

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



**EXPERT PANEL REPORT
INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION OF GEGHARKUNIK REGIONAL STATE COLLEGE**

Yerevan – 2023

INTRODUCTION

The institutional accreditation of the the Gegharkunik Regional State College (hereinafter referred to as GRSC, TLI, College) was carried out based on the application submitted by the institution. The process of institutional accreditation is organised and coordinated by "National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance" foundation (hereinafter referred to as ANQA), guided by the Statute on State Accreditation of Tertiary Level Institutions and their Academic Programmes in the Republic of Armenia approved by the RA Government Decree N 978-N of June 30, 2011 and by the RA Government Decree N 959 on the Approval of the Accreditation Criteria for Tertiary Education of June 30, 2011.

The external review was carried out by the independent expert panel formed in accordance with the requirements set by the Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel of "National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance" foundation.

The institutional accreditation is aimed not only at external evaluation of quality assurance but also at continuous enhancement of the management quality and academic programmes of the institution. Special emphasis was placed on the cooperation between the institution and employers and its impact on the implementation of the education process.

The herby report comprises the results of the evaluation of the institutional capacities of the TLI according to the State Accreditation Criteria and Standards.

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION

EXPERT PANEL EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES ACCORDING TO THE RA ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

The external review of the Gegharkunik Regional State College was carried out by an independent expert panel formed in accordance with the requirements set forth in the Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel. The evaluation was conducted according to the 10 criteria of institutional accreditation approved by the RA Government Decree N 959-N of June 30, 2011.

While carrying out the evaluation, the expert panel took into consideration that the GRSC is a secondary vocational education institution, with a mission of creating, transferring and disseminating knowledge, shaping national mindset of students, equipping citizens to adapt their own actions and decisions to national interests, preparing qualified specialists in line with the requirements of the economy and the labour market, ensuring year-by-year accelerating growth of high-level educational achievements, developing the potential of regional and international cooperation.

The expert panel recognized the importance of the GRSC as a secondary vocational education institution, for the Gegharkunik region and, thereby, for the Republic of Armenia, meanwhile taking into account the regional peculiarities. The expert panel also considered the fact that GRSC is in the accreditation process for the first time.

The GRSC plays a unique and vital role in meeting the demand for the secondary vocational professions in the regional labour market. It also serves as a bridge to ensure continuous education within HEIs. However, the GRSC has not yet managed to fully engage the stakeholders in shaping its strategic directions and uncovering new opportunities. Particularly, a strong connection with employers can open up new development opportunities, crucial for the continuous improvement of the institution.

Despite the introduction of some internal quality assurance documents at the GRSC since 2016, the institution views itself as still in the early stages of instilling a quality assurance culture. Additionally, a clear outline and concepts for the quality assurance system have not yet been established. The GRSC conducts some surveys. However, there are no analyses based on them that could be applied for reforms.

The GRSC has developed a strategic development plan. However, there is a noticeable detachment between goals and actions. Quality assurance processes do not appear to noticeably influence the governance processes. Although there is an accountability mechanism, it is not linked to the strategic plan. The lack of financial and other resources for the goal implementation is evident, which is also a consequence of not ensuring possible financial sources.

Due to the above-mentioned factors, the expert panel concludes that though the GRSC has taken some steps towards quality assurance and process management. However, opportunities, resources, and risks are still not clearly considered in the planning of processes and development. Additionally, development-oriented processes are absent.

The GRSC's academic programmes (hereinafter referred to as "Aps") are designed in accordance with the RA National Qualifications Framework (hereinafter referred to as "NQF") and state academic standards. However, the absence of labour market and other comprehensive studies, as

well as weak communication with a wide range of employers hinder the implementation and development of the APs. Despite the newly introduced APs, the issues of applicant absence appear. The GRSC has approaches to knowledge assessment, uses teaching methods and assignments designed to cultivate students' knowledge and capacities. However, the methods guaranteeing practical and analytical skills are still inadequate. While there are some separate factors to gain insights into the effectiveness of the AP implementation, a process for comprehensive data collection and analysis is yet to be established.

During the selection of the teaching staff, the GRSC is guided by the requirements outlined in state academic standards. It is commendable that the GRSC attaches importance to the processes of ensuring the generational change of the teaching staff and the involvement of practical teachers, taking steps in this direction. However, the GRSC has not yet established a need-based process for planning different activities. This is a result of insufficient financial resources. The expert panel considers that there are significant opportunities to broaden the scope of cooperation with employers, including those geared towards the teacher enhancement. Meanwhile, the expert panel views the issues encountered by teachers in narrow professional fields as problematic. The expert panel regards the absence of mechanisms for the teachers' progress as a noteworthy issue hindering their enhancement and motivation. The absence of such separate mechanisms is again connected with the lack of financial resources. Other human resources issues are also considered significant, particularly when the same person is loaded with work corresponding to several multi-disciplinary administrative positions. Consequently, there are no apparent guarantees of progress in those directions.

The GRSC makes efforts in the improving and updating the resources. From this perspective, some replenishments have been made in response to the institution's regional status. The GRSC also uses employer resources to ensure internships as part of the academic programmes. However, some APs also face insufficient resources, and there is an issue of relevant employers in that direction. Meanwhile, the expert panel considers that efforts to replenish and modernize resources still need improvement, which can be facilitated by the appropriate policy for external relations. As a result, the scope and content of cooperation with employers will be expanded. The GRSC will engage in programmes offering opportunities for resource replenishment, as well as will diversify financial sources, attract benefactors, etc. In separate cases, some resource-related issues have been identified. However, the GRSC does not have mechanisms for identifying resource needs and evaluating the effectiveness of their use.

Despite various issues in the direction of human and some other resources, as well as in the targeted implementation of the APs, the expert panel considers that the GRSC generally ensures the credible award of qualifications.

The GRSC has a clear procedure for student admission. While there are also mechanisms for applicant recruitment, the GRSC does not have mechanisms for evaluating their effectiveness. Attention is paid to the identification of students' educational needs, along with various mechanisms established for this purpose. However, according to the expert panel, the student needs are mainly identified by supervisors. Events are organized for attracting students. Also, some services are provided to support student careers. The expert panel considers that the GRSC still needs to make significant efforts to ensure students' involvement in research activities and cultivate their analytical skills.

The expert panel considers that the GRSC needs to take targeted steps in the direction of research. From this perspective, it is essential to form goals and outline clear plans to achieve them, as well as to provide clear processes and introduce mechanisms for incentives and support. The expert panel considers that current issues in the research field can hinder both the enhancement of the educational process and the institution's development.

The expert panel attaches importance to the introduction of mechanisms in VET institutions that will ensure the teachers' progress based on research outcomes, with a national approach also being crucial.

The GRSC has an accountability mechanism for stakeholders. However, there is still a need for enhancement activities to make the process analytical. The GRSC has some publications on the official website and social networks. However, there is a need for updating and enhancement. The GRSC also carries out some activities aimed at imparting values and knowledge to the society. The expert panel considers that, given the regional context of the institution, there is a need to tailor these measures based on the societal needs.

The GRSC has established a number of contracts with various institutions, enabling the implementation of the internships as outlined by the academic programmes, notwithstanding the issues in some separate cases. The GRSC also has cooperation agreements with other VET institutions and HEIs. However, important achievements resulting from these cooperations are still not evident. The expert panel considers that the GRSC's development is hindered by the limited scope and content of cooperation with partners and employers, as well as the absence of clear goals for external relations (including internationalization), and relevant incentive mechanisms. The GRSC is satisfied with maintaining its current state.

Based on the above-mentioned, the expert panel concludes that the GRSC takes some steps towards development, attaching importance to the increase in the number of students, their needs and introduction of some accountability mechanisms. However, the expert panel finds that in the direction of external relations and research as well as clear goals and targeted processes, the mentioned issues hinder both the GRSC's short and long-term development.

The strengths of the institution

- 1) The special role in the region as an institution implementing academic programmes at the NQF Levels 4,5.
- 2) The academic programmes in line with the mission, NQF and state academic standards.
- 3) The teaching methods developing students' knowledge and capacities.
- 4) The mechanisms for student admission and recruitment.
- 5) The emphasis on the identification of student needs.
- 6) The teaching staff consisting of young employees with ample experience and professional potential.
- 7) The importance attached to the involvement of practical teachers.
- 8) The acting policy for the distribution of financial resources.
- 9) The secure educational environment.
- 10) The importance attached to transparency and feedback in the processes.
- 11) The presence of some accountability mechanisms.
- 12) The importance placed on the quality assurance processes.

The weaknesses of the institution

- 1) The absence of an effective strategic management system based on the principle of quality management (including mechanisms for the monitoring of the strategic plan goals).
- 2) The insufficient financial and human resources.
- 3) The lack of assignments aimed at developing students' research and analytical abilities and providing practical skills.
- 4) The absence of clear mechanisms for the progress and incentivization of the teaching staff.
- 5) The insufficient requirements for narrow professional qualifications and teachers overloaded with multi-disciplinary responsibilities.
- 6) The absence of policies and processes for research development.
- 8) The lack of events based on the societal needs.
- 9) The weak external relations for addressing the educational needs, ensuring relevant resources and diversifying financial sources.
- 10) The absence of mechanisms promoting the study of external relations, local and international practice.
- 11) The shortcomings in the quality assurance system, the stakeholders' weak involvement in the quality assurance processes.
- 12) The absence of comprehensive data and research-based analyses.

Main Recommendations

Mission and Purpose

- 1) Clarify the mission, opportunities and goals, based on a comprehensive analysis of the regional needs, involving a wide range of stakeholders.
- 2) Ensure feasible strategic plan aligned with specified goals, including ongoing and final evaluation process in line with the KPIs for the GRSC's continuous development.

Governance and Administration

- 3) Ensure an effective management system, engaging a wide range of stakeholders, diversifying financial sources (including expanding the scope of external relations and reviewing content) and enhancing resources that will ensure the GRSC's continuous development.
- 4) Ensure a strategic management process in the stages of planning (including the definition of KPIs) implementation and enhancement-based evaluation, creating guarantees for the realization of strategic goals. Ensure the principle of quality management in other different processes as well.
- 5) Ensure accountability through comprehensive data (also driven by factors affecting its performance) and research-based analyses that will help identify issues and ensure continuous enhancement of the GRSC' processes.
- 6) Ensure publicity of information on the academic programme quality and awarded qualifications (also attaching importance to the identification of best practice, alumni success, etc.).

Academic Programmes

- 7) Ensure the continuous enhancement of the academic programme content and internships, based on the best practices from comparable academic programmes, labour market, employer opinions and other studies.
- 8) Provide assignments for the formation of research and analytical capacities and the acquisition of practical skills, while ensuring the connection between theory and practice.

Students

- 9) Reevaluate the Student Council's activities, implementing concrete measures for the protection of student rights and interests.
- 10) Introduce clear mechanisms for raising educational needs and evaluating and analysing the effectiveness of educational consulting and other services.

Faculty and Staff

- 11) Review the requirements for the professional qualities of the teaching and supporting staff and involve specialists from a narrow practical field to prevent multi-disciplinary overload.
- 12) Introduce clear and effective mechanisms for evaluating professional qualities of the teaching and supporting staff, identifying needs, planning trainings, ensuring progress and incentives, guaranteeing transparency of processes.

Research and Development

- 13) Define the GRSC's research directions, issues, guidelines for their solution and the KPIs, based on the evaluation of the GRSC's potential and the involvement of external stakeholders.
- 14) Expand the opportunities for the integration of research assignments into academic programmes to develop students' analytical and critical thinking and research skills.
- 15) Introduce clear mechanisms for involving teachers in research works (methodical works, study of teaching practice etc.) and providing incentives to encourage their participation.

Infrastructure and Resources

- 16) Introduce programmes in the institution and diversify the budget through external stakeholders or the governing council to enable the achievement of all the goals.
- 17) Introduce mechanisms for the evaluation of resource utilization and availability, undertake joint resource utilization with external stakeholders, and ensure continuous enhancement based on that.

Societal Responsibility

- 18) As a regional college, consider short-term supplementary programmes tailored to meet the regional needs as a means of transferring knowledge and values.
- 19) To ensure the external stakeholders' active involvement and raise public awareness, make the processes more transparent and add an analytical component to the reports.

External Relations and Internationalization

- 20) Clarify the directions and goals of external relations, attaching importance to the educational needs, provision of appropriate resources and diversification of financial sources.

- 21) Introduce mechanisms that foster the study of external relations, local and international practice, and ensure appropriate language skills aimed at continuous enhancement and modernization of academic programmes.

Internal Quality Assurance System

- 22) Develop and introduce an internal quality assurance system (by specifying the roles of different bodies in the quality assurance processes) based on best practice, as well as the GRSC's peculiarities and capabilities, and provide an appropriate operational documentation framework for the implementation and development of quality assurance culture within the institution.
- 23) Provide a process of diverse data collection and comprehensive analysis in various areas of the GRSC's activities, with the goal of developing these areas and achieving goals. Ensure the stakeholders' involvement in these processes and awareness of the outcomes through feedback mechanisms.



Armenuhi Sargsyan
Chair of the expert panel

December 5, 2023

DISCRIPTION OF EXTERNAL REVIEW

COMPOSITION OF EXPERT PANEL

The external review of the institutional capacities of the Gegharkunik Regional State College was carried out by the following members of the expert panel.

1. **Armenuhi Sargsyan**, Candidate of Physical and Mathematical Sciences, Associate Professor, chair of the expert panel.
2. **Narine Sirakanyan**, Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, head of the programmes at the National Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship of the RA Ministry of Economy, member of the expert panel.
3. **Seda Khachatryan**, teacher at the Yerevan State College of Light Industry, member of the expert panel.
4. **Mikayel Grigoryan**, a third-year student at the Department of Computing for Software and Automated Systems of the French College in Armenia, student member of the expert panel.

The composition of the expert panel was agreed upon with the education institution.

The coordinator of the expert panel was **Liana Alaverdyan**, assistant to ANQA's director.

All the members of the expert panel and the coordinator have signed agreements of independence and confidentiality.

PROCESS OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW

On January 13, 2023, the GRSC applied for state institutional accreditation, submitting to ANQA the filled application form, copies of the license and orders.

The ANQA's Secretariat studied the data presented in the application form and the documents attached.

After the decision on the acceptance of the application, ANQA and the institution signed an agreement. The schedule of activities was prepared and approved.

Self-evaluation

Considering that the institution is undergoing institutional accreditation for the first time and is in the initial stage of the formation of the quality assurance culture, ANQA has conducted workshops with the institutions in the accreditation process. The workshops aimed to prepare the institutions for the organisational stages of the accreditation process. During the workshops, the interpretations of the institutional accreditation criteria and standards, the electronic questionnaire for the accreditation application, and the peculiarities of self-evaluation and SWOT analysis were presented.

The institution carried out a SWOT analysis, which was discussed with ANQA's specialists.

The institution submitted the self-evaluation of the institutional capacities and the package of documents within the schedule set by ANQA. The coordinator studied the report in terms of its compliance with technical requirements presented by ANQA. On May 5, 2023, the self-evaluation was submitted to ANQA.

Preparatory Phase

After the submission of the self-evaluation report and the attached documents, ANQA's coordinator studied the package to reveal its compliance with the requirements presented by ANQA.

The self-evaluation and the attached documents were provided to the expert panel for the preliminary evaluation. The composition of the expert panel was agreed upon with the institution and confirmed by the order of ANQA's Director.

To prepare the expert panel members and ensure the effectiveness of the activities, training on the following topics was conducted:

1. the main functions of the expert panel's members;
2. the ethics and techniques of holding meetings and doing inquiries;
3. the definition of the specifics of the VET sector and interpretation of accreditation criteria according to the sector.
4. the preliminary evaluation as a stage for the preparation of the expert panel report, the main requirements for the report.

Having reviewed the self-evaluation report and documents attached, the expert panel conducted the preliminary evaluation according to the format, preparing the lists of questions and objectives for different departments and target groups, as well as additional documents for further study. Then the expert panel summarized the results of the preliminary evaluation and set the schedule for the site visit.

Following ANQA's Manual for External Review, the schedule included intended close and open meetings with all the target groups, study of document, parallel meetings, etc. The expert panel's members also had "professional talks" with the managers, teachers and students of the selected APs. Before the "professional talks", the experts studied the student assignments and conducted class observations to understand the extent to which these assignments are aimed at achieving the expected outcomes.

Preparatory Visit

On September 11, 2023, a meeting took place with the institution's management staff. The head of ANQA's Institutional Programme Accreditation Division, the coordinator and the chair of the expert panel were present.

During the meeting, the schedule of the site visit was introduced and agreed upon with the institution's management staff. Additionally, discussions were made and mutually agreed decisions were reached on the technical, organisational, and informational aspects of the site visit, along with the conduct and ethical norms of the meeting participants.

Site visit

The site visit took place on September 18-21, 2023. A week prior to the site visit, all members of the expert panel and the coordinator visited the institution, observed the infrastructure and resources, conducted class observations. Then the experts and the coordinator had a close

meeting. The meeting aimed to bring out the strengths and weaknesses of the institution based on the criteria, clarify questions for the target groups, discuss the meeting procedures and further steps.

The site visit started and ended with meetings with the institution's management staff. To clarify the issues, the focus group meetings took place. The participants, including teachers, students and alumni, were selected from a pre-provided list, based on the principle of representativeness. All scheduled meetings were held. During the site visit, the expert panel also studied the documents.

At the end of each working day, the expert panel held close meetings to discuss the results of the expert evaluation. At the end of the site visit, the main results were summarized.

The expert panel reached conclusions on the criteria through discussions and analyses of all members, always applying the principle of consensus.

Expert Panel Report

The members of the expert panel and the ANQA coordinator prepared a preliminary version of the expert panel report, which was provided to the institution after the approval of the panel members.

On November 6, 2023, the institution submitted observations regarding the preliminary report to ANQA. ANQA provided the observations to the expert panel, then organised a meeting for the GRSC and the expert panel to discuss the institution's observations on the preliminary version of the expert panel report. Taking into consideration these observations, the expert panel prepared the final version of the report, which was approved by the panel on December 5, 2023.



Liana Alaverdyan
Coordinator of the expert panel

December 5, 2023

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

CRITERIA	CONCLUSION
<i>1. Mission and Purpose</i>	Satisfactory
<i>2. Governance and Administration</i>	Unsatisfactory
<i>3. Academic Programmes</i>	Satisfactory
<i>4. Students</i>	Satisfactory
<i>5. Faculty and Staff</i>	Satisfactory
<i>6. Research and Development</i>	Unsatisfactory
<i>7. Infrastructure and Resources</i>	Satisfactory
<i>8. Societal Responsibility</i>	Satisfactory
<i>9. External Relations and Internationalization</i>	Unsatisfactory
<i>10. Internal Quality Assurance System</i>	Unsatisfactory



Armenuhi Sargsyan
Chair of the expert panel

December 5, 2023