

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION  
QUALITY ASSURANCE, FOUNDATION

**ANQA ACCREDITATION MANUAL**

**2015**



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Approved by  
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The Accreditation Manual is a guidebook for the implementation of tertiary level institutional and programme accreditation processes in the Republic of Armenia. It gives a comprehensive description of the quality assurance framework for Armenian tertiary education, the procedures and duration of external evaluation processes through which tertiary level institutions and academic programmes undergo during the accreditation process. The manual is also concerned with the scope of activities for which quality assurance entities, stakeholders, experts, and TLIs carry responsibility. The Manual is a methodological guidebook for the tertiary level institutions, external experts and other stakeholders.

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## FOREWORD

The current manual is a constituent part of the re-elaborated “Statute on State Accreditation of Tertiary Level Institutions and Academic Programmes in the Republic of Armenia” (Accreditation Statute henceforth) approved by the RA Government Decree 978-N on June 30, 2011.

The manual has been reviewed by the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (ANQA henceforth). It gives a comprehensive description of the quality assurance framework for Armenian tertiary education, the procedures and duration of external evaluation processes through which tertiary level institutions (TLIs henceforth) and academic programmes undergo during the accreditation process. The manual is also concerned with the scope of activities for which quality assurance entities, stakeholders, experts, and TLIs carry responsibility.

Throughout the review process of the manual, ANQA has assumed as a basis the following factors:

- needs assessment and situational analysis of the Armenian tertiary education, as well as its current developments;
- electronic questionnaires on the basis of which ANQA database on tertiary education performance is established;
- experience and results accumulated from accreditation processes organized by ANQA within the frames of quality assurance system development throughout 2009-2014;
- results of institutional and programme accreditations implemented in higher educational institutions within the frames of the second loan project of the World Bank “Education Quality and Relevance”, as well as the project “Armenia Quality Assurance Technical Assistance” (ARQATA), in close collaboration with the Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO);
- recommendations and observations provided by local and international experts.

ANQA undertook the review procedures of the manual after it had put its quality assurance processes into practice and received feedback from local and international experts, self-evaluation teams from accredited educational institutions and other stakeholders. Another no less important external impulse for reviewing the manual was the revision of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG henceforth), which sheds new light on quality assurance standards and puts an increasing emphasis on quality assurance requirements.

It is our firm belief that only through an active and direct involvement of ANQA stakeholders the effective application of the current manual will be safeguarded thereby ensuring the

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accomplishment of ANQA’s mission, the quality assurance of the Armenian tertiary education, and the recognition of the qualifications offered by educational institutions at international level.

ANQA extends its great indebtedness to all the stakeholders involved in the education system, who strive to make the system recognizable and competitive on the international scene.

ANQA would also like to express its deep acknowledgement to all the participants for their helpful insights in document drafting and review processes.

Last but not least, ANQA owes its special thanks to international quality assurance agencies and experts, who took part in various surveys and made their observations about the provisions contained in the manual.

Any feedback or suggestions regarding the manual would be much appreciated. They can be addressed to ANQA at the following

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## I. TERTIARY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN ARMENIA

In the further development of education system, paramount importance is subscribed to tertiary education. Current reforms in higher education aim to implement the principles of the Bologna Process. Armenia signed the Bergen Communiqué of education ministers representing the Bologna signatory countries in 2005 and officially joined the Bologna Process assuming responsibility for implementing the main principles of the Bologna Process on the basis of the action lines, and endorsing the principles underlined in the European Higher Education Area (henceforth EHEA). The integration into the EHEA presupposes fundamental changes in the RA higher education directed to provide a knowledge-based education.

Since 2005, Armenian higher education system has undergone fundamental changes, more specifically, the adoption of a comparable three-cycle degree system (bachelor, master, PhD) and the transfer to credit system (ECTS). In the meantime, the higher education sector is embarking on radical reforms in academic programmes with a view to facilitating student-centered learning and promoting mobility among students and staff.

“The National Qualifications Framework of RA” (NQF henceforth) was established on 8 April 2011 and is currently in the stage of development.

Tertiary educational institutions are now carrying out their activities based on new approaches to quality assurance; these are prerequisites for the system of lifelong learning.

Among all ongoing reform processes, the increase in student role and influence as well as the interconnection between educational and research processes are matters of particular importance. These intertwined structural changes allow Armenia to completely integrate into the European Higher Education Area.

The vocational education sector has also implemented a number of reforms aimed at meeting the requirements of international standards.

### 1. Higher professional education system

The three-cycle higher education system with its bachelor's, master's, and research programmes has been implemented in Armenian public and private educational institutions. This system provides both full-time and part-time learning and operates based on tuition-free and paid models.

According to the statistics provided by the Ministry of Education and Science of RA (MES henceforth) there are 24 state Higher education institutions with their

14 branches, 4 HEIs with interstate agreements, 4 state-sanctioned HEIs, 9 branches of foreign state and private HEIs and 33 private HEIs.

The educational institution is granted the opportunity to decide on the amount of tuition fees in accordance with the RA Government decision N163 "The maximum amount of tuition fees per academic degree and in accordance with accreditation results" adopted on February 19, 2015.

The student's full annual workload is equivalent to 60 credits (ECTS). In order to be awarded the bachelor's degree students must meet the requirements of 240 credits for the whole programme (4 years of full-time studies), for police specializations minimum 180 credits (minimum 3 years), and for medical education-300 credits (5 years). To be awarded the master's degree students must meet the requirements of 60-120 credits, and 240 credits for medical education. Whenever part-time education is concerned, one academic year is added to the overall duration of courses.

## 2. Vocational education system

The aim of preliminary professional (vocational) education is the preparation of specialists with preliminary professional (vocational) qualification. The aim of middle level professional education is the preparation of specialists with middle level professional qualification on the basis of basic general education (RA "Law on Education", Yerevan, 1999).

The duration of preliminary professional education, depending on applicants' educational background (basic general or secondary (full) general) and the chosen profession, may last from one to three years. Vocational schools and colleges provide preliminary professional education.

Middle level professional education is provided by middle level professional education institutions (MPEI henceforth): colleges and vocational schools.

In MPEIs, education is based on the basic general and secondary (full) general education and is delivered in the form of full time, part-time studies. The duration of studies may vary from one year and ten months up to four years and ten months depending on the level of students' educational background and the chosen profession.

Nowadays, there are 72 public colleges functioning in Armenia as well as middle level professional education programmes are implemented at seven public higher education institutions, 14 educational complexes and foundations. There are 29 private colleges, as well as 22 preliminary professional education institutions, which provide education programmes to respectively 28000 and 6500 students, who study humanities, pedagogy, healthcare, economics, and arts, technical and

technological professions. Graduates are issued the qualification of a craftsman and a specialist.

Because of reforms implemented in the sphere of middle level professional education, a new list of vocational specializations was ratified. The list includes 257 specializations classified in 28 groups.

## II. QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK IN ARMENIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION

Worldwide, there has been an increased demand for internal and external quality assurance systems to be designed and implemented in the higher education sector. This is due to the rapid growth in numbers of tertiary level educational institutions and students, as well as the rapid growth in public and private investment funds allocated in the last two decades. The education ministers of all the Bologna signatory countries have recognized the need for the implementation of accreditation or Quality assurance (QA henceforth) systems in the EHEA, (Berlin Communiqué, 2003). Nearly all European countries have responded to this need by designing and implementing systems geared towards the enhancement of service quality in higher education and the provision of its expected results. The QA of the TLI operations and especially that of degree awarding and information dissemination to public are given an emphasis.

The Berlin Communiqué appealed to the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (henceforth ENQA) to develop, in close cooperation with all its partners, a set of commonly agreed standards, procedures, and guidelines on quality assurance, which would ensure consistency of quality assurance in Europe, thereby enhancing academic and professional mobility. As a result, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area were established and adopted by the education ministers of the Bologna signatory countries in 2005 (Bergen Communiqué). The ESG provide assistance and guidance to governments, quality assurance agencies, and higher education institutions, upon the basis of which national QA systems are to be developed.

The ESG provide a common regulatory framework for the international recognition of the qualifications awarded. In their “initial phase”, the ESG stimulated the development of the national education systems.

The globalization, popularization, and internationalization of education, which lead to increased student mobility, have been the main tendencies towards the development of the tertiary education system in the last 15 years.

Internationalization and development trends are characteristic features for quality assurance and accreditation agencies too: a considerable number of national and pan-European accrediting bodies have been founded, the quality

assessment technologies and procedures, used by the national accreditation agencies, have been changed.

The changes occurred in the EHEA provided the foundation upon which the ESG for "the second generation" were discussed and adopted by the education ministers of the Bologna Declaration signatory countries during the Ministerial Communiqué in May, 2015 in Yerevan.

The policy, procedures, and quality assurance mechanisms adopted by the Republic of Armenia have been developed in compliance with the ESG and adhere to national peculiarities.

### 1. Quality Assurance Context

According to the definition adopted in RA education system, quality implies **"fitness for the set purposes"**. In accordance with the said approach, throughout external quality assessment the extent to which education services or learning outcomes achieved by students are in concord with defined objectives is determined. This definition also urges institutions to define clear-cut aims and objectives in their missions, the level of fulfillment of which will be assessed and rated. External quality assurance agencies give primary focus to the achievement of the objectives set by educational institutions, determine the level of their compliance with the quality assurance criteria and standards established by the RA government, the priorities in education development, and public demands.

This approach implies that, first and foremost, the aims and objectives of higher education are to be defined. As regards education services and learning outcomes, they are to meet the needs and requirements of stakeholders. It also implies that stakeholders must clearly express their needs and requirements.

The aims and objectives of tertiary education are introduced as general concepts in the mission and are later specified on an academic level embedded in the programme objectives and intended learning outcomes (ILO henceforth).

The TLI states the ways it carries out its mission and assures external experts of the effectiveness of its fulfillment; external experts, in their turn, assure stakeholders, the third party, of the effectiveness of the outcomes.

In tertiary education, the quality of education is closely related to the implementation of programmes, more specifically, to the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching. Effectiveness is connected with the objectives of the programme, whereas efficiency is connected with the resources used to achieve the defined objectives.

When estimating the relevance of objectives, the quality assurance agency pays special attention to their conformity with NQF, state academic standards, priorities, as well as public needs. The agency also analyzes to what extent the objectives are accomplished and to what extent the continuity of processes is guaranteed.

QA in tertiary education is a process of quality assurance and continuous enhancement directed to bring tertiary education to conformity with the needs of students, stakeholders, and the society as a whole. Quality assurance is guided by two basic objectives: accountability and enhancement. The implementation of these objectives contributes to the establishment of trust towards institutional performance.

Thus, the educational institution plans its activities, implements them, and substantiates their effectiveness. The external experts assure stakeholders, the third party, of the effectiveness of achieved results and foster the enhancement of institutional performance through recommendations and collaboration.

Typically, there are two levels of operations in Armenian quality assurance system:

- **“Political” level:** At this level, stakeholders in education engage in the processes regarding the development and periodic review of criteria and procedures; they also join in further discussions in order to interpret and comment on those criteria. In case of Armenia, these discussion processes are coordinated and facilitated by an independent QA body - ANQA, which serves as a central “arena” for effective interaction and collaboration between stakeholder groups.
- **“Procedural” level:** At this level, it is necessary that the complete independence of the external quality assurance agency be guaranteed in all accreditation processes. If the government or other interested parties feel the need for alterations and adjustments to be made either in the accreditation system or in the criteria, they can be made only at the “political” level of Quality assurance framework (QAF henceforth). Criteria or procedures can be modified when an accreditation processes are in progress. However, as a rule, these changes may not have a retrospective effect on the educational institution, which is already in the accreditation process, if nothing else is foreseen by the legal act.

Quality assurance is a mandatory process for or all TLIs irrespective of their legal and organizational form. Quality assurance is an officially adopted system aimed

at improving and strengthening the institution's performance as well as ensuring the enhancement of education quality and its compliance with NQF, state academic standards, and accreditation criteria.

The main processes are formulated within the framework of the RA Quality Assurance and are based on ESG.

## 2. Quality Assurance Principles and Framework

The Armenian Quality Assurance Framework of Higher Education is based on the following four principles of EHEA:

- TLIs carry responsibility for the quality assurance of the education they provide,
- quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes, and students,
- quality assurance fosters the creation of quality culture,
- quality assurance considers the needs and expectations of students including all other stakeholders and society.

The Armenian Quality Assurance Framework of Higher Education includes four different processes:

- external quality assurance,
- internal quality assurance,
- recognition of quality assurance agency by international organizations,
- information provision.

### 2.1 Internal Quality Assurance

Internal Quality Assurance (IQA henceforth) of TLIs is a key element of the Armenian quality assurance system. Internal quality assurance processes should be an integral part of the TLI's academic performance and should provide a basis for its enhancement and reinforcement.

The internal quality assurance policy is of utmost importance; it should reflect the basic mechanisms of the internal quality assurance system and promote the institution's accountability. Besides, it will help to create and foster quality culture, meantime promoting the full participation of internal and external stakeholders in quality assurance processes.

The policy is based on the principle of **continuous quality enhancement**, which includes four main operations thus formulating the driving principle of continuous quality enhancement: plan-do-check-act.

- Plan - establishing feasible priorities and developing a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives;
- Do - executing the action plan;
- Check- evaluating the realization of educational objectives on an ongoing basis;
- Act – reviewing the results achieved and reconsidering further steps and actions.

This is a principle through which a TLI assures itself and its stakeholders that it has consistently reached the highest standards possible in all aspects of its activities.

In the context of **accountability**, internal quality assurance is used as an academic performance monitoring mechanism. Learners, graduates, employers, and society are demanding high standards from TLIs. Quality assurance is a key tool for the TLI's performance, and ensures not only the fulfillment of the demands and needs of the society but also the maintenance of TLI autonomy.

To ensure the TLI's accountability and transparency, an external evaluation of internal quality assurance policy and procedures is required for TLIs to reach the quality determined by accreditation criteria. It is required that TLIs provide maximum clarity and precision of information and transparency of procedures in all aspects of their activities and functions. All the documents concerning the TLI's mission and performance should be published and made available to staff, learners and, all other stakeholders.

It is of no less importance that TLIs ensure the high quality of their academic programmes. TLIs must have programme development, implementation, and monitoring processes. Academic programmes should be consistent with the institution's mission and have clearly defined learning outcomes. It is important that all stakeholders be involved in programme development and review



processes. TLIs should give primary focus to students' active participation in the implementation of academic programmes.

A student-centered approach to learning is important mainly with regard to the rise in student motivation and active involvement in learning. Lecturers occupy a substantial role in providing students with a high-quality education. Consequently, TLIs must have transparent mechanisms for academic staff recruitment and professional development.

Great importance is being attached to student admission, progression, qualification awarding and recognition processes as well as documents outlining and regulating all these processes. It is important that the existing regulations be consistent with the institution's mission and objectives.

### 2.1.1 Quality Culture

Internal quality assurance processes should be directed to and foster the development and enhancement of quality culture in educational institutions.

In organizations and companies with a highly developed culture of quality, any service provider and service consumer feels responsible for the others in cooperation processes. Quality culture is the responsibility of not only those who are in charge of quality assurance, but also of all employees. However, each subdivision carries a direct responsibility for the quality of its own work. It is important that any work be done properly at the first attempt. However, if efforts are doomed to failure, the process, the output of which is not satisfactory, needs to be analyzed in order to prevent the repetition of the problem.

The quality culture approach implies checking and evaluating outcomes on completion of each stage of the process; this ensures feedback and eliminates the special need for outcomes assessment. Outcomes assessment by itself does not provide a solid base for detecting in what unit the mistake has been made; consequently, it becomes rather difficult to make further steps toward improvement. Educational institutions, where quality assurance processes are aimed at building quality culture, can display the following at all levels:

- transparent and active performance, compassionate attitude towards quality;
- willingness to carry out criticizing self-evaluation;
- internal regulations with clear-cut procedures and consistent implementation;

- coherently and distinctly defined responsibilities for quality control and evaluation;
- striving to get external and internal stakeholder opinion;
- striving to identify and disseminate best practices;
- performing appropriate problem-solution actions based on reliable information.

## 2.2 External Quality Assurance

External quality assurance processes have three essential aims:

- **Accountability and transparency:** Quality assurance processes ensure that in case of adherence to accreditation criteria and state academic standards, public interest is met and local, national and international publicity of TLIs' academic services and quality is guaranteed.
- **Control:** The institution not only controls the expenditure of its resources, but also demonstrates how it accomplishes the advancement of education quality by making an efficient use of resources.
- **Quality enhancement:** The institution conducts discussions and analyses with a view to promoting the effectiveness of quality assurance processes, the creation and sustainable development of quality culture.

In general, external quality assurance attempts to ensure that the TLI's operations answer the following questions:

- Does the TLI have procedures promoting "quality culture creation" and are they operating throughout the institution and for all academic programmes?
- Does the TLI periodically evaluate the achievement of its mission with regard to quality assurance and further development of academic programmes?
- Are the findings from quality assurance procedures used to improve the quality of academic performance, training services and strive to meet the needs of the learners?

- Does the TLI monitor the effectiveness of the services rendered to the learners?
- Is the TLI concerned with imperfections, drawbacks identified in the QA procedures, and does it take immediate action toward their elimination and improvement?
- Does the TLI provide its stakeholders with relevant and trustworthy information about the institutional effectiveness and quality of academic programmes?

While developing, implementing, and reviewing quality assurance procedures, the TLI should not be restricted in acquiring only quantitative data, which are easily measured, since this may divert attention from other important aspects of quality assurance, for the evaluation of which a qualitative approach of assessment may be required.

#### 2.2.1 External Quality Assurance Mechanisms. Accreditation

Various mechanisms of external quality assessment and assurance are being applied in EHEA; these being external audit, certification, assessment, accreditation, etc.

**Audit:** the audit is carried out on the initiative of the institution with the involvement of external experts. The audit is intended to evaluate the procedures, processes, and mechanisms of the TLI. In case of audit, the subject of assessment is not the correspondence with the aims but rather quality assurance procedures, mechanisms, and processes that are directed to the fulfillment of the mission and defined objectives.

**Certification:** This is a process by which the auditing body officially recognizes the TLI's adherence to predetermined quality requirements and usually grants some privileges to the target body. This process is mainly voluntary in nature.

**Assessment:** This process is generally applied at programme level. It is a process, which helps to verify that the TLI's functioning or new developed academic programme is commensurate with the quality required, meets the stated requirements, and can either continue or start its implementation.

**Accreditation:** Accreditation is carried out by a **state authorized body**. It is a process by which an external body assesses the quality of an institutional or specific academic programme with a view to officially recognize its compliance with minimum predetermined criteria and standards.

### 2.2.2 Armenian Approach

In Armenia, the external quality assurance is carried out through accreditation. The accreditation process is being performed by ANQA.

In the RA, the external quality assurance is in line with the institution's internal quality assurance processes, and it maintains the institution's autonomy. In addition, the external quality assurance is based on the information revealed by the internal quality assurance system.

The Armenian external quality assurance entails two types of accreditation:

- institutional,
- programme.

**Institutional Accreditation** is the state recognition of academic and QA procedures of the TLI, the requirements set forward towards academic programmes as ascribed to the TLI by the law, correspondence with state academic standards and institutional accreditation criteria. Institutional accreditation is a regular mandatory process both for private and public institutions operating in the territory of the RA. Institutional Accreditation allows to evaluate the effectiveness of TLI operations, as well as to find out whether the TLI is in compliance with its mission, whether it follows the policy of continuous improvement and enhances the development of implemented academic programmes.

Institutional accreditation is a prerequisite for Programme Accreditation.

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

As an outcome of accreditation process, the TLI or its separate academic programmes are positioned as accredited with a certain validity date.

There are three general phases or steps in the accreditation process:

1. **Self-evaluation** is an evaluation procedure of the institution or its academic programme, which is followed by a written report based on the standards adopted by RA Government.

2. **External Review** is a process whereby an expert panel carries out desk-review, which involves examining the self-evaluation report and all other important documents submitted by the institution. This is followed by a **site visit**, during which the expert panel members meet with institutional representatives in person: administrative and academic staff, students, graduates, employers and as an outcome, the panel prepares a written report, which includes recommendations on the areas to be improved.
3. **Decision-making** is a process of fact reviewing, decision-making and indication of areas in need of urgent solutions.

### 2.2.3 Accreditation Criteria and Standards

State Accreditation Criteria and Standards serve as a foundation and framework to guide institutions in self-evaluation as a basis for assessing institutional and programme performance and to identify needed areas of improvement.

The criteria are intentionally broad to allow for diversity and innovation since there is considerable variation among institutions with distinctive characters, essential differences in adopted philosophies and purposes. At the same time, the criteria are precise enough and ensure that their formulation incorporates the important elements of acceptable quality, that they have undergone preliminary assessment and are applicable. An institution or programme must be judged to have met the allocated criteria to merit a positive accreditation status.

**Criteria** are distinct and discrete statements, which identify or define in verifiable terms, the attributes of institutions or programmes

**Standards** are statements that identify the conditions necessary for an objective evaluation of the extent to which an institution meets each criterion.

The criteria, standards and performance indicators promulgated by the RA Government are reviewed and modified periodically to ensure they are up-to-date, valid, relevant and consistent with the emerging trends and recent developments in the field of quality assurance and accreditation.

#### Institutional Accreditation Criteria and Standards

The TLIs (while carrying out their self-evaluation) and the expert panel (while evaluating) are guided with the general principle that management operations undertaken by the tertiary education institutions must be oriented towards a continuous improvement of education, research and services rendered to the society and must be aim at:

- *Quality culture establishment*
- *Establishment of an organizational culture conducive to formation of transferable knowledge and skills enabling the graduates' functioning in an ever-changing environment*
- *Raising effectiveness of professional education and promoting accountability of the institution*
- *Promoting comparability and competitiveness as well as transparency of the service provisions at both national and international levels.*

Institutional criteria and standards are:

#### I. MISSION AND PURPOSE

##### CRITERION

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

- 1.1 The TLI has a clear, well-articulated mission that represents the institution's purposes and goals as well as is in accordance with the ANQF.
- 1.2 The TLI's mission, goals and objectives reflect the needs of the internal and external stakeholders.
- 1.3 The institution has approved mechanisms and procedures to evaluate the achievement of its mission and purpose and to further improve them.

#### II. GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

##### CRITERION

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

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

- 2.3 The TLI develops and implements short, mid, and long term planning consistent with its mission and purposes and has clear monitoring and implementation mechanisms.
- 2.4 The TLI conducts environmental scanning and draws on reliable data during the decision-making process.
- 2.5 The management of the policies and the processes draws on the quality management principle (plan-do-check-act).
- 2.6 There are mechanisms in place ensuring data collection on the effectiveness of the academic programmes and other processes, analyses and application of the data in decision-making.
- 2.7 There are impartial mechanisms evaluating the quality of quantitative and qualitative information on the academic programmes and qualification awards.

### III. ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES

#### CRITERION

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

- 3.1 The academic programs are thoroughly formulated according to the intended learning outcomes, which correspond to an academic qualification and are in line with the institution's mission and the state academic standards.
- 3.2 The TLI has a policy that ensures alignment between teaching and learning approaches and the intended learning outcomes of academic programs promoting student-centered learning.
- 3.3 The TLI has policy on students' assessment according to the learning outcomes and ensures academic integrity.
- 3.4 The academic programmes of the TLI are contextually coherent with other relevant programmes and promote internationalization and mobility of students and staff.
- 3.5 The TLI has policy ensuring academic programme monitoring, effectiveness assessment and improvement.

### IV. STUDENTS

#### CRITERION

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

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

- 4.2 The TLI has policies and procedures for revealing student educational needs.
- 4.3 The TLI provides advising services, opportunities for extra-curricular activities supporting students' effective learning.
- 4.4 The TLI has set regulation and schedule for students to receive additional support and guidance from the administrative staff of the faculty.
- 4.5 The TLI has student career support services.
- 4.6 The TLI promotes student involvement in its research activities.
- 4.7 The TLI has responsible body for the students' rights protection.
- 4.8 The TLI has evaluation and quality assurance mechanisms of student educational, advisory and other services.

## V. FACULTY AND STAFF

### CRITERION

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

- 5.1 The TLI has policies and procedures promoting recruitment of a highly qualified teaching and supporting staff capable of ensuring programme provisions.
- 5.2 The teaching staff qualifications for each programme are comprehensively stated.
- 5.3 The TLI has well established policies and procedures for the periodic evaluation of the teaching staff.
- 5.4 The TLI implements teacher professional development in accordance to the needs outlined during regular evaluations (both internal and external).
- 5.5 The TLI ensures the sustainability of the teaching staff according to academic programmes.
- 5.6 There are set policies and procedures for the staff promotion.
- 5.7 There is necessary technical and administrative staff to achieve the strategic goals.

## VI. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

### CRITERION

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

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



- 6.2 The TLI has a long-term strategy as well as mid and short-term programmes that address its research interests and ambitions.
- 6.3 The TLI ensures the implementation of research and development through sound policies and procedures.
- 6.4 The TLI emphasizes the internationalization of its research.
- 6.5 The TLI has well established mechanisms for linking research with teaching.

## VII. INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES

### CRITERION

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

- 7.1 The TLI has an appropriate learning environment for the implementation of academic programmes.
- 7.2 The TLI provides appropriate financial resources with necessary equipment and facilities as needed to achieve its mission and objectives.
- 7.3 The TLI has sound financial distribution policy and capacity to sustain and ensure the integrity and continuity of the academic programmes offered at the institution.
- 7.4 The TLI's resource base supports the implementation of institution's academic programmes and TLI strategic plan, which promotes for sustainability and continuous quality enhancement.
- 7.5 The TLI has a sound policy and procedure to manage information and documentation.
- 7.6 The TLI creates safe and secure environment through health and safety mechanisms that also consider special needs of students.
- 7.7 The TLI has mechanisms in place for the evaluation of the effectiveness, applicability and availability of resources given to the teaching staff and learners.

## VIII. SOCIETAL RESPONSIBILITY

### CRITERION

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

- 8.1 The TLI has clear policy on institutional accountability.
- 8.2 The TLI ensures transparency of its procedures and processes and makes them publicly available.
- 8.3 The TLI has sustainable feedback mechanisms for establishing relations with society.

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

#### IX. EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND INTERNATIONALIZATION

##### CRITERION

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

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

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

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

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

#### X. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

##### CRITERION

The TLI has an internal quality assurance system for promoting establishment of a quality culture and continuous improvement of all the processes of TLI.

10.1 The TLI has internal quality assurance policies and procedures.

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

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

10.4 The internal quality assurance system is periodically reviewed.

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

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

### Academic programme accreditation criteria and standards

The academic programme is continuously improved and is aimed at:

- *Establishment of a learning culture conducive to formation of transferrable knowledge and skills enabling the graduates' functioning in an ever-changing environment*
- *Raising effectiveness of professional education and promoting societal accountability*
- *Promoting comparability and competitiveness as well as transparency of the qualifications at both national and international levels.*

Academic programme criteria and standards are:

#### I. ACADEMIC PROGRAMME DESIGN AND APPROVAL

##### CRITERION

The academic programme is in concord with the Armenian National Qualifications Framework (ANQF), national qualifications descriptors, and state academic standards as well as is in line with the institution's mission.

- 1.1 The goals and objectives of the academic programme are in line with the institution's mission and purpose.
- 1.2 The academic programme forms part of institutional planning and resource allocation.
- 1.3 The academic programme is thoroughly formulated, according to intended learning outcomes.
- 1.4 The academic programme is in line with the ANQF, national qualifications descriptors, and state academic standards.
- 1.5 The programmes of the TLI are contextually coherent with other relevant programmes and promote mobility of students and staff as well as internationalization.
- 1.6 The programme learning outcomes meet the needs of the students and other stakeholders.
- 1.7 There are set mechanisms and procedures in place to ensure development, approval, monitoring and periodic review of the academic programme.

#### II. TEACHING STAFF

##### CRITERION

The academic programme ensures teaching staff with necessary professional qualifications to realize the goals of the academic programmes.

- 2.1 The teaching staff qualifications for the programme are comprehensively stated and there are policies and procedures promoting recruitment of a highly qualified teaching staff.
- 2.2 There are well-established policies and procedures for periodic evaluation of the teaching staff that foster to reveal and develop the professional needs of teaching staff.
- 2.3 The academic programme fosters the development and professional progress of teaching staff.
- 2.4 The permanent teaching staff ensures the sustainable implementation of the academic programme.

### III. TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICES

#### CRITERION

**The teaching and learning practices used within the academic programme ensure the achievement of intended learning outcomes.**

- 3.1 The academic programme clearly defines the teaching and learning approaches necessary to achieve the intended learning outcomes.
- 3.2 The academic programme ensures the implementation of progressive approaches accepted at international level.
- 3.3 There are set mechanisms evaluating quality of teaching and learning approaches.

### IV. STUDENT ASSESSMENT

#### CRITERION

**The academic programme provides assessment system that allows ensuring the students' progress as well as the formation and achievement of intend learning outcomes.**

- 4.1 The academic programme applies precise and reliable system that assesses the formation of intended learning outcomes the standards of which are available to learners and teaching staff.
- 4.2 The academic programme has clear mechanisms that ensure the achievement of intended learning outcomes aimed at awarding a qualification.
- 4.3 There are set mechanisms for the improvement of student assessment system.
- 4.4 The institution treats students fairly and equitably through clearly stated policies and procedures, taking into account the students' responsibilities and appeals.
- 4.5 The academic programme has clearly articulated policies promoting academic integrity and tracking for plagiarism

## V. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

### CRITERION

The programme ensures links between learning and research and creative activities.

- 5.1 The programme has a long-term strategy and medium and short-term programs that address its research interests and ambitions.
- 5.2 The programme promotes development and innovation through sound policies and procedures.
- 5.3 The programme emphasizes internationalization of the research activities.
- 5.4 The programme has well established mechanisms for linking and improving research and creative activities with education process.

## VI. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

### CRITERION

The programme promotes the quality educational provisions by creating an environment conducive to learning.

- 6.1 There are necessary resources for the implementation of the programme, which effectively support the implementation of its stated mission and objectives and create an environment conducive to learning.
- 6.2 The programme ensures that all students receive useful and regular information and advice to promote learning.
- 6.3 The programme has necessary methodological resources in accordance with its content.

## VII. QUALITY ASSURANCE

### CRITERION

The programme has internal quality assurance system that promotes its maintenance and continuous improvement.

- 7.1 The quality assurance is designed and operated to follow the societal needs and students' requirements, as well as to evaluate its activities.
- 7.2 There are well-established policies and procedures for programme internal quality assurance.
- 7.3 The programme collects reliable information about the implemented processes through feedback mechanisms, which is evaluated for the improvement programme's goals and processes.
- 7.4 The internal and external stakeholders of the programme are involved in the quality assurance processes.

**7.5** The programme ensures dissemination of good practice to other relevant programmes.

### 2.3 Cross-Border Recognition of the Quality Assurance Agency

In order to enhance cross-border external quality assurance in the fields of academic services, programmes and qualifications awarded, the external quality assurance agency should operate its activities in compliance with ESG (Clause 3: European standards and guidelines for quality assurance) requirements.

As part of implementation of its mission, main aims and objectives, the agency should carry out external quality assurance activities on a regular basis, should have official status, and should act autonomously and independently. The agency should employ internal quality assurance procedures to ensure the transparency and enhancement of its activities, as well as provide accountability mechanisms for its stakeholders. The external quality assurance agency should regularly undergo an external review to demonstrate the compliance of its activities with the ESG.

### 2.4 Information Provision

According to ESG, the external quality assurance agency should periodically disseminate information on the results and analyses of its activities, as well as developments of education system.

In Armenia, it is required that the information on tertiary education be made public. This policy aims at promoting transparency of education services.

With a view to making accreditation results available to public and international organizations, "State accreditation register" is developed in concord with the accreditation policy. The state accreditation register provides information about accredited institutions and academic programmes.

### III. ANQA ACTIVITIES

National center for professional education quality assurance, foundation (ANQA) was established on November 7, 2008 under the Government Decree (No. 1486). The main goal of ANQA is to support the TLIs to develop, disseminate, and enhance a quality culture by complying with the RA Legislation.

It is the responsibility of TLIs to ensure the high quality of education services rendered as well as the credibility and integrity of qualifications awarded. These stipulations require that TLIs develop internal quality assurance mechanisms effective enough to ensure that the quality of education in TLIs is in full compliance with the accreditation criteria of the RA. Those criteria incorporate recommendations and requirements set out in a wide range of international publications and national requirements including but not excluded to:

- EU Council Recommendation of 24 September 1998 on European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education (98/561/EC);
- “The European Higher Education Area”, Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education convened in Bologna on the 19<sup>th</sup> June, 1999 (the “Bologna Declaration”);
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (2005);

All the TLIs, regardless of their subjection and legal form of organization, shall be guided by the RA Accreditation Standards and Criteria for tertiary education and shall participate in accreditation processes.

#### 3.1 ANQA Mission and Strategic Objectives

In order to ensure the public accountability of autonomous TLIs, ANQA is also guided by the principles of autonomy and independence. First, ANQA ensures the independence of its activities from the RA Ministry of Education and Science and TLIs.

ANQA strives to promote public trust, social cohesion, equity, responsibility and competitiveness through periodic enhancement of the quality of educational services.

ANQA carries out its mission by:

- being receptive to the needs of national stakeholders through its mandatory institutional and voluntary programme accreditation;

- aligning its QA criteria and standards with international standards and guidelines;
- ensuring international recognition, thereby assisting to strengthen the position of Armenian professional education in EHEA;
- attaching importance to close cooperation with stakeholders in the process of developing the quality assurance system.

ANQA's approaches to quality assurance are outlined in the accreditation criteria, standards, and procedures established by the RA Government. These approaches are based on the following concepts: *public trust*, *social cohesion*, *equity*, *social responsibility* and *competitiveness*.

- ***Public trust*** - The concept of public trust is based on the core ideology of democracy whereby within the public lies the true power and future of the society. Therefore, ANQA, through its activities, shall ensure public trust in tertiary education.
- ***Social cohesion*** - One of the main tasks of education is socialization (i.e. development of respect for norms, values, and principles of a democratic society) on the basis of which social mobilization should take place. In this regard, the role of the quality assurance is to raise awareness of the society regarding their rights to quality education as those of a citizen of a democratic society. In particular, a robust quality assurance system will safeguard the society from under quality education by making educational provisions at tertiary level transparent for the society.
- ***Equity*** - Through equal approach to all the stakeholders in Armenian tertiary education, ANQA will strive to promote equal opportunities for all the segments of the society. One such example is providing equal treatment and enhancement opportunities to both public and private educational establishments.
- ***Social responsibility*** - Social responsibility implies that ANQA, as an organization, has an obligation to act to benefit society. ANQA will strive to achieve its mission through a robust and independent quality assurance system that will safeguard the society from under quality education.



- *Competitiveness* - ANQA will strive promoting recognition and competitiveness of Armenian tertiary education at international level.

The following are ANQA strategic objectives:

- to ensure that the TLI's activities and qualifications awarded are in line with state academic standards and accreditation criteria;
- to promote and foster continuous enhancement in the quality of tertiary education services by working in close cooperation with tertiary education stakeholders;
- to enhance the TLI's responsibility towards the quality assurance;
- to ensure the public availability of clear, transparent, and accurate information on the quality of the TLI's academic performance.
- to promote the dissemination of national and international best practices while evaluating the quality of available educational services.

ANQA ascertains that the implementation and maintenance of a quality assurance system is considered the TLI's great commitment and accountability. Since there is no "correct model" for quality assurance, each TLI is therefore expected to develop its own model for internal quality assurance, basing the model on the ANQA criteria, state academic standards, and European standards and guidelines.

### 3.2. ANQA Principles of Quality Assurance

ANQA strives to ensure the public trust in recognition and credibility through the maintenance of standards. ANQA quality assurance provisions are based upon the following principles:

- ANQA evaluation and quality assurance provisions should be comprehensible, transparent, properly organized, publicly accountable and financially effective.
- ANQA is accountable to the public for its activities.
- ANQA quality assurance criteria should be perfectly appropriate to the purpose of QA, and should be clear and comprehensible to the public.
- ANQA quality assurance provisions should be valid, reliable and

practicable, and decision-making should be in line with the set criteria.

- ANQA carries responsibility for the evaluation and validation of quality assessment of tertiary education and TLIs carry responsibility for the quality of education.
- ANQA quality assurance provisions should be accessible to all tertiary educational institutions.
- ANQA quality assurance provisions are intended to protect students from poor quality educational services and the outcomes should, by no means, adversely affect students.

As regards discussions and proposals directed to the enhancement of policies and procedures, ANQA has adopted an open and transparent way of functioning. ANQA stakeholders can actively participate in the development of quality assurance framework; however, they are not entitled to interfere in accreditation, assessment and decision-making processes for which ANQA applies strict regulations.

### 3.3. ANQA's cooperation with Stakeholders

ANQA policies underpin two levels of collaboration with its stakeholders: periodic investigations of stakeholder needs and activities purposefully designed to meet those needs and requirements. In order to address stakeholder needs more effectively, ANQA has set up stakeholder groups and defined the levels of cooperation with each of those groups.

#### Stakeholders

#### Cooperation

#### Tertiary education institutions

ANQA works directly with TLIs and their QA units to promote the development of their institutional capacities.

#### Rectors' Councils

ANQA periodically organizes conferences and workshops with the participation of Rectors' Councils from both public and private higher education institutions to jointly discuss the problems and issues the quality assurance system is facing and to promote the



creation and development of quality culture.

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Employers</b>                 | ANQA keeps on undertaking a number of activities aimed at getting the employers' unions and private entrepreneurs more actively involved in the quality assurance process.  |
| <b>Professional associations</b> | These units are either not fully formed in some fields or are not actively involved in tertiary education. ANQA is continuously taking steps to get the professional associations more actively involved in the quality assurance process.  |
| <b>Government</b>                | ANQA cooperates with the Government with regard to the enhancement of the quality assurance framework, which, more specifically, presupposes a periodic review of the QA policy for professional education and that of regulatory documentation.  |
| <b>Students</b>                  | ANQA cooperates with students at different levels: student unions, student networks, individual students. The mechanism, through which ANQA collaborates with student networks, is the "Student Voice" programme, whereby students' attitudes and viewpoints towards teaching and learning issues are discussed and analysed. |
| <b>Teachers</b>                  | ANQA directly collaborates with academic staff by periodically organizing meetings, conferences, and workshops with them.   |
| <b>Administrators</b>            | ANQA directly collaborates with TLI administrative staff by periodically organizing meetings, conferences, and workshops with them.   |

ANQA strives to enhance the quality assurance procedures through full consultation and discussion with its all stakeholders.

### 3.4 ANQA Recognition

To guarantee the recognition of ANQA quality assurance services at international level, ANQA periodically undergoes an external review, which is conducted by ENQA according to ESG.

Since 2009, ANQA has been an affiliate member of ENQA. In 2011, ANQA became a full member of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE henceforth).

In 2012, ANQA conducted the first self-evaluation, and in September, 2013 an international peer-review panel conducted a site visit to ANQA for an external review. The purpose of the review was to evaluate the extent to which the agency's activities complied with ESG.

After the site visit, a follow-up plan was developed based on the report provided by the experts. After the thorough implementation of the follow-up plan, ANQA will apply for the full membership of ENQA.

### 3.5. Data dissemination by ANQA

ANQA evaluates the effectiveness of quality assurance via cyclical manner. The outcomes of such reviews are made publicly available inasmuch as their dissemination is vitally important to gain the public trust. In this process, ANQA expects the participation of all stakeholders.

To make the accreditation results publicly and internationally available, ANQA runs the "State Accreditation Register" which is available on ANQA website.

ANQA publishes the conclusions of institutional and programme accreditation results as well as the decisions of the Accreditation Commission on its website. ANQA also publishes decisions on the expiration and withdrawal of accreditation status.

Besides, on a three-year cycle, ANQA conducts system-wide and other thematic analyses, the results of which are presented in different conferences devoted to the quality of education and are published on ANQA website.

### 3.6. State Accreditation Register

In order to make the accreditation results available to the public and international organizations, ANQA has established the "State Accreditation Register" (SAR henceforth) in compliance with the accreditation regulation. According to that regulation, the TLI's institutional capacity and professional



academic programme are considered accredited after they become registered in the accreditation register.

The register consists of two parts:

- 1) accredited educational institutions;
- 2) accredited academic programmes

In the sector entitled "Accredited Educational Institutions", there is sufficient information about the TLI to which accreditation status has been granted: the name of the institution, the legal and business address, the name and the country of the accrediting agency, the number and date of the decision made by the accreditation commission, the series, number, delivery and expiry date of the certificate, as well as RA Education Minister's decree number of the accreditation certificate.

In the sector entitled "Accredited academic programmes", there is sufficient information about the academic programme that has been accredited: the name and classifier of the academic programme, the educational institution, the name and the country of the accrediting agency, the number of the decision made by the accreditation commission, the series, number, delivery and expiry date of the accreditation certificate supplement, as well as the RA Education Minister's decree number of the accreditation certificate.

## IV. ACCREDITATION PROCESS

### 1. Institutional and Programme Accreditation

The primary purpose of state accreditation is to assure educational institutions, students, families, employers, and interested public that the institution operates with a high level of quality in education and is recognized by the Government.

Accreditation is a process by which educational institutions and academic programmes are recognized for their performance, integrity, and quality that entitles them to the confidence of the educational community and the public. Accreditation is granted for a certain period and guarantees that the institution or academic programme has the necessary capacity to provide education for a definite time span.

Accreditation entails that the institution maintains the standards that endow its graduates to gain admission to other reputable institutions of higher learning or to achieve credentials for professional practice.

In this respect, the independence of agencies that are held accountable for institutions to which they grant accreditation status is a major principle. It is the agency's task to avoid any conflict of interest in the accreditation process. Furthermore, transparency, comparability as well as legal certainty of accreditation procedures are attributes needed to engender public confidence in tertiary education.

### 2. Application for State Accreditation

An educational institution seeking accreditation status can apply to ANQA or other quality assurance agencies that are either registered on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR henceforth) or are full members of ENQA. Institutions implementing academic programmes with non-EHEA countries or branches of foreign institutions can apply to recognized accreditation agencies, the list of which is approved by the RA Minister of Education and Science. Any institution that has applied to an international accreditation organization must notify ANQA of the start of the accreditation process within five calendar days.

ANQA accepts applications for accreditation throughout the whole year. Applications are submitted according to the format of application form set up by ANQA and the Board of Trustees.

The educational institution appoints a Contact Person to care for the organizational and technical issues, as well as to cooperate with ANQA. The Contact Person's name and contact details are specified in the application.

It is mandatory for educational institutions applying for institutional accreditation to state those two educational programmes that will be introduced in the self-evaluation.

The procedure for the approval or rejection process of applications is adopted according to the Statute on Accreditation.

According to the 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> clauses to the Statute, ANQA decides whether to accept or reject the application.

The application may be rejected if:

1. the institution does not have a license: official permission to carry out educational activities;
2. the institution has not filled in ANQA's electronic questionnaire;
3. the institution has applied for programme accreditation without being accredited institutionally.

The compliance with the eligibility criteria and requirements being proven, ANQA makes a decision about accepting the application.

Within a week after the application has been accepted, the schedule and initial costs of the accreditation process are formed and approved by the institution and ANQA's Board of Trustees. Various accreditation-related costs and fees are evaluated according to the rates determined by ANQA's Board of Trustees. A paid service contract is signed by the institution and ANQA.

The contract shall include, at a minimum, the following:

- the beginning and the end of the process;
- three academic programmes under scrutiny: two programmes chosen by the institute, and the third one chosen by ANQA;
- service price, value-added tax (VAT) and payment schedule fixed in the contract.

#### 2.1. Application Withdrawal Process: Accreditation Termination

The educational institution reserves the right to terminate the accreditation procedure according to the payment service contract between the institution and ANQA. The institution's Rector notifies the ANQA's director of the termination

of accreditation in writing. The ANQA's director gives an order for accreditation termination and informs the Accreditation Commission about it. At the institution's request, they can be provided with peer review results and findings. ANQA provides those results if they are available at the time the accreditation process is terminated.

In case of withdrawal of the accreditation process, financial issues are regulated under the contract signed between the institution and ANQA.

### 3. Expert Panel Formation

To conduct an external evaluation of an educational institution or an academic programme, ANQA sets up an expert panel of 5 to 7 experts chosen from ANQA's expert database (<http://experts.anqa.am>). The selection of expert panels is made in compliance with the requirements set forth in the *Statute on Expert Panel Formation* approved by the ANQA's Board of Trustees.

According to the *Statute on Expert Panel Formation*, one of the experts is selected as the Panel Chair, who is responsible for carrying out the review process, guiding the expert panel performance, presiding at all the meetings, planning specific activities and following the guidelines set forth in this manual. Selection criteria, guidelines and requirements for expert panels, as well as the status and responsibilities of the Panel Chair and members are established in compliance with the *Statute on Expert Panel Formation* and are described in more detail in chapter 5 of this manual.

One of the important steps in the expert panel formation procedure is submitting the list of panel experts to the approval of the TLI under review.

ANQA submits a shortlist of experts (7 to 10 experts) to the Accreditation Commission. Then the expert panel is formed from the agreed list. The preliminary list of the panel is sent to the TLI for approval.

The TLI submits its agreement or objections in writing. Only by drawing on well-grounded justifications can the TLI or AP under review reject the expert candidacy in the shortlist provided by ANQA.

Having scrutinized the justification for expert rejection, ANQA makes respective changes in the composition of the expert panel and submits the final list to the TLI for endorsement. The final composition of the expert panel is confirmed by the ANQA's director. ANQA signs a payment service contract with experts.



Overall, the negotiation process may last about two weeks. At the end of the process if there is no agreement between ANQA and TLI, the contract is being extended up to 1 month until the agreement regarding the expert group is reached. If the negotiation process does not culminate in agreement between ANQA and the target TLI, the contract between ANQA and TLI is dissolved. To restart the accreditation process a new application should be submitted to ANQA and a new contract will be signed.

ANQA, by order of ANQA's director, appoints a coordinator from the ANQA staff to facilitate the process in general and take care of the overall process planning and implementation. The coordinator is responsible for accurate and timely facilitation of the procedures set up in the *Accreditation Statute* and explicated in this manual, starting from accepting applications for accreditation, drafting the final report and ending with making respective notifications in the SAR. For the full set of the ANQA coordinator responsibilities, see section V of this manual. The ANQA Director assigns the scope of his/her responsibilities. The ANQA coordinator is not a member of the expert panel and does not participate in the evaluation process.

#### 4. The Phases of Accreditation

Both, institutional and academic programme accreditations are carried out in three consecutive phases:

- **First phase:** self-evaluation (a written report of the institution's internal review) conducted by the educational institution;
- **Second phase:** site visit carried out by an independent external expert panel;
- **Third phase:** decision made by ANQA's Accreditation Commission regarding the granting or denial of accreditation status.

##### 4.1. Self –evaluation

It is recommended that the TLI's institutional capacities and academic programmes be internally evaluated annually. This allows for cyclical review of the planned activities, analyses of the results, detection of problems and areas in need of improvement. Based on the results of the self-evaluation, take appropriate measures as well as allocate resources for further improvement of the processes the TLI/AP engages in. The self-evaluation will help the TLI/academic

programme to reach the stated goals by using systematic and consistent approach, evaluate and improve the effectiveness of governance, control and risk management.

The accreditation process requires that institutions, as part of their compliance review, measure the levels of compliance of their missions, goals, strategies, processes and achievements. Within 12 weeks after the accreditation process has started the TLI should provide a self-evaluation report of its activities for the past five years.

Within the frames of institutional accreditation, the TLI is to conduct a self-evaluation: an internal evaluation of its institutional capacities and an academic programme under review according to "Criteria and Standards for Institutional Accreditation" of the RA Decree N 959-N, approved on June 30, 2011.

Through its self-evaluation, the institution should raise issues on which it needs advice. The more analytical the self evaluation is in nature, the more effective and forthright experts' assessments and recommendations will be in their attempt to identify the institution's best practice and problems.

To facilitate the self-evaluation process, ANQA has developed a series of guiding tools, which include but are not limited to:

- institutional and academic programme accreditation self-evaluation forms make up a constituent part of the State Accreditation Statute;
- a "Guide to Self-evaluation".

It is expected that the institution will elaborate in the self-evaluation the answers to four important questions regarding scheduled tasks or processes:

- What has the TLI planned on resolving the issues?
- What processes are actually being implemented?
- How does the institution make sure that its mechanisms are operating properly? (In what ways are the results intended to be checked and evaluated? What data have been collected? What analyses are available? What are the ways in which the results of the analyses are being applied?)
- What changes aimed at improvement, can be encountered in the TLI?

It is particularly important that the TLI show the extent to which the educational process is directed and suited to student learning needs and the development of professional qualifications.

It is essential that the institution clearly follow the self-evaluation format, the structure of the format, the sequence of separate parts and the content without any errors or omissions.

It is also important that the self-evaluation content and structure, references, graphs, and tables in both paper and electronic form be coherent and legible. In the electronic version of self-evaluation, references should be cited in a hyperlinked organization. The self-evaluation and evidence-based documents attached should be attested.

The self-evaluation can contain references to documents that are not attached to the self-evaluation as appendix, but are presented by the institution in the electronic questionnaire of ANQA. The self-evaluation can also refer to documents that will be introduced to experts at the time of site visits.

The self-evaluation report should be submitted in both English and Armenian. Along with the English version of self-evaluation, the institution should also provide the English translations of a number of related documents to be provided for international experts. The aforesaid documents being: the appendix list of self-evaluation, the statute of the institution, its structure, the mission-related document, the strategic plan, the academic programmes implemented and the qualifications awarded, the student performance assessment tools and criteria, the document containing the description of the quality assurance system and other documents that may be considered necessary.

Without appendixes, the institutional self-evaluation report should not exceed 100 pages and the number of appendixes should not exceed 15 pages.

As regards programme self-evaluation report, it should not exceed 70 pages and the number of appendixes should not exceed 10 pages. The Armenian text should be typed in Sylfaen font, 12 font size and interval 1.15, The English text: Times New Roman font, 12 font size and interval 1.15.

ANQA's decisions on accepting or denying a self-evaluation are based on accreditation laws and regulations. ANQA has a legal right to withdraw a self-evaluation if the self-evaluation:

1. doesn't comply with ANQA's standardized format;
2. has contextual, technical, structural, or other imperfections;
3. has unreliable data.

In such cases, a one-month time is being given to the institution to eliminate the inaccuracies and imperfections.

#### 4.2. External Evaluation (Peer-Review)

The aim of external evaluation is to externally evaluate the institutions infrastructure, processes, and also institutions individual academic programmes and make a report to present it to ANQA Accreditation Commission. The expert panel members function as **constructive peer reviewers**.

During the external evaluation, the expert panel performance is based on the principles of legality and independence and is guided by the following regulatory documents:

- State Accreditation Statute approved on June 30, 2011;
- “On establishing accreditation criteria for tertiary education” RA Decision N959, June 30;
- National Qualifications Framework, State academic standards and other regulatory documents.

The external evaluation evolves three main steps:

- **Desk Review**–The expert panel conducts an intensive review of the self-evaluation and the package of respective documents submitted by the TLI according to the ANQA’s template. Reviewers write out the missing information and issues that need to be clarified during the site visit.
- **Site Visit** –The expert panel pays a visit to the TLI to check on-site the state of affairs with regard to the units under scrutiny.
- **Report production** – The expert panel produces a report, which includes the analysis of the situation, commendations for the achievements and recommendations for further improvement.

##### 4.2.1 Desk Review

A desk review utilizes a process, which rates the adequacy of the self-evaluation report and respective documentation submitted by the TLI/AP to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of a TLI/AP according to ANQA criteria and standards. Desk review is a screening tool, which intends to facilitate the review of TLI self-evaluation within a relatively short period.

Once the expert panel receives the initial documentation from the ANQA coordinator, the expert panel examines the documents and completes a desk review report. During the desk review the expert panel endeavors to provide

answers to the following questions, which will feed into the draft preliminary report:

- Does the self-evaluation report provide an in-depth analysis of the situation drawing on the strengths and weaknesses of the TLI or AP?
- Does the self-evaluation report provide enough evidence for review assessments?
- Does the evidence stem from reliable sources?
- Does the self-evaluation provide a list of activities directed to the improvement of the areas in need?

Thus, within the frames of the desk-review experts are obliged to:

- identify the strengths and weaknesses of the TLI or AP;
- outline the areas in need for each guideline for further exploration and evaluation;
- outline the scope of activities to be carried out and a set of respective questions to be explored during the site visit;
- write out straightforward facts about each standard as well as facts that are subject to verification at the time of a site visit;
- write out the issues, documents which are not introduced sufficiently, and are therefore problematic and are subject to examination;
- highlight the areas that need further study and evaluation;
- carry out a preliminary assessment of criteria by relying on the self-evaluation and documents related to it.

The problems studied by the expert panel must be summarized and formulated in the form of issues concerning the criteria.

The ANQA coordinator should make sure that issues are related to the institution and do not express an expert's personal interest. For the expert panel to effectively carry out the evaluation of the TLI's performance and academic programmes, ANQA gives them a secure and solid base by providing the following documents:

- regulatory documents;

- guidelines and templates for the initial evaluation and for the preparation of the final report;
- timetable for the accreditation process and site visits;
- other required documents.

During the meetings designed for the desk-review, experts introduce and discuss their written findings on each standard, and the Panel Chair generalizes the results by the ANQA's template. After all the standards have been discussed the initial version of the expert evaluation report is drawn up and agreed with all the members of the expert panel. The ANQA coordinator and the Panel Chair are responsible for this procedure.

During the preparatory phase, in order to increase the efficiency of cooperation with international experts, their findings are being translated and provided to all the members of group; in addition regular Skype meetings and discussions are being conducted.

By the end of this phase, a number of issues that are to be examined at the time of the site visit, as well as the list of meetings, additional required information, its sources and the list of additional documents should have been clarified by the expert group.

#### 4.3 Site visits

##### 4.3.1 Preparatory visit

Prior to the site visit, the ANQA coordinator in consultancy with the Panel Chair, develops an agenda for the site visit and negotiates it with the TLI under review. The agenda should be comprehensive and flexible enough to ensure effective and efficient functioning of the expert panel. Thus, prior to the site visit, the ANQA coordinator first sends the draft agenda to the TLI's Contact Person by email, and, two weeks before the visit pays a preparatory visit to the target TLI along with the Panel Chair to negotiate and agree on the agenda of the site visit.

The preparatory visit has four main objectives:

- to negotiate the site visit agenda and its feasibility;
- to request further information on lacking or not sufficient items in the self-evaluation report;

- to check whether there are any sensitive issues of which the panel should be aware;
- to check whether the institution is ready for the visit (including but not limited to the space provision and other facilities).

During a preparatory meeting, the ANQA coordinator and the Chair meet the TLI Rector, the TLI Contact Person or the quality assurance team. The ANQA coordinator provides the institution under review with all the necessary information about the review process, including the site visit agenda and a predetermined list of documents compiled by experts for additional review.

In addition, the heads of the TLI subdivisions should be ready to provide the expert panel with all the necessary information and documents in case such a need arises. It is possible that the panel will prefer to study some documents before the visit. The Contact Person is obliged to prepare all the necessary documents and submit them as per the agreed period or deadline. The institution, on its part, presents the list of TLI's representatives nominated for each of the meetings. The introduced lists should contain more nominations than required in order that the expert panel can make selections. It is the responsibility of the target TLI to brief its staff about the purpose, scope and overall site visit process, as well as inform the staff of the likeliness of being approached by the expert panel for further inquiries. In addition, TLI should in advance ensure a possible participation of each nominated. This mainly concerns meetings with governing bodies and high-level representatives (management and academic council) and external stakeholders (graduates, employers etc.).

According to the site visit agenda, additional meetings may be convened either by the choice of the expert panel or at the request of the institution under review.

Prior to the site visit, the TLI should inform all the staff in advance that at the time of the site visit experts can pose any question to any staff member or student and that all the answers to those questions are confidential. The heads of the TLI subdivisions should be informed that they should provide the expert panel with all the necessary information, documents and their duplicates. For that reason, during the preparatory weeks, the Contact Person meets the TLI's staff and students.

If an educational establishment performs activities in different locations, and in the event the site visit takes a lot of time, then, site visits, on mutual agreement, can be arranged by the expert panel in those places. The ANQA coordinator, the

Panel Chair or any other member of the group should be included in this group. At the end of the preparatory visit, the ANQA coordinator provides the expert panel with the revised and complete agenda approved by the ANQA's director and the TLI's rector, as well as the list of TLI's nominated participants of the meetings.

Within a week, experts select site-visit participants by maintaining the participation of representatives from different groups. The coordinator sends the final list of participants (no more than 8 to 10 people for each meeting) to the TLI's Contact Person a day before the site visit.

#### 4.3.2 Site Visit

A site visit is part of the external evaluation process when the expert panel visits the TLI under review to evaluate verbal, written, and visual evidences during the accreditation process.

The main purposes of the site visit are as follows:

- to check the verification of the facts and the validity of the information specified in the self-evaluation;
- to acquire some additional information through meetings and surveys;
- to access relevant documentation on educational processes and procedures;
- to develop a clear idea about the general workings of the educational institution under review and its academic programmes.

Site visit lasts 3-7 days depending on the type of accreditation, the size and specifications of the institute under review, the availability of affiliates and subsidiary buildings, etc.

The site visit usually starts with a close meeting of the expert panel. The Panel Chair convenes this preparatory meeting:

- to discuss with an international expert the outcomes of the desk-review;
- to discuss the additional information acquired from the initial evaluation procedures;
- to plan, in detail, the content of each interview, meeting and focus group, as well as clarify any questions that may arise,
- to review the technical preparations for the site-visit.



In order to ensure the effectiveness of each activity, the expert panel is to prioritize the information to be obtained in each of them. It is the responsibility of the expert Panel Chair and the ANQA coordinator to arrange the process effectively. This entails, drawing on the expertise of the panel members, assigning sets of questions to particular experts for further exploration, and deciding on the order of the inquiry. The Chair is responsible for moderating all the meetings and verifying respective protocols.

#### 4.3.3 Types of meetings during the site visit

##### 1. *Agenda-fixed meetings with TLI representatives*

According to the fixed agenda, the representatives of the TLI arrive at the place reserved for the expert panel. The Contact Person of the TLI provides the presence of participants.

The Panel Chair takes the lead in conducting the meetings following the issues derived from the self-evaluation report. If need be, the team, with the permission of the Chair, may pose additional impromptu questions for the clarification of certain issues.

The ANQA coordinator is responsible for taking notes, writing the protocol, and keeping the fixed agenda. During the meetings, all the panel members make notes too, so that they can make use of them while making the final report.

During the visit, members of the panel should work in a team. However, if necessary, the panel can be divided into sub-study groups in their respective fields. In this case, the Panel Chair and the ANQA coordinator should lead different groups.

##### 2. *Meetings at the TLI's Departments*

Generally, meetings with the staff of the TLI's subdivisions aim to clarify issues raised during the desk-review and to make here-and-now observations at the place. In this case, expert panel visits the departments and conducts reviews or has interviews. Such meetings are defined by the agenda, but can be changed according to the decision of the panel. The interview can be done with any member of the staff, students, administrative staff and other stakeholders. The ANQA coordinator and the TLI's Contact Person organize meetings in the departments.

### 3. *Closed Meetings*

Close meetings are intended for the expert panel members only and aim to bring in the key findings and achieve common understanding and agreement on each of them, as well as initiate drafting of the final report. Closed meetings typically bear three different forms:

- **Daily close meetings** usually held at the end of each site visit day. Such meetings are to bring in the findings for the day as well as discuss and/or revise the questions that need further exploration. During these meetings further changes to or elaborations on the subsequent plans pertaining to the site visit may also be discussed. The close meetings also allow the panel members to bring in the findings obtained during the split expert panel meetings.
- **Ad-hoc close meetings**, which are arranged, in case of necessity, after a specific event organized within the frames of the site visit. The initiative for such an ad-hoc close meetings may stem from each expert.
- **Final close meeting** is held at the end of the site visit. Such a meeting is meant for the expert panel to sum up the findings and the achievements of the site visit as well as outline the final report. An important element of this meeting is to achieve the consensus of all the members of the expert panel on the preliminary assessment of the accreditation criteria and standards as well as the justifications of the assessment that are to feed into the draft final report. It is the responsibility of the expert Panel Chair to record the areas in need of further improvement as well as commendations for the TLI/AP accomplishments.

### 4. *Open Meetings*

Open meetings are envisioned in the site visit agenda to allow any member of the teaching and administrative staff or student to make an appointment to meet the expert panel to individually discuss specific concerns or express specific opinion of the process. Such arrangements are made between the TLI/AP Contact Person and the interested staff member and student during the preparatory phase, during the week before the site visit. An opportunity for open meetings should be announced by the TLI/AP under review two weeks before the site visit and it should be available to the students and staff members.

The ANQA coordinator conducts the registration for participation. Each participant is given an opportunity to have a short meeting with experts; the duration of such meetings should not exceed 15 minutes.

Those who register for the open meetings with the expert panel can submit a short written statement expressing any concern, opinion or suggestion to the expert panel.

The expert panel studies the findings obtained during the open meetings, analyses them in detail for relevance, and consider them in further discussions.

#### 5. *Closing Meeting*

The closing meeting is an exit session held at the conclusion of the site visit. An exit session is an opportunity for the expert panel to thank the institution for its efforts and to share with the institution the panel's initial observations about strengths and concerns, as well as information about next steps in the review and decision processes. This meeting is arranged for the expert panel members, the Rector of the target TLI and other staff members at the Rector's and/or Director's invitation. During the closing meeting, the Panel Chair delivers a brief verbal report on the expert panel's observations.

During the meeting, the staff involved in the accreditation process and the Rector of the TLI are invited to evaluate the organization and implementation of the external evaluation.

The records obtained serve as feedback for further improvement of ANQA approaches in general and procedures in particular.

At this point, it is important to note that no decision is presented and there is no room for discussion.

#### 4.4 Report production

The Panel Chair and the ANQA Coordinator are responsible for the preparation of the panel report.

The panel report includes **findings** on each standard that describes the TLI's current situation. The findings are brought out by the local and international experts from the self-evaluation report, the appendices as well as during the site visit. These findings are bases for making considerations on the criteria. The panel report includes an educational institution's or programme's **strengths** and **weaknesses**, as well as the expert panel recommendations for improvement.

The **considerations** prepared for each criterion are the expert panels' approach on the findings that are described per criteria. These considerations should bring out the key elements that approve the assessment of criteria and the recommendations. For that reason, the considerations should be comprehensive and based on facts.

Through the considerations, the expert panel's position on the criterion whether or not the minimal threshold requirement are met should become clear. The panel report does not include considerations (positive or negative) on individuals or their activities.

An expert report also contains improvement **recommendations** for each field of study. Recommendations should clearly indicate the problems that need solutions. The recommendations relate to a range of amendments, but not to specific actions aimed at amendments.

The feasible changes and expected results should be stated clearly enough for the TLI. Recommendations may be aimed at:

- strengthening the positive experience;
- further improvement;
- elimination of problems;

After an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of each criterion, the expert panel's **conclusion** about each criterion is being introduced.

Expert reports are being concluded by one of following evaluation phrases: **“meet the requirements of the criterion”** or **“does not meet the requirements of the criterion”**.

If the experts' observations of the TLI's general operations show that the TLI's performance needs an immediate overhaul or improvement, and the students' education is endangered, in this case, the panel's conclusion should be “does not meet the requirements of the criterion”. If the expert panel has not discovered any danger for students' education during the observations, then the expert panel's conclusion will be “meet the requirements of the criterion”.

Findings, considerations, recommendations and conclusion on each criterion included in the expert report should be set in one logical order in a way so that the logical system from facts to conclusion and from conclusion to facts will be identical and sequential.

“From conclusion to facts” observation will help to filter not required facts and concentrate on the TLI's key points.

The Panel Chair with the support of the ANQA coordinator makes the preliminary version of the expert report. This report is based on the desk-review report, the outcomes of the site visit, and the opinions of all the members of the expert panel.

The international expert's peer-review observations and recommendations are included in the panel report as a separate part, and aims at the strengthening of TLI's competitiveness and promoting its integration into the EHEA.

This preliminary version of the panel report is being sent to the TLI after all the members of the panel have come to an agreement on it.

If the TLI has any comments on or objections to the panel report, they should be justified by:

- giving a detailed explanation of the problematic points;
- presenting clear facts;
- referring to relevant sections of the expert report;
- changing the wording, where appropriate.

The only objections and comments that the TLI can make should be related to the findings and information about the TLI. Other clarifications or specifications are not accepted.

It is the ANQA Coordinator's responsibility to circulate the written response of the TLI among the panel members for the discussion of the comments and suggestions made by the TLI. The ANQA coordinator organizes a joint discussion with the expert panel and the representatives of the TLI.

The expert panel is to scrutinize the written response and make respective amendments in the draft of the final report. The ANQA Coordinator and the Panel Chair then finalize the report and circulate it among the expert panel for their endorsement. If necessary, respective changes are possible to be made.

The changes are made only in the special part of the panel report template after mentioning the TLI's comments.

After this process, the panel report is being finalized and presented to the ANQA Secretariat. The ANQA Secretariat, according to the procedure on "Formation and Operations of Accreditation Commission" and within the stipulated time, sends the report to the Accreditation Commission for the preparation of the decision-making session.

If the Accreditation Commission considers that there are not sufficient evidence and findings presented for the decision, the report is being returned to the expert panel for examination.

The final report is considered confidential before the decision is made by the Accreditation Commission.

#### 4.5 Decision making within the Expert Panel

The expert panel regularly organizes discussions and performs various estimates. During close meetings, the panel is coming up with decisions to evaluate the level of the compliance of the TLI's institutional capacity or academic programme with the criteria. The ANQA Coordinator and the Panel Chair should create a friendly and supportive business environment so that all the members of the panel will feel free to express their opinions and make impartial and evidence-based discussions.

ANQA's approach to decision-making is that decisions inside the panel should be made not by simple voting but based on consensus.

Voting is not conducive to cooperation and compromise; it reduces the involvement of individual members and their responsibility for the result; as a result, it can lead to a split within the panel and be a clog of effectivity.

Whereas, consensus process, in case applied precisely, can lead to the most acceptable solution.

The Panel Chair carries responsibility for the discussion and consensus process. The Panel Chair raises the question, organizes an exchange of ideas between the panel members in order to find out their attitude and to put forward possible proposals.

All the members should clearly express their agreement to the Chair's proposal, and silence should not be considered as a sign of agreement.

If consensus is not achieved, then experts who are not in favor of the proposal express their attitude by presenting possible risks and doubts. As a corollary of this, the proposal is being clarified, modified or completed; afterwards a new cycle of agreement process commences and continues until a decision satisfying everybody's needs and expectations is reached.

However, in the event when this procedure is not efficient enough to come to an agreement at the end of a particular discussion, the member, who has some objections to the decision, takes on responsibility for the final wording. For the next meeting, he is obliged to present all acceptable variants of wording or to substantiate his opinion by providing a solid base for his/her position. This approach to the agreement-reaching process practically ensures an objective majority opinion of the subject matter. In case of disagreement, a new discussion is to be organized.

#### 4.6. Follow-up and Timeline

According to ESG, it is vitally important from the perspective of accreditation process integrity that the TLI plan and implement its follow-up plan. At the same time, the follow-up is a sound basis for interim reporting of TLIs and gives a valuable insight into the next self-evaluation and accreditation. For this purpose, the follow-up and its timeline are required by the Accreditation Statute.

An educational institution launches the follow-up process immediately after receiving the expert panel's final report. The follow-up activities should be directed to overcoming the issues mentioned in the expert panel conclusion and the implementation of recommendations. Activities should be carried out within the frames of the mission and overall strategy of the institution and should not interfere with the institution's regular activities.

The draft version of the self-evaluation, the expert panel report, along with the main document package are submitted to the Accreditation Commission to start the decision-making process.

The follow-up is structured in compliance with each accreditation criterion and demonstrates:

1. how an institution perceives the nature of the problem raised in the framework of the criterion;
2. what approaches or methods an institution is going to apply for the solution;
3. what tangible results an institution is expecting due to solution of the problems.

The follow-up should cover several important issues:

- **Description of action** - actions that the TLI is going to undertake to implement the recommendations in the framework of the criterion.
- **Steps** - steps that the TLI is going to undertake to achieve the objective of the given action.
- **Current situation** - (mainly refers to the action implementation steps (although it can also be specified for the action)) - specifying the working phase of each step (e.g. planned, in progress, completed, etc.).
- **Responsible person or a team** (the position and the responsibilities in the team) - identifying who will be responsible for the implementation of each action and step.
- **Human and financial resources** - resources the institution is going to allocate for the solution to each problem.
- **Timeline** - determining a reasonable timeline for the solution of each problem or achievement of the outcomes of each step.
- **Outcomes assessment indicators** - determining the indicators through which an institution is going to assess the achievements (performance and quality).

Expert panel studies the follow-up in terms of being satisfactory and realistic:

- whether all the recommendation are taken into account;

- the extent to which the planning is logical;
- whether it's possible to achieve the intended outcomes with the planned resources in the indicated period.

The expert panel studies the follow-up plan according to the sufficient-realistic criterion. By this criterion, the group gives primary focus to the following issues:

- Have all the recommendations been considered?
- To which extent is the plan logical?
- Is the provision of the resources and time adequate to achieve the intended outcomes?

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

Within two months after the accreditation decision has been made, the institution considers the Accreditation Commission's observations and recommendations and submits the revised follow up and timeline to ANQA for approval.

#### 4.7. ANQA's Conclusion

Based on the educational institution's self-evaluation report and the endorsed final report, ANQA's conclusion is prepared within the timeframes fixed in the Accreditation Statute.

ANQA's conclusion includes the brief summary of desk-review and site visit results.

The content of this document should be based on the conclusions of the panel report.

ANQA's conclusion should be laid out in at most 10 pages, should contain information about the educational institution, the legal basis of the accreditation process and a brief overview of the accreditation process, including the TLI's or academic programme's strengths and weaknesses. It should also contain the recommendations and proposals made by the expert panel. Some parts of the conclusion refer to the expert panel evaluation of the compliance with the European Higher Education Area; some parts refer to the experts' evaluation of the TLI's follow-up plan. ANQA's conclusion also refers to rather controversial and complex issues that require urgent solutions and problem areas that require much-needed improvements.



ANQA Secretariat sends the accreditation document package and the ANQA conclusion to the Accreditation Commission and the TLI under review so that they get prepared for the Accreditation Commission meeting discussion. The Secretariat notifies the Accreditation Commission and the TLI of the date set for the meeting in due time.

## 5. Decision on Accreditation Process

The procedure on decision-making of the Accreditation Commission is regulated by the statute on “Formation and Operations of Accreditation Commission”.

### 5.1 ANQA Accreditation Commission

The Accreditation Commission is an independent, collegial, permanently operating body, which carries out its functions and exercises its powers in compliance with the “the Accreditation Statute of Educational Institutions Implementing Academic Programmes and their Specialties in the RA” and the statute on “Formation and Operations of Accreditation Commission” set by ANQA. Members of the Accreditation Commission may be experienced professionals, employers, and students from the sector of education, science, culture, industry, and administration. Candidates for becoming members of the Accreditation Commission are mainly nominated by educational institutions, employers unions, national students unions and other professional companies and associations.

The Accreditation Commission is made up through a rigid recruitment procedure, thereby ensuring legitimacy of its functions.

The composition of Accreditation Commission and the recognition of higher education qualifications by the key stakeholders and by the public are crucial elements and guarantee for the success of the Armenian accreditation system.

Accreditation Commission is responsible for:

- making a decision on institutional and programme accreditation based on the results of the TLI's self-evaluation and external evaluation;
- timely responding to quality assurance issues related to the ANQA accreditation process and methodology.

The Accreditation Commission operates within the principles of legitimacy and liberty, guided by the RA Government Decrees N 978-N on approval of the Statute on State Accreditation of Tertiary Level Institutions and Academic Programmes in the Republic of Armenia and N 959-N on approval of the RA Educational Accreditation Criteria, ANQA Charter, the procedure of formation

and operation of the Accreditation Commission and other legal and normative acts.

The Accreditation Commission carries out its functions and exercises its powers through meetings, which are initiated upon necessity at least four times a year. The Accreditation Commission makes decisions through an open voting system.

#### 5.2. Decision on Accreditation

Minimum two weeks before the Accreditation Commission meeting, the package of all the necessary documents is forwarded to the Accreditation Commission and the institution under review by ANQA.

The members of the Accreditation Commission observe all submitted materials; TLI's self-evaluation report, the expert panel report, ANQA conclusion, the institution's follow-up plan, and the expert panel's opinion of that plan.

This observation aims to check:

- the reliable accuracy of the implementation of ANQA policy and procedures by the expert panel;
- the level of adherence to RA Accreditation Criteria.
- the realistic nature of the institution's follow-up plan.

Commission meeting shall be valid if at least two thirds of the Committee members are present at the meeting. The Meeting is attended by the representatives from the institution under review, the expert Panel Chair, the ANQA coordinator, as well as a representative from RA Ministry of Education and Science.

During the session, the Expert Panel Chair introduces the outcomes of external review. TLI representatives can express their opinions and make observations, in case of need, elucidate the action plan and answer the questions posed by the Accreditation Commission members and the Ministry representative. After reviewing the documents and considering the opinions of the Panel Chair and institution representatives, the Accreditation Commission convenes a closed-door meeting, the results of which provide a basis on which the Accreditation Commission makes a decision on accreditation by majority vote. The accreditation decision may be one of the following:

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

- to deny accreditation.

At the end of the session, the head of the Accreditation Commission announces the decision on accreditation.

#### 5.3 Publication of the decision on accreditation

The final report becomes public after the Accreditation Commission takes a decision. Thus, the conclusions on institutional or programme accreditation approved by the Accreditation Commission along with the accreditation decision are published on ANQA's website within the timeframes set by the respective procedure in the Accreditation Statute.

ANQA's decision on accreditation is being published in the mass media.

In case of institutional accreditation, an Accreditation Certificate is handed over to the TLI and in case of programme accreditation but the supplement of Accreditation Certificate.

ANQA Accreditation Commission's decision along with the accreditation certificate template are submitted to MoES for the Minister's approval. In case of infringement of the accreditation process, the documents are returned to ANQA for reconsideration.

In case of lack of infringement, the accreditation certificate or its supplementary sheet is confirmed by the Minister and submitted to ANQA to make an appropriate record in the SAR.

#### 5.4. Inclusion in the State Accreditation Register

The institutional capacity or academic programme of a tertiary educational institution is considered accredited after it is registered in the SAR. The aim of the register is to provide information on accredited institutions and programmes to the public and international organizations.

After getting the accreditation certificate or the supplement, ANQA makes an entry in the Accreditation State Register and hands it over to the institution. ANQA's final decision on institutional accreditation is published on the ANQA website and in mass media.

In case of applying to international organizations with the aim of accreditation and not informing ANQA, the results of institutional or programme accreditation are not registered in the SAR.

#### 5.5 Reports on follow-up

According to the Accreditation Statute, it is an obligation that the accredited TLI carries out internal institutional evaluation once every two years. By saying

internal evaluation, the mid-term assessment of the areas in need for amelioration as mentioned in the expert report is meant. The assessment can be carried out both internally as well as through an external expert. The results must be submitted to ANQA.

In the accreditation decision, the Commission emphasizes the areas that need primary and urgent improvements and which must serve as basis for the forthcoming self-evaluation.

Upon gaining conditional institutional accreditation, an educational institution submits a written report to ANQA once every six months on follow-up implementation. Educational institutions should highlight the compliance with follow-up while preparing the reports and analyze the effectiveness of the implemented actions.

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

#### 5.6 The risks of rejection or granting conditional accreditation for TILs

The rejection or granting conditional accreditation leads to several consequences for an educational institution, which are set forth in the Accreditation Statute.

In case of a negative result of institutional accreditation, full tuition reimbursement in the form of student benefits allocated by state are terminated for the particular educational institution for all- academic degrees as well as for the financing of scientific and technical activities dating from the next academic year till the gaining of institutional accreditation.

In case of conditional institutional accreditation, an educational institution cannot apply for the programme accreditation and open a new specialty.

In case of a negative result of programme accreditation, full tuition reimbursement in the form of student benefits for the particular academic programme allocated by the state is terminated for all-academic degrees dating from the next academic year till the gaining of programme accreditation.

If the programme accreditation result is negative for a bachelor's programme, then full tuition reimbursement in the form of student benefits allocated by the state is terminated for the all three academic degrees dating from the next academic year until the gaining of programme accreditation.

#### 5.7 Appeal of a decision on accreditation

According to the accreditation procedure, an educational institution that has been denied accreditation is entitled to an appeal. Within a month after receiving an adverse accreditation decision, an institution may appeal to the

ANQA Board of Trustees against the Commission's decision on institutional or programme accreditation.

An educational institution appealing that decision must present written notification of its appeal according to the respective format developed by ANQA. The appeal must clearly and convincingly demonstrate adversely assessed criteria and/or alleged procedural violations according to the educational institution.

After receiving the appeal, ANQA Secretariat submits it to the head of ANQA Board of Trustees or turns it down.

The appeal may be turned down if:

1. filling dates were dismissed;
2. the format does not correspond to the respective form developed by ANQA;
3. there are no bases for appeal;
4. the appeal is not verified;
5. the appeal is signed by the person not having the authority and the license is not attached.

Within ten working days, after receiving the appeal, the head of ANQA Board of Trustees makes a new three-member list of expert Committee (Committee henceforth) from ANQA expert pool for additional research.

The Committee authorities are set up in accordance with "The Organization and Functioning of the Procedure of Accreditation Commission of ANQA".

A member of the Committee may be:

- an international expert in the field of education;
- a local expert in the field of teaching and/or education management with an in-depth knowledge of education legislation and experience of its application;
- a local expert with extensive experience in the field of one of the academic programmes which have been analyzed in the previous SER by the TLI. In case of professions regulated by the state (medical) an expert of the field is selected.

The experts involved in the first accreditation process cannot be included in the new expert committee. The staff of Expert Committee must be agreed with the educational institution.

ANQA Secretariat makes the action implementation schedule for additional research.

The appellant presents the self-evaluation of appealed standards to ANQA by the approved format.

The new self-evaluation must not contain references to the previous self-evaluation, expert report or to the Accreditation decision. The modernized supplements may be attached to the new self-evaluation.

The Expert committee examines the educational institution's self-evaluation and the documents attached, makes a list of expert meetings. An Expert visit may last no more than two days.

The Committee may meet with the Accreditation Commission, as well as with the members conducting the previous accreditation process: experts and the coordinator.

The Committee submits the written results of the research to the ANQA Secretariat in the format of Expert report.

ANQA sends the preliminary version of the expert report to the educational institution to get the written agreement or comments and recommendations about facts on the report. Expert Committee discusses the comments and suggestions with the educational institution.

If need be, the Committee makes changes to the draft version and sends the final report to ANQA. ANQA Secretariat sends the complete documentation package of appeal (application, new self-evaluation and expert report) to the ANQA Board of Trustees by e-mail.

After getting the final expert report, ANQA, within two months, convenes a Commission meeting to make a new decision.

Costs associated with the additional studies are covered by the appellant according to the rates set by ANQA Board of Trustees.

Ten working days after receiving the appeal, a contract is being signed between the TLI and ANQA in accordance with the schedule and preliminary expenses of additional examinations to be undertaken.

The Commission's decision cannot be appealed to ANQA again.

#### 5.8 Revocation of state accreditation

According to the Accreditation Statute, ANQA can make a decision on revocation of state accreditation if:

1. the date of accreditation certificate validity is expired;
2. functioning of an educational institution is terminated by the RA Legislation;
3. licensing is considered as not being in force.

ANQA posts the decision constituting the revocation of state accreditation on its website and makes a respective notification in the SAR.

## V. GUIDELINES AND CRITERIA FOR PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

With a view to implementing accreditation processes as a key component of external quality assurance, ANQA makes use of the services of highly qualified experts, who carry desk-review and site visit, form the basis on which they submit their final report.

The selection of peer-review experts is one of the most important steps of the accreditation process to be taken, inasmuch as the recognition of accreditation decisions by education stakeholders mainly depends on the level of adherence to both the selection criteria of external experts and the implementation of established procedures. The European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA henceforth) (2005) set down the following principles for the selection process of experts:

- any decision regarding the composition of an expert panel shall be based on the rules and regulations established by an accreditation organization, and shall comply with legislative acts. The expert selection process shall be fully transparent;
- institutions undergoing accreditation shall be given an opportunity to lodge an objection against the nomination and selection of experts;
- the accreditation decisions shall be made by the accreditation organization and not by the expert panel;
- experts shall be independent and in a position to make unbiased judgments;
- experts shall work in close liaison and carry out review procedures commensurate with the objectives of the accreditation.

Thus, ANQA expert selection criteria and procedures are consistent with the ECA standards.

The peer-review panel is made up of specialists and students who are selected according to clearly defined procedures developed by ANQA and ratified by the Board of Trustees. The panels are composed of local and international experts who are well-known highly qualified specialists with sufficient expertise in the implementation of quality assurance processes.

A large number of factors come into play in the selection procedure of experts: they are selected according to the adequate degree of spoken and written

communication skills (communication skills both in speech and in writing) as well as skills at conducting meetings and focus group discussions, analyzing and synthesizing a wide range of information. In choosing an expert, there are also a number of important personal characteristics to consider, especially the ones that will ensure an unbiased and objective evaluation.

To effectively apply the above-mentioned skills and competences in accreditation processes, ANQA periodically conducts trainings for expert panel members.

The expert recruitment, selection, training and development policy, as well as expert selection and panel composition regulations are publicly available through ANQA website.

ANQA assures the TLIs under review of the usefulness and effectiveness of the quality assurance processes through:

- instilling confidence that expert panel members and facilitators are properly trained to undertake review work professionally and skillfully;
- providing consistency in the use of the same review methods for all institutions;
- providing institutions with clear and comprehensible review results.

## 1. Expert Panel Composition

### 1.1 Requirements for Experts

ANQA forms two panels of experts to perform institutional and programme accreditation processes.

Expert panels are composed of:

1. academic staff representatives;
2. representatives from the field of education management;
3. international experts;
4. students;
5. representatives and employers from professional or specific field of industry,

International experts are selected from the expert pool of an authoritative international accreditation (quality assurance) agency or from the international expert pool of ANQA.



*Academic staff representatives should:*

- have experience in academic programme assessment and/or institutional or programme accreditation;
- have proven professional expertise;
- have experience in review processes and education quality assessment;
- have experience in education management (desirable);
- have international experience in teaching, research or evaluation;
- have experience in academic programme development, monitoring, methodology and review;
- participation in trainings on accreditation or audit procedures.

*Representatives from the field of education management should:*

- have experience in professional review processes;
- have experience in policy and procedure development processes;
- have international collaboration experience;
- participate in trainings on accreditation or audit procedures;

*Students engaged in review panels should:*

- be either senior undergraduate students or Master's students with some experience in social activities;
- have participation in trainings on accreditation or audit procedures.

*Representatives from professional or specific field of /industry should have:*

- experience in professional review processes;
- experience in employing and working with university graduates (in the field of human resource management);
- experience in review processes and education quality assessment;
- international experience,
- experience in education management;

- as well as, participation in trainings on accreditation or audit procedures.

Experts involved in the accreditation of higher education institutions should have recognized qualifications on the level of a PhD or status of an assistant and associate professor or higher. For the accreditation of institutions, delivering vocational education and training (VET) experts should have at least recognized qualifications at the Master's level or should be certified education specialists.

### *Language Proficiency*

Local experts should be fully proficient in both spoken and written Armenian. At least one of the local experts in the panel should demonstrate an appropriate level of proficiency in the English language.

*Experts should also have knowledge and skills in applying institutional and programme accreditation criteria and standards.*

All experts should have:

- an in-depth knowledge of the RA accreditation criteria and standards, policies and procedures and their practical application skills;
- an in-depth knowledge of the ESG and their practical application skills;
- an in-depth knowledge of ANQA evaluation methods;
- necessary skills at making reasonable interpretations and practical applications of accreditation criteria appropriate for a specific situation.

#### 1.2. Experts' Personal Qualities

*An expert should:*

- be perfectly willing to consider alternative ideas and points of view;
- make sound and impartial judgments, demonstrate analytical skills, and have tenacity;
- have the ability to perceive situations in a realistic way through understanding complex operations and the role of individual units within an organization;
- be able to prioritize;

- be honest, fair, sincere and discreet;
- be diplomatic – tactful in dealing with people;
- be observant – perfectly aware of the activities, customs of the surroundings;
- be able to make right smart decisions, based on reasonable conclusions, and thorough analyses;
- be self-reliant; be able to act independently while interacting effectively with others.

*Experts should possess the aforesaid qualities so that they can:*

- collect true facts, relevant details, sound bases, and supporting evidence;
- remain loyal to the purpose of the assessment;
- perform the assessment process without any deviation;
- react effectively in stressful situations;
- arrive at conclusions generally accepted by all the members of the panel and base those conclusions on objective evidence collected during assessment processes;
- remain loyal to confirmed conclusions even if they are under pressure to change them, especially when there are no reasonable grounds.

## 2. Expert Panel Functions

The expert panel conducts a review based on the accreditation criteria of the RA and the established requirements and procedural principles.

The expert panels should:

- review and evaluate the institution's self-evaluation report and the attached documentation package;
- conduct a site visit at the target TLI;
- check the extent to which the documents and procedures comply with the requirements imposed on the institution;

- prepare a final report, basing one's judgments on the initial evaluation of the self-evaluation and the documentations attached to the self-evaluation as well as on the findings and results of the site visit;
- submit the final report to ANQA;
- provide necessary information required by ANQA Accreditation Commission;
- express their views on the follow-up plan submitted by the TLI.

### 3. Expert Panel Roles and Responsibilities

In order to ensure an equitable and fair distribution of responsibilities among the expert panel members, one of them is appointed as the Panel Chair. Below are briefly introduced the roles and responsibilities of the panel members, the Panel Chair, and the coordinator.

#### 3.1 The Role of expert panel members

Each member of an expert panel is responsible for:

- conducting a desk-review of the self-evaluation report and the respective appendices,
- providing an initial evaluation of the institution's self-evaluation report according to ANQA format;
- participating in the discussions on the experts' initial evaluation of the self-evaluation report;
- participating in the discussions of the issues derived from the self-evaluation report, as well as in the development of a site visit agenda;
- conducting a site visit, participating in all site visit meetings, close meetings, and decision-making processes;
- during the site visit, addressing the questions and issues assigned by the coordinator or the Panel Chair;
- participating in the preparation of the preliminary version of the panel report;
- participating in the discussions of the institution's remarks and suggestions on the preliminary version of the panel report;
- participating in the preparation of the final panel report;

- participating in the evaluation process of the institution's follow-up plan developed on the basis of recommendations made by the expert panel and stating their opinions on the plan according to ANQA format.

Experts are not allowed to express their impressions during the site visits, make comparisons or announce their own findings, nor are they allowed to use such terms as satisfactory, unsatisfactory, good, or bad.

### 3.2 The Role of the Chair

The Panel Chair conducts and leads the whole review process and carries responsibility for both methodology and quality of the work of the expert panel.

The Panel Chair is responsible for:

- organizing discussions of an initial evaluation made by each expert;
- preparing desk-review report on the self-evaluation submitted by the educational institution;
- conducting a preparatory visit to the educational institution with the ANQA coordinator to agree upon the site-visit agenda;
- presiding over all the meetings of the site visit, both open and closed, and guide all decision-making processes;
- keeping to the agenda, maintain the standing orders (follow the duration of the meetings, the presentation and clarification of all the issues raised by the panel members);
- ensuring an optimal distribution of work between experts and provide them with assignments;
- conducting organizational work;
- preparing the preliminary version of the expert panel report with the coordinator's assistance and agree upon the results with all the panel members;
- organizing a discussion on the institution's remarks and suggestions on the preliminary version of the panel report and prepare the final report;
- organizing the evaluation process of the institution's follow-up plan developed on the basis of recommendations made by the expert panel and state his/her opinion on the plan according to ANQA format;
- participating in the preparation of ANQA conclusion about the accreditation of TLI or Academic Programme;
- participating in the Accreditation Commission meetings, present the results of the expert review and give clarifications.

### 3.3 The Role of the Coordinator

The coordinator consolidates the link between the expert panel and the TLI under review. He/She is a guarantor of the accreditation methodology. The coordinator is not considered a member of the expert panel; he does not make evaluations, nor does he make judgments on the TLI performance or AP.

The coordinator is responsible for:

- the smooth flow and effective implementation of all procedures (holding discussions, regulating misunderstandings);
- the reconciliation of the initial expert panel with the educational institution;
- the systematization of the whole review process and the protection of the rights of all panel members;
- the analysis of situations; (in case of need to come up with right decisions and solutions)
- drawing up the site visit agenda along with the Panel Chair and come to an agreement with the TLI about it;
- arranging preparatory site visit to the TLI, check the state of readiness of the TLI for the site visit ( allocated working room, required equipment, etc.);
- along with a Contact Person from the TLI, take responsibility for the arrangement of all the meetings, the maintenance of the agenda, as well as the presence of selected participants as per a site visit plan;
- assisting the Panel Chair in preparing the initial expert panel report;
- arranging discussions on the TLI's remarks and objections with both expert panel members and TLI representatives;
- assisting the chair in the process of finalizing the expert panel report;
- providing the TLI with follow-up consultancy on the elimination of imperfections and flaws indicated in the report and organize the panel's evaluation process of that plan;

- participating in the preparation of ANQA conclusion about the results of the accreditation process;
- ensuring the high quality of the work and procedures carried out by the expert panel.

In special cases, institutional accreditation procedures may be handled and systematized by two coordinators.

On completion of the site visit, the coordinator should have all the main documents which will be necessary to make the final report. The coordinator should have all the notes of the experts as well.

#### 4. Expert Recruitment and Selection

With the purpose of recruiting competent and reliable experts, ANQA adheres to the experts selection statute of the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation, in which the requirements for experts, as well as the nomination and selection procedures of experts are clearly defined.

According to that established statute ANQA's announcement of candidate expert recruitment is being publicized through ANQA website ([www.anqa.am](http://www.anqa.am)), and mass media; it is also being sent to co-partner organizations. Candidate experts can be nominated by:

1. Tertiary level institutions of the RA;
2. National Academy of Sciences of Armenia (NAS RA) and other scientific- research institutes;
3. Ministry of Education and Science of RA and its subdivisions;
4. Armenian professional associations;
5. Union of Employers of Armenia;
6. TLI Alumni Unions
7. Individuals.

Student-expert candidates are nominated by student unions, councils, and other student organizations registered in Armenia, as well as TLIs.

Candidate experts are sending their CVs to [info@anqa.am](mailto:info@anqa.am) and [experts@anqa.am](mailto:experts@anqa.am) e-mails.

The initial selection of candidate experts is being made by the committee formed from ANQA's experienced staff, who base their selection on the data presented

in CVs. Selected expert-candidates are provided with a “Login” and “Password” to fill in the electronic survey of ANQA’s expert’s database (<http://experts.anqa.am>).

Based on the electronic survey data, expert-candidates are called for an interview during which they submit all the necessary documents validating the information provided by them. Candidates selected as a result of an interview are included into the expert pool, which ensures their participation in the trainings organized by ANQA.

Candidates who successfully complete the trainings acquire the status of an external expert and are registered in the expert pool by ANQA.

An expert can leave ANQA’s pool of experts according to his/her application for voluntary resignation from that position. An expert may face dismissal for not conscientiously fulfilling or periodically neglecting his/her duties and responsibilities as an expert, as well as for violating the terms of contract with ANQA.

### 5. Expert Trainings

Before being selected by ANQA, all expert-candidates undergo an extensive orientation period after their nominations are approved by the TLI under review.

#### 5.1 Initial Trainings

Initial trainings provided by ANQA are designed to instill confidence among candidate experts so that they will be able to perform proper assessments on their own.

Each expert panel member undergoing an initial training is entitled to:

- be provided with appropriate induction activities and detailed information about ANQA, its mission, values, accreditation criteria and standards;
- acquire professional skills necessary to carry out or facilitate quality assurance processes;
- get assistance from ANQA staff to acquire sufficient confidence in his/her ability to undertake personal assessments;
- get training materials and resources for further use;
- get all the documents necessary to conduct reviews;



- have an opportunity to be informed about ANQA's work and new publications via e- mail;
- have an opportunity to make his/her own contribution to the evaluation of applied methods and techniques.

### 5.2 Ongoing Trainings

ANQA provides 'refresher' training sessions and periodic short training courses for the experts whose nominations have been approved by the TLI under review. These trainings are designed to keep experts updated on new and evolving procedures and requirements. Such trainings are conducted by ANQA professional staff, coordinators, and sometimes by the most qualified experts before the site visit.

These training activities are being held on a regular basis; they promote effective interaction and fruitful collaboration among experts. For this purpose, ANQA periodically organizes meetings with experts, in case of need; they set up discussions on controversial issues relating to different fields of study. This promotes consistency in assessment and improvement in quality assurance processes. It is therefore required that experts periodically attend these training activities in order to maintain and develop the skills they have acquired, to broaden their experience and share it with others, as well as to become trainers themselves.

### 6. Monitoring and Assessment of Review Processes

The proper assessment of expert performance is of vital importance for ANQA. To ensure the successful operation of accreditation processes the work of experts is periodically monitored and evaluated. ANQA has clearly developed procedures for monitoring and evaluating the performance of experts.

The work of new experts is being monitored and evaluated by ANQA staff or experienced experts. The evaluation is being carried out according to standards reflecting ANQA's policies and procedures. The analysis results of expert reports, as well as the feedback from educational institutions are being used as part of expert performance evaluation.

### 6.1 Ongoing Evaluation and Monitoring Methods

ANQA monitors the ongoing performance of their experts in the following ways:

- **formal observation.** The internal quality assurance specialist from ANQA or the specialist in charge of the monitoring process observes the experts' performance during the site visit. These observations form the basis on which the specialist makes his/her remarks and recommendations and states them in the report. This evaluation helps experts to take necessary steps towards the improvement of their performance.
- **Reviewing expert reports.** ANQA coordinators and staff analyze the reports and documents produced by the experts from different perspectives (e.g. desk-review forms, evidence collected during the site visit etc.) to make sure that the compliance with ANQA's requirements and the clarity of writing are guaranteed. Such reviews are carried out systematically inasmuch as they provide effective expert feedback.
- **Collecting feedback from institutions.** Collecting oral or written feedback from institutions is one of the main tools to supplement the expert performance evaluation programme. After all the meetings scheduled by the site visit agenda are held, the TLI participant representatives fill in a survey questionnaire whereby they assess the expert panel's work. The analysis of the survey results serves a basis for the assessment and further enhancement of the effectiveness of experts' performance.
- **Collecting feedback from panel members.** Oral or written feedback from experts is also a useful tool to evaluate the expert's performance thoroughly insofar as different points of view are taken into consideration in the assessment process.
- **Casual observation.** This observation may take place in actual review processes or in other situations, such as group meetings and trainings, in which experts' evaluation skills or personal qualities are being observed.

### 7. Conflict of Interests, Confidentiality and Integrity

Before experts undertake the study or assessment of documentation submitted by the educational institution, they must disclose any professional, financial and work-related interest that could be construed as a conflict of interest. They must

inform ANQA in writing 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. Candidates for an expert panel are considered to have a possible conflict of interest if they:

- have financial, relative or any other similar relations with a particular educational institution or with its administrative staff which prevent them from making independent and impartial judgments;
- carry out some functions in the institution under review;
- have close cooperation with the institution under review.

**Confidentiality:** Experts are expected to sign an agreement of confidentiality ensuring that all the information received from and about the institution is held in strict confidence and no confidential information should be disclosed without the written permission of the institution. However, it can be disclosed without any consent if the law requires such information to be publicized.

**Integrity:** ANQA is taking a number of steps towards integrity to ensure that experts are not subjected to undue influence or pressures that might affect their integrity.

**Impartiality:** Experts must act objectively and be free from any undue commercial, financial or other pressures which could compromise impartiality.

**Consultancy:** Expert consultancy is not allowed by ANQA except the ones that are officially formulated in the expert report.



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## VI. EXTERNAL EVALUATION EXPENSES

According to the Statute on Accreditation, it is the responsibility of the TLI to cover all the expenses related to the accreditation process, which is based on a paid-service-provision contract signed between the applicant TLI and ANQA.

The external evaluation fee is defined by ANQA depending on the nature and duration of the external evaluation, the number of experts involved, and other conditions. The external evaluation fee is calculated on case-by-case basis and is endorsed by the ANQA Board of Trustees.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| ANQA   | National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance, Foundation             |
| AP     | Academic programme   |
| ECTS   | European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System                                     |
| EHEA   | European Higher Education Area   |
| ENQA   | European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education                       |
| EQAR   | European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education                             |
| ESG    | Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area |
| HEI    | Higher Education Institutions  |
| MES    | Ministry of Education and Science  |
| MPEI   | Middle Level Professional Education Institutions                                     |
| NAS RA | National Academy of Sciences of Armenia  |
| NQF    | National Qualifications Framework  |
| QA     | Quality Assurance  |
| QAF    | Quality Assurance Framework  |
| RA     | Republic of Armenia  |
| SAR    | State Accreditation Registrar  |
| TLI    | Tertiary Level Institutions  |

