation at institutions. Considering these circumstances, the HEIs conduct the review of programmes by their internal procedures and in parallel optimize the number of programmes. They stay accountable for the credible awarding of qualifications and effectiveness of programmes during the institutional accreditation. Institutions

internally review the academic programmes with the participation of internal and external stakeholders as well as considering opinions of employers.

As an impact of institutional accreditation, the stakeholders mention that the academic programmes have become outcome-based, the assessment of students have been improved.

At the current stage, with the adoption of the new Law on Higher Education and Science, the programme accreditation will be mandatory and between the six-year cycle of institutional accreditation, the HEIs will be motivated to conduct the review of all their academic programmes.

Accreditation in the COVID19 situation

The outbreak of COVID19 brought new challenges for the education system. Accreditation processes were stopped to evaluate the risks and to plan, considering the challenges of the new situation.

To evaluate the situation and to find effective solutions, ANQA organized a number of meetings with HEI management, experts, IQA representatives, and Accreditation Committee members. Discussions were held with the MoESCS. In parallel with the meetings and discussions, the international practice of accreditation in the COVID19 situation was examined. ANQA has introduced [some guidelines](#) to assist the TLIs for the internal quality assurance in the situation of pandemic. According to the stakeholders, the guidelines were effective and guided the institutions' IQA centers in their work.

In addition, for the purpose revealing the peculiarities, risks and mechanisms, and ensuring reliable online and hybrid accreditation processes ANQA has conducted a survey among the stakeholders.

As a result of the workshops and survey evaluation, a procedure on ["Organization and conduct of accreditation in emergency situations"](#) was developed, piloted, and adopted by the Board of Trustees. The procedure includes a description of the activities ANQA and the HEI under review must ensure for the implementation of online and hybrid accreditation.

Trainings were organized for the experts, HEI QA responsible persons and ANQA coordinators for effective organization of the online accreditation process. Since the end of 2020 ANQA launched the online and hybrid institutional accreditation processes.

Institutional Accreditation at VET Institutions

Having analyzed the needs and challenges of various stakeholders of the VET sectors, ANQA has summarized the results of the workshops and pilot institutional accreditation processes in VET and presented a policy document to guide the VET institutions in the accreditation processes.

According to the guiding principles institutional accreditation has to serve as a tool for increasing the transparency, accountability, visibility, autonomy and recognition of qualifications.

The principles will also guide development of a joint strategy with regional employers and ensure the long-term planning of investments in teaching and learning from both sides. ANQA has promoted embedding the PDCA cycle in all institutional developments in VET sector and implementation of SWOT analysis for evaluation and regular data collection for implementing culture of data driven decision making in VET governance. The policy document is available in ANQA website.

Regulatory Framework

The ANQA Accreditation Manual, which is the constitute part of the ["Statute on Accreditation of TLIs and Academic Programmes"](#), has been developed in 2011 with the wide participation of stakeholders, has been amended in 2015 and 2021 based on the changes in a number of policy documents. [The Armenian draft version Accreditation Manual](#) is currently being discussed with stakeholders. It is envisioned that ANQA Board of Trustees will approve the amended Accreditation Manual by the end of 2021.

Cost Effectiveness and workload of the accreditation process

ANQA regularly collects feedback on the effectiveness of the accreditation processes and to what extent the processes are cost effective. According to the results the HEIs find the expert reports and recommendations as useful tool for the clarification of their long-term development. The HEIs mentioned that as a result of the external review, the expert reports are effective, as these are based on the self-evaluation of the HEI, discussed during site visit with different stakeholders.

As for the accreditation fees, though the rates of the accreditation fee remain the same for the first and second cycle of the accreditation processes, as the HEIs and the experts gained experience after the first cycle of institutional accreditation, the working days for different stages of accreditation have been reduced thus resulting in the reduction of total accreditation amount.

Accreditation fees have become part of institutions' planned budget. The only concern regarding the fee was received from small private institutions because of the decrease in student numbers which has resulted in financial issues for them.

Institutions consider that expenses for accreditation are effective from the point of further development and attracting of students with reliable education services.

Regarding the workload, the HEIs have reflected that in general the workload defined by the accreditation schedule was realistic. Each phase of the accreditation process provides enough time for preparation, as indicated by the HEIs in the comprehensive analysis.

6.3   ESG STANDARD 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

> **Standard:**
> **External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include**
> **- a self-assessment or equivalent;**
> **- an external assessment normally including a site visit;**
> **- a report resulting from the external assessment;**
> **- a consistent follow-up.**

The regulatory documents elaborating the process of institutional and programme accreditation, along with the guiding principles, criteria and standards, are described in the Manual for Accreditation. The Manual has been revised in 2021 considering the new challenges in relation to the pandemic and to correspond to the revised regulation on the "Formation and Operation of Accreditation Committee" and the "Policy on Accreditation Decision Making by Accreditation Committee".

The "Guide to Self-Assessment", the template for self-evaluation and the glossary are available on ANQA's website, which guide the TLIs in carrying out the external review process.

The other central documents and templates that regulate the external review process such as the "Organization and conduct of accreditation in emergency situations", follow-up plan template, evaluation grid of the follow up, as well as the templates used by the experts are presented in two languages (English and Armenian) and are available on the agency's web-site or and the agency's Intranet. Packages in two languages are prepared for the process coordinators, translators, and local and international experts. All the packages are available on ANQA's Intranet.

The whole accreditation process is bilingual (Armenian and English).

After each accreditation process, survey and focus group discussions are conducted among TLIs, local and international experts, and accreditation process coordinators to evaluate the effectiveness of the process and to find improvement areas.

Both the institutional and programme accreditation processes are implemented in the following phases:

Application for Accreditation Process

The TLIs apply for an accreditation process by filling in the application form that is available on ANQA's website. With the application, the TLIs present the licenses, data about the academic programmes, student numbers. One of the conditions to accept the application of the TLI is the completion of the electronic online questionnaire. The electronic online questionnaire is available at http://forms.anqa.am. There is a guide prepared for the use of the questionnaire. The questionnaire includes data for all the academic programmes, students' number

on each programme, drop-out rates, graduate employment, number and profile of teaching staff, the budget of the TLI etc.

According to the feedback of TLIs and [comprehensive analysis](#), the application process is clear, the templates available provide effective guidance.

Self-evaluation

The TLIs conduct a self-evaluation using the data collected to prove the effectiveness of different processes. The self-evaluation is conducted based on a template that contains guiding hints for each criteria and standards. The TLI submits the self-evaluation both in Armenian and English.

According to the Statute on Accreditation ANQA process coordinators examine the self-evaluation report technically, structurally and based on content. ANQA accepts or denies the SER based on the formal regulation.

In recent years, with the launch of second cycle of institutional accreditation process, the template for preliminary evaluation of the SER of the TLIs has been amended. Special attention is given to what extent the TLIs presented evaluation data on each quality criterion and to what extent the progress after the previous accreditation is evaluated by the institution.

During the focus group discussions and based on the survey results, the TLIs indicated that the template of self-evaluation helps to cover all the necessary aspect of the accreditation criteria and standards. The stakeholders find that the template give opportunity to evaluate the progress of the TLIs at different dimensions.

External evaluation

The external evaluation includes the desk-review, the site visit and report production conducted by the experts.

The experts conduct desk-review by examining the self-evaluation report, the appendices as well as the information and data from the electronic questionnaire. They determine the strength and weakness of the TLI under review as well as the issues to be clarified during the site visit based on the provided desk-review template. Before the site visit regular meetings are held to discuss the desk-review results of the experts and prepare the schedule of the meetings during the site visit. International experts join the discussions online.

In recent years, based on ANQA's evaluations, when examining the three academic programmes within institutional accreditation the experts review the assignments of students' assessment and conduct class observations and review internships. Experts visited some employers' places of business to examine the capacity for supporting internships.

This allows experts to get prepared to have discussions about the subject, professional thinking, and the progress of students with academic programme directors, teachers and students during the site visit ("Professional talk") and evaluate students' yearly progress to become a specialist in the field.

During online and hybrid accreditation processes the experts' meetings and the class observations are conducted via Zoom.

Next, experts conduct a site visit to the TLI. Site visit includes meetings with all types of internal and external stakeholders to clarify the issues and to reveal the good practices in order to prepare recommendations for further development. The visit may take from three to five days depending on the size of the TLI. In addition, experts have separate internal meetings where they discuss the results of the visit and review additional documentation. Resource observations are included in the schedule of the site visit. During online accreditation processes the site visit is conducted via Zoom. The TLI prepares video materials where the resources are presented.

For the hybrid accreditation process, the local experts visit the TLI and the international expert joins via Zoom. In this case, the TLI prepares the video materials about resources for the international expert. International experts can participate remotely in online classes or other activities such as graduation exams etc.

ANQA conducts survey after each meeting during the site visit, to evaluate the effectiveness of the meetings. After each day the process coordinators review the filled surveys and discuss the results with experts and give them feedback.

Based on the results of the desk-review and the site visit, the expert panel prepares reports that include the findings on each standard, considerations on each criteria and evaluation of the criteria and recommendations.

The reports are agreed with the TLIs (more details in the discussion of Standard 2.6). The TLIs observations on the experts' report are reviewed by the expert panel and discussed during a briefing session where TLI representatives and experts discuss the observations.

Follow-up

Based on the recommendations of the experts, the TLIs prepare an outcome-oriented follow-up plans guided by the template provided by ANQA. The expert panel evaluates to what extent the follow-up plan is realistic in terms of implementation in the planned timespan.

After the first cycle of the institutional accreditation process, ANQA launched an amendment process for the follow-up procedure. For that purpose, feedback was gathered from relevant stakeholders (TLIs, experts, ANQA staff) to understand how to improve the procedure in the future. Having analyzed the feedback, ANQA organized various discussions with stakeholders. Both TLIs and experts provided suggestions on the improvement of the template for the provision of follow-up plan. Their suggestions were considered, discussed and the template was correspondingly revised. The main focus of the amendment was to ensure outcome-based approach in planning.

Decision making

As a final phase of the process, the Accreditation Committee decides on accreditation (See standard 2.5). Accreditation Committee decisions contain directions for improvements. The HEIs that received accreditation for 6 or 4 years provide a follow-up report two years after the decision, and the HEIs that received an accreditation for 2 years produce a report after six months. Considering that six-month period is too short to show the medium-term results based on the follow-up, ANQA is considering including relevant amendments in the Statute on Accreditation.

Monitoring of the Institutions' Follow-up Developments after the Accreditation Decisions

ANQA conducts monitoring in the accredited TLIs in order to.

- promote the continuous quality culture at TLIs and to monitor the progress of the follow-up;
- reveal the effectiveness of the experts' recommendations;
- discuss the challenges while implementing the reforms;
- point out recommendations for further improvement.

ANQA has conducted monitoring at 92 HEIs (accredited and non-accredited) during the last 5 years.

The monitoring includes:

- Review of the follow-up plan and the report of the HEI based on the progress of the follow-up plan;
- One day visit to the HEI that includes meeting with the internal stakeholders and class observations (this may be an online visit);
- Discussion of the monitoring visit results with the HEI leadership at the end of visit days.

The monitoring is conducted with a group formed from ANQA staff; in some cases, external experts are involved to motivate them with an additional activity for experts training. After the visit the group prepares a short report.

The results of the monitoring are regularly evaluated to understand the impact of the accreditation on the further development of HEIs core processes. ANQA conducted focus group discussions and surveys among the HEIs that experienced monitoring.

The results show that after accreditation processes, the HEIs initiated changes in the academic programmes, improved strategic planning process, as well as accelerated the mechanisms for data collection and analysis.

According to the survey results, monitoring helped to identify enhancement in the following domains of development:

- academic programmes, faculty and staff, infrastructure and resources (43%);
- governance and administration, mission and purposes, internal quality assurance system (31%);

- student services, research and development, societal responsibilities, external relations and internationalization (26%).

During the focus group discussions, the participants highlighted that the monitoring served as tool to reevaluate their work and track the success and challenges. Stakeholders reflected that this is a platform where the TLIs without any consequences can discuss the challenges and find solutions. This method is similar to formative assessment for learning.

6.4   ESG STANDARD 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

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

ANQA attaches great importance to the enhancement of experts' recruitment and training processes. Thus, it regularly collects data on the effectiveness of the experts training sessions, by implements surveys among TLIs and coordinators to reveal the strong and weak points of the experts' recruitment and work.

Furthermore, one of the agency's strategic directions is the continuous development of experts' capacities through organizing training sessions and discussions engaging teachers and specialists from different fields.

The expert panels cover several perspectives including education management and QA professionals, academic staff, students and international experts.

Recruitment and training of experts

ANQA has established an electronic database for local and international experts. For the purpose of enlarging the experts' database, ANQA regularly announces open calls in the agency's website and social networks. Also, promotion materials are distributed among TLIs different departments. ANQA presents and promotes the expert's database in different conferences and forums. Regarding the international experts' recruitment, a letter of request for international experts was sent to different international organizations and agencies to recommend experts and disseminate the information in their experts' pool to increase the number of international experts. ANQA employees provided necessary guidance and support to interested candidates to register in the experts' database.

There are now about 600 local and international experts registered in the database. However not all registered specialists participated in the trainings because of the strong requirements to be engaged in the accreditation process.

Besides promoting the database, it was necessary to diversify the recruiting mechanisms to engage specialists from various backgrounds and experience. In particular ANQA invites to participate in the expert training sessions:
- the specialists involved in the self-evaluation teams of TLIs;

- the specialists suggested by the experts who participated in the accreditation processes (the satisfaction survey includes such a question);
- the academic staff recommended by the students;
- the specialists recommended by the IQA representatives;
- the specialists active during round table and thematic discussions organized by ANQA;
- the specialists active during the site visits focus groups meetings;
- the specialists actively participating in the monitoring visits;
- the specialists actively participating in diverse training sessions organized by ANQA;
- the academic staff who regularly research their teaching experience and have good practice on the quality assurance of teaching and effective and innovative assessment methods;
- well-known specialist from science;
- employers actively engaged in the teaching process.

The diversification of the recruitment mechanism helped to include large numbers of specialists in the expert database and experts training sessions.

At the beginning of each year, ANQA Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division plans the accreditation processes for the year and indicates the fields of specialists needed for each process. ANQA yearly organizes 4-5 training sessions for potential experts.

ANQA has introduced a new programme for experts training sessions considering the results of the experts training and the accreditation process evaluations. The training programme includes role plays where the trainees have the possibility to get acquainted with a real self-evaluation report (without the name of the institution) and prepare questions and conduct a site visit where the trainees act as expert panel and ask questions to students and teachers. ANQA process coordinators and "Students voice" project students participate in the role play.

This mechanism helps the trainees to get familiar with the peculiarities of expert work in the real environment. After each phase of the training sessions, the process coordinators give feedback to the trainees.

According to the results, the training programme was evaluated as productive by the participants.

Considering the new emphasis of the second cycle of institutional accreditation and to promote academic programme reforms at HEIs, ANQA has introduced a training programme where the potential experts present an example of a good practice how they implement the quality assurance of their academic programme and course. ANQA coordinators review the good practice and prepare questions for the discussion. Each participant also has an opportunity to ask the presenter a question.

It was evident that when the training participants are presenting their own practice, they become more engaged into the evaluation process and strengthen their capacity of review by accepting other participants' approaches.

At the same time future experts develop the capacity of group work useful for the accreditation experts' panels.

The trainings end with feedback on each participant's conducted work.

The coordinators evaluate the capacities of experts according to the grid. The grid includes points such as:

- innovative knowledge of academic programmes quality assurance;
- quality evaluation report writing skills;
- asking formative questions;
- engaging in discussions;
- outcome based approach in evaluation;
- etc.

The trainings participants who are evaluated positively in most of the points are included in the database for trained experts. ANQA implements group evaluation of potential experts by the mechanism of consensus of coordinators who participated in a training as coaches and include high rated trainees in a short list of experts.

The recruitment and training of students are implemented by the ANQA "Students Voice" project. The "Students Voice" project announces calls two or three times per year in the social networks and ANQA website. Student experts' trainings are organized for all registered students. The duration of the training is approximately two months. The trainings are organized at the premises of the agency. In ANQA work environment students can review real self-evaluation reports from different HEIs, prepare questions and issues for the desk-review, conduct a role play, write a report and evaluate the HEIs performance in the students' perspective.

The successful candidates receive certificate and are included in the database of students' experts. The training is implemented by the responsible of the "Students Voice" project, ANQA leadership, coordinators and experts conduct some sessions as well.

Composition of the expert panel

For both institutional and programme accreditation processes, the expert panels are composed of academic staff representatives, education management and/or quality assurance professionals, representatives and/or employers from specific fields of study. For the programme accreditation the engagement of the employers in the panel is mandatory.

The expert panels include one student representative and one or two international experts (by the request of institution two international experts could be involved in the panel). One of the experts must have experience participating as a panel member in ANQA's accreditation processes.

According to the Statute on Accreditation, for each accreditation (both institutional and programme) process a shortlist of the experts (7-10) is presented to the

Accreditation Committee for approval. Afterwards, a list of experts is selected and sent to the TLI. The TLI under review and agree with the expert panel or disagree if they find that anyone has a conflict of interest with the institution.

The shortlist is formed from the trained experts list taking into account subject area knowledge aligned with the three programmes field chosen by the TLI for institutional accreditation.

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

In order to ensure an effective management of the accreditation process one of the experts is selected as the Panel Chair.

Since 2011, 114 local experts, 53 international experts, 61 student experts and 15 coordinators have been involved in expert panels. ANQA strives to keep gender balance among the experts.

	Once	Twice	Thrice	Total number of expertise
International experts	44	7	2	53
Student experts	60	0	1	61
Local experts	80	22	12	114
Coordinators	7	0	8	15

Table 11: Experts' and coordinators' involvement

Code of Conduct

At the very beginning of each accreditation process, the experts must disclose any professional, financial and work-related interest that could be interpreted as a conflict of interest. They must inform ANQA about any problem that might provoke a conflict of interest with the institution and must sign an agreement whereby any kind of conflict of interest is excluded. ANQA has adopted a strict conflict-of-interest policy for experts nominated for participation in the accreditation process. ANQA has also designed the Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct, which regulates the principles of experts' behavior and independence. To ensure financial independence ANQA signs a paid-service-provision contract with each expert with above-average rate of payment.

During the trainings with the potential experts the agency present and discuss the Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct.

Monitoring of the Experts' Work

The performance of the experts is periodically monitored and evaluated during all the phases of the accreditation process. The panel is evaluated by ANQA staff (usually by an internal quality assurance specialist or the head of the Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division), by the institution (after each site visit meeting the representatives of the HEIs fill in the evaluation form and at the end of

the day the process coordinators discuss the results with the expert panel) and by the coordinator (experts' evaluation form). The results of these evaluations are summarized in the [Comprehensive analysis](#), discussed and used to improve the accreditation processes.

6.5 ESG STANDARD 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

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

The institutional and programme accreditation process is regulated by the Statute on Accreditation of TLIs and Academic Programmes approved by the Government of the RA in 2011 (Government decree N 978-N) and the Accreditation Manual, which is an integral part of the Statute on Accreditation. The Accreditation Manual was developed in 2011 and reviewed in 2015 with participation of the external stakeholders (experts and TLIs).

The Accreditation Manual describes the stages of the review process as well the Institutional and Programme Accreditation Criteria and Standards approved by the RA Government (Government decree N 959-N). The Accreditation Manual also describes the process of the panel decision making on each criterion and new policy with special attention to credible award of the qualifications. The expert panels are guided by the principle of consistency and fitness for purpose considering the improvements from the previous accreditation process and balance between strengths and weaknesses when making judgments on each criterion.

ANQA applys the same approach of the review and accreditation criteria and standards to all the TLIs functioning in the Republic of Armenia without differentiation as to private and public, or by number of students. The guidelines, manuals and the regulatory documents are published on the agency's website.

The template for self-evaluation, which is an essential part of the Statute on Accreditation, includes explanations of each criteria and standard as well as relevant requirements and evidence on each standard. The document is available on the ANQA website.

Indicators for each criterion are detailed in the expert desk-review template, which is regularly updated based on the collected experience and review of the expert panel reports.

ANQA periodically discusses the quality evaluation indicators for criteria and standards with its stakeholders during the regular meetings with IQA responsible persons of TLIs and experts' trainings, conferences and forums. The interpretation of criteria and standards is of high importance during the trainings of process

coordinators and experts. ANQA strives to have the same understanding of evaluation criteria and standards and to keep these aligned with HE system development.

To ensure the consistency and language of the experts' reports, the Institutional and Programme Accreditation division reviews all the reports and discusses the issues with the panels before the reports are submitted to the TLIs.

The final outcome of the accreditation process is the decision of the ANQA Accreditation Committee which is an independent body. The activities of the Accreditation Committee are regulated by the procedure on the "Formation and Operation of Accreditation Committee" which was reviewed in 2020 with the launch of the second cycle of institutional accreditation processes. The document is published on ANQA website.

To strengthen the independence of decision making, ANQA has introduced scrutiny of each accreditation report. With this approach, before making a decision on any accreditation the President of the Committee elects three members from the Committee and these members examine the package of documents, and hold two meetings with the expert panel, and representatives of the educational institutions separately to clarify the factual circumstances of the review. After the meetings, the three members fill in the template of the scrutiny report. The report of the scrutiny includes the substantiations for the standpoint and reassessment of the criteria (if any), as well as a substantiated proposal for the conclusion of the accreditation decision. This process may take up to two weeks.

In parallel with this process, all the Accreditation Committee members receive the package of the documents of the institution under review and start examining them to be prepared for the decision. The package of documents of the accreditation of the educational institution includes:

- the self-evaluation of the institution;
- the expert report, which presents the analysis of the strengths of the TLI and the points that need enhancement;
- the institution's remarks on the expert report;
- the follow-up plan of the institution;
- the expert group's evaluation on the follow-up plan;
- the scrutiny report prepared by three members of the Accreditation Committee.

During the meeting of the Committee, the three scrutiny members present their findings and justifications, which are discussed, and a final decision on accreditation is made through open voting. Based on the discussions of Accreditation Committee and the scrutiny report, the decision is prepared and agreed with Committee members.

The accreditation decision could be one of the following:

- to grant institutional accreditation for a period of 4 or 6 years (programme accreditation for a period of 5 years),

- to grant conditional accreditation for a period of two years,
- to reject accreditation.

Based on the results of the first cycle of accreditation and workshop discussions with the stakeholders and the Accreditation Committee ANQA reviewed and introduced the new [Policy on Accreditation Decision Making for Institutional Accreditation](#). The policy presents the overall scope and principles of the decision making. The credible awarding of qualifications is crucial in the process of decision making. When granting accreditation with the TLI, the Committee takes into account the following principles:

- TLIs' strategy for continuous enhancement of the quality of all implemented academic programmes that ensure the result of credible awarding of qualifications;
- Outcome-oriented governance of the TLIs which ensures stability, enhancement and development;
- Operationalization of the internal quality assurance system which generates data for decision making.

The policy gives details for how Accreditation Committee grants accreditation for 6, 4 and 2 years or rejects accreditation.

[The accreditation decisions](#) are published on ANQA's website. The panel [reports](#) are also published on the website. Information on accredited institutions and programmes are included in the [State Accreditation Register](#) maintained by ANQA in order to be accessible to the public and international organizations.

To evaluate the impact of the accreditation decisions, ANQA conducts yearly monitoring visits to the TLIs. The monitoring is conducted to evaluate the progress made based on the follow-up and current issues.

The TLIs accredited for 6 and 4 years present a report on the progress of the follow-up after 2 years and the TLIs accredited for 2 years present a report on the progress of the follow-up after 6 months of the accreditation decision.

6.6   ESG STANDARD 2.6 REPORTING

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

ANQA attaches great importance to the continuous improvement of experts' report quality. Quality of reports always is a focus of ANQA developments. The periodic workshop discussions with the TLIs, experts and other stakeholders try to evaluate the impact of the experts' reports on the further development of TLIs and identify the areas for improvement of report content.

According to the focus group discussions and survey results the HEIs find the experts reports useful tools for the further strategic development and strengthening of the internal quality assurance system. Monitoring visits to TLIs are another way to understand to what extent the experts' reports were valuable and the recommendations of the experts were appropriate. Analyzing the results of the monitoring visits, it was obvious that the recommendations helped the HEIs improving the internal quality assurance system in general and they contributed to the review of academic programmes in particular.

Although, ANQA has kept the main structure of the reports, the emphasis of the content has been changed based on the introduction of the new Policy on Institutional Accreditation Decision Making and the challenges coming with the online and hybrid accreditation processes. In particular:

- The methodology of checking the institutional policy of programmes development through thoroughly examining three programmes during the institutional accreditation has been improved. Now the experts have to ensure relevant data is obtained from the special "professional talk" meetings conducted for each of three programmes by reviewing the learning outcomes, assessment assignments and implementing observation of classes and internships.
- Based on the Policy on Institutional Accreditation Decision Making, the expert panels ensure data to prove the QA of credible awarding of qualifications by the TLIs, the outcome-based governance with use of specific KPIs; and the effective implementation of the internal quality assurance system within the TLI.
- The expert panels touch upon the progress of the institution from the previous accreditation based on the follow up plan.
- Review of how the university manage the challenges and risks caused by the COVID19 situation and how effectively the education process was organized and evaluated.

The structure of the report revolves around:

- **The introductory part,** which includes the executive summary outlining the big picture of the HEI, the main strengths and weaknesses of the institution or the programme and the main recommendations and a peer-review written by the international expert where the emphasis is on the compliance of the HEI with the international benchmarks and its integration into the EHEA;
- **The procedural part,** which includes the description of the process, a brief introduction of expert panel members; general information on the institution or the programme, including the background and history;
- **The main part**, which includes findings on each standard, considerations on each criteria derived from the findings, conclusion on each criterion to assess whether the institution or programme meets the minimal requirements of

each criterion and overview of the assessment by summarizing judgments on all criteria.

- **Appendices** including panel members' CVs, site visit agenda, list of reviewed documents and resources, organizational structure (in case of institutional accreditation), list of used abbreviations.

The detailed description is available in the Accreditation Manual.

The experts' reports in both Armenian and English with the accreditation decision of the ANQA Accreditation Committee are published in the agency's website and State Accreditation Register which is automatically connected to the DEQAR database.

6.7   ESG STANDARD 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

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

In 2019, ANQA with the active involvement of the Accreditation Committee, the Board of Trustees, and internal stakeholders initiated a change for the appeal procedure. For that purpose, a working group has been established to analyze the legislative framework of the RA, to understand the obligations and limitations, communicate with the relevant stakeholders and make a proposal on the amendment of the existing appeal procedure. The new appeal procedure was included in the revised procedure on "Formation and operation of the Accreditation Committee" that was approved by ANQA Board of Trustees in 2020.

Essential aspects of the appeal procedure were revised. Particularly:

- With the previous version of the appeal procedure, the TLIs had the possibility of a second chance evaluation by a new group of experts and with a new self-evaluation report based on the criteria that had been assessed negatively. This approach was acceptable for the first cycle of accreditation based on the feedback received from stakeholders. According to this approach two HEIs appealed the decision of the Accreditation Committee. After receiving the results of revaluation, the two HEIs terminated the process.

  With the new amendments to the Appeal procedure, the TLIs submit an appeal against the decisions of the Accreditation Committee. According to the procedure an Appeal Commission is formed from the experts' database of ANQA. Afterwards the Commission examines the appeal against the decision based on the available and relevant documents. The documents include:
  - The self-evaluation of the TLI;
  - The expert report and objections of the university on the report;
  - The follow-up plan and the assessment of the follow-up plan;
  - The scrutiny report completed by the three members of the Accreditation Committee;
  - The Accreditation Committee decision.

- The other important amendment that has been fixed at the legal level is the introduction of the principles of legality, impartiality and objectivity, which guide the Appeal Commission in drawing up its conclusion. These principles apply when any member of the Appeal Commission has a conflict of interest with the TLI under an appeal process. If this happens, he/she withdraws from the appeal process.
- The conclusion of the Appeal Commission is made on the principle of consensus. This implies that all the members of the Commission agree with the conclusion, and the conclusion is completely acceptable to them and they are confident in their conclusion.
- Two types of Appeal Commission conclusions are available:
  - Leave the decision of the Commission unchanged, rejecting the applicant's appeal;
  - Send back with a proposal to make a new decision by the Accreditation Committee.

These amendments and additions to the appeal are entirely in line with the logic of the RA legislation, giving the education institution the right and the opportunity to appeal decisions to a superior body.

Currently, one higher education institution has appealed the decision of the Accreditation Committee. ANQA Board of Trustees has formed an Appeal Commission according to the procedure. The Appeal Commission has reviewed the documents and sent the proposal to the Accreditation Committee for their review and for making a new decision. The Accreditation Committee launched the new process of decision-making according the procedure on ["Formation and operation of the Accreditation Committee"](). Finally, the Accreditation Committee has left the decision unchanged. ANQA secretariat has informed the HEI with a briefing note.

As for the complaints, according to the Statute on Accreditation, the TLIs have the possibility to make objections and comments on the preliminary version of experts' report. Within two weeks, the institution prepares and presents its objections and comments related to the findings and information about the institution or programme. The expert panel scrutinizes the written response afterwards, and in case of relevant basis, makes respective changes in the report or rejects objections, in both cases giving a written explanation.

To increase the mutual understanding between the TLIs and the expert panels, and to ensure a high level of transparency and objectiveness, ANQA organizes a meeting to discuss the objections and comments of the TLI.

According to the focus group discussions, the stakeholders find the meetings effective as the two parties could clarify and discuss the objections of the TLI on the expert report.

After this meeting the expert panel finalizes the experts report.

The package of documents including the feedback of HEIs sent to the Accreditation Committee for a decision.

7. OPINIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS

The scope of ANQA stakeholders

ANQA attaches great importance to the active communication and collaboration with its stakeholders. One of the most important aims of the agency is the continuous enhancement of the created platform where various stakeholder groups meet and discuss the challenges and trends of the tertiary education system. Recently, ANQA has also initiated communication with young researchers and teachers to engage them with the quality assurance activities.

ANQA has identified a wide range of external stakeholders:

- RA Government
- The Higher Education Institutions (the Board of Trustees, the IQA responsible persons, teaching staff);
- Vocational educational institutions;
- Young researchers from diverse fields;
- Students and prospective students of Armenian tertiary education;
- Employers and employee organizations;
- Quality assurance agencies abroad;
- International networks for quality assurance and education.

ANQA also supports the "**Students' voice**" project (launched in 2011 by ANQA) urging students to be more demanding as to their education quality enhancement. The Students' voice project strategy is:

- to increase students' awareness of educational reforms;
- to reveal the main issues of concern for students via research;
- to stimulate students' engagement in the internal and external quality assurance activities through continuous trainings and discussions.

Collection of data from stakeholders and communication mechanisms

The key stakeholders of the agency are involved in policy development and implementation.

Yearly conferences and forums and the biannual "Quality week" organized by the agency are the platforms for communicating with the stakeholders. ANQA ensures the stakeholders proactive engagement in the quality dialogue through thematic meetings, focus groupa, discussions and research conducted by the agency.

The website and social networks serve as a platform for active collaboration with stakeholders.

ANQA collects opinion from various stakeholder groups on the agency's main activities:

- Accreditation processes;
- Monitoring of TLIs;

- Conducted training sessions;
- Conferences and forums.

The participants at these events highlighted experience exchanges between institutions that have new insights on diverse activities. In addition, as a strong point of the training sessions the participants mentioned the variety of practical examples discussed during the training sessions and the high professionalism of the trainees.

Generally, the results of evaluations are summarized in the [annual reports](#) of the agency.

Comprehensive analysis and opinion of stakeholders

ANQA has implemented a comprehensive analysis to summarize and evaluate the effectiveness of the accreditation processes (HEIs and VET institutions) and continuously improve it. The evaluation includes:
- Revealing the drawbacks and shortcomings related to the accreditation process;
- Revealing the best practices;
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the process itself;
- Reviewing the regulatory documents;
- Pointing out the areas in need of improvement.

The objectives of the study are:
- to describe the current state of the accreditation procedures,
- to collect feedback and reveal issues related to:

  — expert training
  — the information and the document package provided by ANQA
  — application procedures
  — procedure for submitting self-assessment
  — ANQA electronic questionnaire
  — expert panel structure and composition
  — self-assessment
  — desk-review
  — site visit (including online and hybrid processes)
  — expert report
  — Follow-up plan of TLIs
  — expert's independence
  — expert-coordinator relations
  — professional skills of the coordinators
  — cooperation with international experts
  — work ethos
  — accreditation process deadlines

— advice/consultation provided

A mixed methodology was applied for the study: quantitative and qualitative (surveys among TLIs, experts, and coordinators; focus group meeting with experts and TLI representatives; and evaluation of the experts after each meeting during the site visit). The research has been implemented according to its consecutive phases: self-assessment, desk–review, site visit, preparation of the experts' review report.

According to the national and international experts, as well as TLI representatives' reflections on the agency's activities and its impact on the system, "ANQA's activities are reform-driven and inclusive and help the enhancement of quality culture in the country". All the participating parties mentioned the high professionalism of the coordinators and agency staff. The international experts highlighted how ANQA has embedded the European approach in its procedures.

The international experts participating accreditation processes online emphasized "the great quality and the fine atmosphere of the visit, even in the online environment". It was highlighted that during online visits, direct contacts to the various stakeholders and in-deep discussion to enlighten the points that needed to be completed after the reading of the documents were possible.

The detailed evaluation is presented in the [Comprehensive analysis of Accreditation process for 2018-2020 years (available in Armenian)](#).

Opinion of stakeholders on the impact of the monitoring of TLIs

ANQA conducts surveys and a series of focus group discussions on the effectiveness of monitoring of TLIs and its impact on their development. The stakeholders found the monitoring visits are an effective tool for reevaluation of the activities conducted by the TLIs. The stakeholders mentioned that the monitoring helped:

- To strengthen their internal capacities;
- To find solutions for further development;
- To improve the academic programmes and internal quality assurance system.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS AND MAIN FINDINGS FROM PREVIOUS REVIEW AND AGENCY'S RESULTING FOLLOW-UP

Based on the first ENQA review recommendations, ANQA prepared a follow-up plan considering the recommendations of the ENQA review experts and the Board. According to the follow-up plan, ANQA initiated activities resulting in developments at agency's various dimensions.

ANQA prepared a Follow-up report in 2019 that summarizes the main outcomes of the implemented activities.

The table below shows the actions taken according to each recommendation of ENQA experts.

EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES (PART 3)	
3.1. ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE	
Recommendations	**Actions**
To increase the activities of external quality assurance. Particularly, to develop capacity to carry out evaluation of the programmes on a regular basis.	➢ ANQA strives to increase external quality assurance activities and develop capacity to carry out programme accreditation. However, according to the Armenian legal framework the programme accreditation is not mandatory yet. Considering this issue ANQA prepared a proposal and submitted it to the Government for the draft Law on Higher Education and Science where ANQA suggested to make the programme accreditation mandatory. The new Law on Higher Education and Science includes the mandatory programme accreditation. The new Law will be adopted by the National Assembly of RA by March 2022. Meanwhile, to review the academic programmes in a regular basis ANQA fostered TLIs to analyze the data of all academic programmes within the frames of second cycle of institutional accreditation processes. ANQA also promotes TLIs reviewing the academic progarmmes in accordance with international professional standards. Also, ANQA redeveloped its electronic

	questioner for the second cycle of institutional accreditation including quantitative data to be presented by the TLIs for all the programmes.
To publish ANQA Annual Plan	➢ In the strategic plan, ANQA has defined its mission, goals and objectives that are based on the analyses of internal and external environments of ANQA. Based on the goals and objectives yearly action plans with certain deadlines and responsible people are set which correspondingly ensure the implementation of strategy. Taking into consideration ENQA experts' recommendations, ANQA publishes its [Annual action plan](#) on its web- site.
The Register Committee understood from the panel's response that ANQA provides collective training opportunities to Armenian higher education institutions, but does not render services to individual institutions, and that, therefore, there is no specific potential for conflict of interest. **The Register Committee, however, underlined that in case ANQA provides consultancy to individual institutions in the future it would have to implement appropriate policies to prevent that ANQA accredits the same institution to which it rendered consultancy services.**	➢ One of ANQA's strategic goals is to significantly support the enhancement of tertiary level education quality in RA. ANQA encourages TLIs to act in conformity with national and international quality standards and continuously improve the quality of provision in higher education. For this purpose, ANQA promotes a dialog between all stakeholders: organizing workshops, capacity building trainings, round table discussions, consultations, annual and biannual fora and Quality weeks. Meanwhile, the same information is provided to all the institutions, the involvement of all stakeholders in ANQA fora/conferences/trainings is ensured; the same accreditation criteria and standards are applied, the process for external evaluation is the same for all TLIs.

3.3 INDEPENDENCE	
To avoid undue influence and to increase transparency in the decision-making process, the panel recommends limiting the role of the representatives of the Ministry to that of silent observers in the preparatory meetings of the Accreditation Committee. **In addition, the panel recommends that the Ministry directly ratifies the decisions of the Accreditation Committee. There is no obvious reason why the Minister should be able to judge ANQA's procedures selectively and individually.**	➢ As part of its follow-up plan ANQA revised the ANQA Accreditation Manual and Regulation of Formation and Operation of Accreditation Committee considering the outcomes of the discussions with the Ministry representatives. During the discussions the participation of the MoES representatives in the Accreditation Committee's meetings was evaluated as non-effective as the practice of the Accreditation Committee's meetings demonstrates that only once a representative of MoESCS participated in the Accreditation Commission meeting as a passive observer. Hence, according to a mutual understanding reached with the MoESCS, the respective parts have been revised in the mentioned documents. ➢ Considering that all the certificates on the decisions of the ANQA Accreditation Commission have been ratified by the Ministry of Education and Sciences without any exception, it was communicated with the Ministry representatives to revise the corresponding parts in the Statute of State Accreditation to: "the MOES directly ratifies the certificates on the decision of the Accreditation Commission". The Statute has not been yet approved by the Government. It is envisioned that after adoption of the New Law on Higher Education and Science, the new Statute on Accreditation will be revised and will include the following point.
To strengthen the Boards independence and	➢ To strengthen the Boards independence ANQA was recommended to add an international

autonomy, the panel recommends adding an international perspective to the Board.	representative to it. However, taking into consideration that ANQA Board is composed by the RA Government, as well as the limitation of RA legislative framework to have international member in the Board (having an international member in the Board requires a legislative change), ANQA decided to attach an international advisor to the Board when needed. The Advisor provides consultation when asked by the Director or the Board or can give unsolicited advice.
To ensure meaningful student representation in the governance bodies the panel recommends that students can be nominated only by student representation bodies.	➤ The founder of the agency is the Republic of Armenia represented by the RA Government. Hence, the members of the Board of Trustees are composed and approved by the Prime Minister of RA. The representation of the Board is fixed in the ANQA Charter. The practice of the Board composition showed that the RA Government referred to a student representation body to nominate a student representative to the Board. To fix this approach ANQA proposed the Board a revised Charter where the part of involving a student has been revised correspondingly: "the student member is nominated by student representation bodies". The revised Charter still needs to be approved by the RA Government.
3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS	
The panel recommends that the report Comprehensive analysis of the accreditation process becomes a	➤ On each accreditation procedure ANQA collects feedback from the all stakeholders (experts, HEIs, coordinators) on the effectiveness of the process through surveys. The survey is aimed at assessing the effectiveness of the accreditation process,

periodic analysis of the accreditation process.	discovering the best practices in the process, revealing the shortcomings and obstacles, hence contributing to the improvement and review of the regulatory documents, methodology and analyzing the impact of accreditation on the development and enhancement of TLIs. The collected data is analyzed afterwards. Based on the analysis the major points and issues are identified for the discussion with the same stakeholders for validating the collected data. The results of the survey and focus group discussion is being analyzed and included in the comprehensive analysis which is being published on ANQA website.
The panel recommends broadening the thematic analysis, for example, carrying out analysis by disciplines.	➢ ANQA is conducting thematic analysis in different areas through meeting with various stakeholders (teachers, administrative staff of HEIs and VET institutions, students, ministry representatives etc). The list of research and evaluations is presented in ESG 3.4 Table 7.
3.5 RESOURCES	
The panel recommends that ANQA foresees in the medium term the needs of staff and budget and establishes the necessary measures to carry out all the foreseen activities.	➢ According to the follow up plan ANQA has launched a process of midterm planning of the needs of staff and budget with a view of meeting its strategic goals and making its activities more effective. For that ANQA has foreseen the necessary number of staff members to carry out all the planned activities for the upcoming 2 years. The most problematic issue was the number of coordinators from the perspective of increasing the accreditation processes as within the Republic of Armenian as well as in the region (regional joint accreditations). To increase the

	number of coordinators ANQA has adopted the following mechanism: as a result of regular meetings organized by "Students Voice" project with the students studying Education Management, ANQA invites outstanding students to be a part of the accreditation processes as an assistant of a coordinator. Being an assistant for several times and participating at all the other ANQA activities the method of learning by doing gives its positive results.
	➢ Another mechanism to recruit a necessary staff is supervising internships and final thesis of the students. Though it might seem that the process is time consuming but ANQA seeks a sustainable staff who shares the values of the agency.
	➢ As for the budget, ANQA highlights the financial independence and for that a comprehensive midterm plan of diversification of financial resources has been developed. The plan touches upon the financial planning of the accreditation processes, trainings conducted by the ANQA representatives, participation in international projects, etc.
	➢ ANQA has a stable increase of its reserve fund from each accreditation process of the HEIs and VET institutions. The reserve fund is primarily used for the necessary developments done by the ANQA staff as well as by the outsourced staff.
It is necessary that the Board of the Trustees forecast new staff and more budget to face new activities not funded or	➢ The issues regarding the new staff and financial planning have been presented to the President of ANQA Board and it was decided to work per projects within the departments and

foreseeing a possible decrease of European projects. It is necessary to take into account that a part of the budget depends on the universities, which also show problems lack of funding, for that reason there is a possibility that they cannot face the rates tied to the accreditation of programmes.	conduct planning of staff and finances in a two-year length. ➢ The state funding is currently the most sustainable source of finance for the agency. Another sustainable source of finance is accreditation, ANQA saves a fixed sum from each process for its reserve fund. ➢ As regards the rates of programme accreditation, ANQA undertakes several steps to relieve the financial burden from the TLIs. It is also important to mention that ANQA organized several meetings with the representatives of MoESCS and HEIs' leadership to discuss the possible ways of financing the programme accreditations. With the new Law on Higher Education and Science will give opportunity for HEIs to implement programme accreditation with their own resources and within the cycle of institutional accreditation.

3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

The panel recommends revising periodically their internal and external procedures, for example doing internal audits.	➢ ANQA fosters continuous improvement of the working environment through periodic multidimensional evaluations and analysis of agency's internal activities. All quality areas commence the implementation of the quality assurance cycle as set out in the protocols through preparing annual reports on the effective implementation of targets defined in each quality area protocol. The midterm results are being discussed among ANQA staff members through meetings periodically organized by the responsible persons for the protocols. Generally, as a lean organization ANQA has a culture to hold regular and open discussions with the staff on the

	all possible issues.
	➤ For the revision of external procedures, ANQA regularly analyses the feedback of the stakeholders (TLIs, experts) on the effectiveness of the processes and conducts meetings with the stakeholders. Based on the annual reports of quality areas and analysis of the effectiveness of agency's external activities the respective improvements are made if necessary. The subject that has been highlighted for the current year is more effective selection procedure of local experts.
	➤ Agency's annual report is prepared and submitted to the Director and the Board of the Trustees.
The panel would like to recommend reducing the number of surveys carried out or to space them in the time, in order to not saturate the system with an excess of surveys.	➤ As part of its follow up plan ANQA analyzed the effectiveness of its surveys. For that, the mechanisms, target groups and the frequency of the evaluation of the internal and external activities have been discussed among ANQA staff, TLI representatives and experts. As a result of the focus group meetings it turned out that the frequency and the number of the internal and external surveys are overall effective, targeted and process driven. The only change was applied to the questionnaire given to the participants after each meeting during site visits. It was decided to do a qualitative analyses of the filled in questionnaires (instead of quantitative) by the coordinators in the end of each day of site visits because the coordinators assessed the questionnaire as a good communication tool with the experts during closed panel meetings: the questionnaire helps the coordinators to prevent

	any possible shortcoming during the visits. It was discussed to add open questions in the questionnaire to make it more effective and useful for the coordinators.
	Also, the number of internal surveys has been reduced and the SWOT analysis of each direction have been introduced.
It also recommends establishing a channel in the web page to collect suggestions or consulting of students, teachers, or society not linked directly in the processes of external quality assurance.	➢ ANQA has activated its blog on the website where all the stakeholders and/or experts of the field may raise topics and discuss them with the interested parties. ➢ ANQA also changed the content of the Section "Contact us" on the website. It became another opportunity for the stakeholder to get consultancy, guidance as well as provide some feedback/suggestions on agency's activities. Through this channel ANQA received over 80 requests on different issues. ➢ Another opportunity for the stakeholders is the Network of Quality Supporters established at the beginning of 2017 where different stakeholders actively discuss different issues on the quality assurance, accreditation, share their experience and good practice. The number of the members involved in the group is over 300, including representatives from HE and VET sectors, experts, students, ANQA staff.
COMPLIANCE WITH EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES (PART 2)	
2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE	
The panel recommends using the same approach for the future cycle of Institutional Accreditation.	➢ ANQA launched the second cycle of accreditation processes by maintaining the basic elements of already adopted external quality

| | assurance system. In this cycle of institutional accreditation, all academic programmes are considered by the expert panel.

➢ ANQA continues to strengthen the communication ties with its stakeholders. Particularly, ANQA launched strong cooperation with young teachers and researchers by regularly meeting with them. The aim of the meetings is to engage young teachers and researchers in the policy development of quality assurance processes. |

2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

The panel recommends improving the follow-up processes, once implanted in the different centers. Aspects that should be taken into account should be: • **it is satisfactory that HEIs have to submit follow-up and improvement plan, in order to be monitored also after decision making. But the panel had concern about the time frame. The 6-month delay for the submission of the follow-up report is too short and should be reconsidered.** • **the effectiveness of follow-up of the institutions valued positively should be**	➢ As a part of its follow-up plan, ANQA launched the amendment of follow-up procedure. For that, a written feedback was gathered from relative stakeholders (TLIs, experts, ANQA staff) to understand how to improve the procedure in the future. Having analyzed the feedbacks, various discussions were organized with stakeholders. Both TLIs and experts provided suggestions on the improvement of the template for the provision of follow-up plan. Their suggestions were considered, discussed and the template was correspondingly revised. The new format emphasizes the outcome driven approach. ➢ The issues regarding the timeframes for the submission of the follow-up reports and the methodology of conducting the follow-up monitoring have also been discussed with the stakeholders. The respective changes on the timeframe are fixed in the draft of the new Statute of State Accreditation. As for the methodology of conducting periodic monitoring

carried out externally, including the participation of external experts from the institution, in order to consider the results of the actions taken by institutions.	of the follow-ups, ANQA developed the Regulation on Monitoring where it is stated that external experts along with the ANQA representatives are involved in the monitoring panels in case needed.

2.4 PEER REVIEW EXPERTS	
The panel recommends, in the measure of its possibilities, increasing and /or maintaining the number of international experts. This fact would be beneficial specially taking into account agency future plans of internationalisation.	➢ According to the ANQA regulations each expert panel mandatorily has one to two international experts. Currently ANQA strives to enlarge the involvement of international experts to accreditation processes taking into consideration the geographical representation to ensure that new wave of approaches is introduced in each process. Considering that this approach can be a financial burden for institutions under accreditation, ANQA takes efforts to activate the cooperation and involve experts from the region which will reduce the expenses and bring the regional context to the processes. ➢ International experts are selected from the international expert pool of ANQA, expert pool of an authoritative international accreditation (quality assurance) agency, from the international networks/associations (EURASHE, INQAAHE, ECA, etc.) and from the EU and regional project partner institutions. ➢ To increase the number of international experts, a letter of request for international experts was sent to different international organizations and agencies to recommend

	experts and disseminate the information in their experts' pool. ANQA employees provided necessary guidance and support to interested candidates to register in the pool.
2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES	
The panel recommends improving the Manual of accreditation to make more clear which aspects, indicators or evidence are required for each criterion.	➤ The template of self-evaluation includes explanations on each criteria and standards as well as respective requirements and evidences on each standard. The document is available at the ANQA website.
Likewise, the panel recommends publishing the decision rules used by the Accreditation Committee to differentiate their accreditation decisions.	➤ According to the follow up plan ANQA conducted several meetings with the Accreditation Committee and discussed the criteria for decision making. After the discussions ANQA in cooperation with Accreditation Committee has improved the criteria for decisions considering the implementation of PDCA cycle in TLIs procedures. The policy on decision-making of awarding institutional accreditation by accreditation committee has been adopted by the Accreditation Committee.
2.6 REPORTING	
The panel recommends using always the same vocabulary (positive/ negative vs. satisfactory/unsatisfactory vs. yes/no) to qualify each criterion, even though the result is clear and it has not produced any confusion.	➤ Considering the recommendations of ENQA experts and gained experience, ANQA has revised: • the template for the preparation of the reports, • an induction package with mostly used terms for the translators, Also, a tool (with responsible people and timeframe) for the monitoring of the experts'

	reports have been developed and agreed.
The reports of the pilot programme accreditations were not published on ANQA website.	➢ According to the Statute on State Accreditation of Institutions and their academic programmes in RA, as well as ANQA Accreditation manual, the reports become public right after the Accreditation Commission takes a decision. The pilot programme accreditations, conducted by ANQA does not have any formal outcome, that is why the reports are not published on ANQA website.

2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

The panel recommends that ANQA reconsiders its appeals process, considering the aspects quoted, in order to avoid any confusion between an appeal procedure and a second chance procedure. **The panel recommends that if the appeal is evaluated by a new panel, ANQA should consider including a student.**	➢ According to the analyses of the feedbacks received from the stakeholders, the appeal procedure that has been applied by the ANQA for the first cycle of accreditation was acceptable for the stakeholders. In cooperation with Accreditation Committee, Board of Trustees and internal stakeholders, ANQA revised the Appeal Procedure. The new Procedure is included in the procedure on Formation and operation of ANQA Accreditation Committee (with new edition). The Procedure is adopted by ANQA Board of Trustees.

9. SWOT ANALYSIS OF ANQA

Strengths

- Independence in development and decision-making
- Participation in the legal developments of the field
- Recognition of EQA activity results by the main stakeholders
- Internationalization of the agency
- Membership in ENQA and registration to EQAR
- Availability of expert reports in DEQAR database
- Launch of institutional accreditation second cycle as a proof of trust from HEIs
- Launch of VET institutional accreditation
- Embedment of mandatory programme accreditation
- Well-organized bilingual accreditation processes
- Reform-driven thematic analysis providing objective data that stimulates the enhancement of TLIs
- Collaboration with all levels of stakeholders and their trust in ANQA procedures
- Strong engagement of "Students Voice" project students in external and internal QA activities
- Strong expert training capacity
- Strong IQA system of the agency
- Trained staff with internationally accepted approaches
- Financial sustainability (diversification of sources)

Weaknesses

- Gender imbalance of the staff
- Staff retention issues
- Small budget (particularly for development)
- Small staff and risk of staff substitution due to COVID-19 situation
- Small experience in programme accreditation
- Small number of experts with strong accreditation experience for a certain field of study
- Small number of experts participating in international accreditation processes

Opportunities

- Participation in international projects
- ANQA staff mobility to European agencies for experience exchange
- Engagement of university staff into ANQA developments
- Stimulation of field commissions' development by the RA Government
- Engagement of foreign experts with Armenian background in the accreditation processes

Threats

- Decreasing number of students in Armenia, and migration
- Decline in the popularity of Education management academic programmes in Armenian universities
- Lack of professional unions in the country
- Lack of international mobility in the HEIs
- Difficulties in finding local experts with the capacity for evaluation from the international perspective
- Expectations of the RA Government and public for faster enhancement of higher education quality
- Legacy of 2001 accreditation in most private HEIs that do not apply for new accreditation
- Not clear links between accreditation and licensing regulations in RA

10. KEY CHALLENGES AND AREAS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

In 2021 the Parliament of the RA adopted the new "Law on Higher Education and Science" that brings new reforms with it. By the proposal of ANQA, the new "Law on Higher Education and Science" entails a mandatory programme accreditation with the possibility for the HEIs to conduct self-review of academic programmes and present the information to the ANQA Accreditation Committee for approval.

Through the institutional accreditation mechanism, a basis has been created for academic programme evaluation and review. Additionally, expert and HEI staff capacity are being developed, and the documents and regulatory framework is in place. However, the massive start of the programme accreditation is a challenge.

For that reason, ANQA conducted research on international practice and hasprepared the draft "Statute on Quality Assurance and State Accreditation of HEIs and Their Academic Programmes" in close cooperation with stakeholders. It is envisioned to continue to discuss the draft Statute with wider engagement of Government and MoESCS representatives.

The ANQA Strategic Plan 2021-2025 indicates the agency's further development directions.

For the upcoming five years ANQA's activities will revolve around:

- Culture of Continuous Improvement: Heightening the focus on quality improvement of teaching and learning as a driver of ANQA activities.
- Dvelopment: Continuously developing expert capacities so they will lead reforms in the tertiary level institutions.
- Relationships with Stakeholders: ANQA will work with its stakeholders, including the public, students and employers to educate and encourage them to support university quality assurance.
- Regional and International Activities. ANQA will continue its efforts to cooperate internationally and regionally in quality assurance activities.
- Organizational Functioning. ANQA will continue development of internal quality assurance functions, redesign organizational structures, and seek additional resources for projects.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS[8]

Accreditation	Accreditation refers to an assessment based on criteria to determine if a tertiary education institution, or a degree programme meets the requirements for being granted a certain quality label. An accepted accreditation is a public acknowledgement and proof of the tertiary education institution, degree programme or other programme meeting the criteria specified for the accreditation.
Benchmark	A standard, a reference point, or a criterion against which the quality of something can be measured, judged, and evaluated, and against which outcomes of a specified activity can be measured. The term, benchmark, means a measure of best practice performance. The existence of a benchmark is one necessary step in the overall process of benchmarking.
Follow-up plan	The Follow-up Plan is developed according to separate recommendations of the expert panel, the major issues identified in the report independently or by the institution and should clearly indicate not only the final achievements expected by the institution in their area, but also the expected mid-term results according to time phases.
Institutional Accreditation	The terms refer to the accreditation of an entire institution, including all its programmes, sites, and methods of delivery, without any implication to the quality of the study programmes of the institution.
Monitoring	Monitoring is the systematic process of collecting, analyzing and using information to contribute to the continues improvement of quality assurance in TLIs.
Programme Accreditation	Programme Accreditation is the recognition of academic programmes and

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[8] The Glossary of Terms has been taken from ANQA Glossary.

	the correspondence of quality with state accreditation standards and programme accreditation criteria. Programme Accreditation is targeted at separate academic programmes. This allows to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of academic programmes as well as to monitor whether it thoroughly ensures the acquisition of intended learning outcomes.
Quality Assurance	An all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a tertiary education system, institutions, or programmes. As a regulatory mechanism, quality assurance focuses on both accountability and improvement, providing information and judgments through an agreed upon and consistent process and well-established criteria.
Self-evaluation	Self-evaluation is a form of evaluation helping a TLI to identify existing strengths and development areas in its activities.
Site Visit	A component of external evaluation that is normally part of an accreditation process. It may be initiated by the institution itself. It consists of external experts visiting a higher education institution to examine the self-study produced by the institution and to interview faculty members, students, and other staff in order to assess quality and effectiveness (and to put forward recommendations for improvement).

ANNEXES

1. [ANQA Charter](#)
2. [ANQA Strategic Plan 2016-2020](#)
3. [ANQA Strategic Plan 2021-2025](#)
4. [ANQA Accreditation Manual (2015)](#)
5. [Statute on State Accreditation and Their Academic Programmes in the Republic of Armenia](#)
6. [ANQA Accreditation Manual (revised in 2021, draft Armenian version)](#)
7. [Procedure on Organization and Conducting of Accreditation in the State Emergency by ANQA](#)
8. [Decision-Making Policy on Awarding Institutional Accreditation by the Accreditation Committee of ANQA](#)
9. [Policy and Procedure on Monitoring of TLIs and Their academic Programmes of ANQA](#)
10. [ANQA Internal Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures](#)