ANQA ACCREDITATION MANUAL

INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE:

CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

15-17, december, 2011

ANQA
National Center For Professional
Education Quality Assurance
Foundation

The World Bank

Education Quality
and
Relevance Project

ANQA ACCREDITATION MANUAL

INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE:

CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

15-17, december, 2011

FOREWORD

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

This Manual was prepared by the *National Center for Professional Education Quality AssuranceFoundation* (ANQA henceforth) anddescribes in detail the quality assurance framework for Armenian tertiary education, external evaluation processes initiated for the purposes of state accreditation of tertiary level institutions (TLIs) and academic programmes, the main procedures, their duration, the scope of ANQA activities, expert activities and those of the universities.

The currentdocumentaims to set a stage for quality assurance in Armenian tertiary education. Throughout its development ANQA has drawn upon the following crucial factors:

- situational analysis of the Armenian tertiary education;
- the electronic questionnaire aimed to establish ANQA database on tertiary education performance;
- the results of the pilots ANQA has organized within the frames of quality assurance system development throughout 2009-2011;
- the recommendations of ANQA international experts financed within the World Bank DPO-C-6 project;
- the recommendations of ANQA international experts financed within the frames of Tempus projects: Development and Integration of University Self-assessment Systems (DIUS) and Promoting Internationalization and Comparability of Quality Assurance (PICQA).

It is our belief that through a broad involvement of ANQA stakeholders in the development process the current document will find its applicability and, ultimately, serve the mission of ANQA, which aims to ensure quality education of the Armenian tertiary education and therefore recognition of the qualifications offered at international level.

ANQA extends its acknowledgement to all the contributors of the process and beliefs the endeavor to be a worthwhile goal.

Questions regarding this Manual or the procedures described in it can be addressed to ANQA Secretariat at the following e-mail: info@anqa.am or at phone: (+ 374 - 10) 229145; (+ 374 – 10) 229146; (+ 374 – 10) 229147; Fax: (+ 374 – 10) 229148.

Table of Contents

I. INTRODUCTION

All over the world, there is an increasing demand to set up internal and external quality assurance systems for higher education, reflecting both the rapid growth of higher education, and its costs to the public and private purse. In the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) all Bologna signatory countries have been asked by their ministers to set up corresponding accreditation or equivalent QA systems (Berlin communiqué, 2003). In the meantime almost all European countries have responded to these requests and implemented such external QA regimes. In all of the Bologna countries external QA is a mandatory process for the higher education sector. This gives evidence, that the governments are ready to put measures in place of assuring and demonstrating the quality of their HEI's and the delivered awards.

The Berlin communiqué of 19 September 2003 invited the European Network for Quality Assurance Agencies (ENQA) to develop - in cooperation with its partners - an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance. This would increase consistency of quality assurance in Europe and would thereby facilitate academic and professional mobility. Consequently, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESGs) (2005)were established and adopted by the European Bologna ministers in 2005 (Bergen communiqué). The ESGs provide a source of assistance and guidance to governments, quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions in developing their national QA-systems. The ESG are highly compatible with international guidelines for QAAs (e.g. the Codes of Good Practices of INQAAHE), thus making them applicable on an over regional level. Although the ESG are non-binding by nature, they provide an important common frame of reference, which will enhance the transnational recognition of qualifications. Today fulfillment of the ESGs has also become a prerequisite for entry into ENQA and the newly established European Quality Assurance Register for validated QAA's (EQAR). However, rather than being prescriptive, the ESGs aim to serve as an overarching framework based on which countries are to align their quality assurance criteria and standards.

Quality assurance in tertiary education is a newly emerging and developing area of policy and procedural innovation in the Republic of Armenia. ANQA expects that the concepts elaborated on in this Accreditation Manual will continue to develop and evolve in line with the best international practices.

1. The Armenian Approach

The National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA) was established on November 7, 2008 under the Government Decree (No. 1486N). ANQA is the primary provider of quality assurance services for the Armenian tertiary education. The purpose of thisAccreditation Manual is to set a stage for tertiary level system in Armeniato promote establishment of quality assurance culture for academic purposes, in accordance with the Armenian Law on Education, and the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG).

The stipulations above require the TLIs to establish internal quality assurance mechanisms, which are coherent with the ANQA external quality assurance provisions. The latter incorporates 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 19th June, 1999 (the "Bologna Declaration);
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (2005);
- Descriptions of existing quality assurance procedures provided to ANQA by the national tertiary education establishments through the ANQA electronic questionnaire and extensive pilots carried out in the period of August 2009-December 2011.

Considering the differences in the scale, scope and statutory basis of TLIs, ANQA will adopt a flexible approach to the interpretation of the criteria and standards. All the TLIs are subject to meeting the state required academic standards and the quality assurance criteria, standards and procedures set out in this document.

2. ANQA Mission Statement and Strategic Objectives

ANQA is a quality assurance agency independent of the RA Government and Tertiary Level Institutions.

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

It will do so by

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

The values that ANQA cherishes are imbedded in the quality assurance criteria, standards and procedures and evolve around the following main terms: *public trust*, *social cohesion*, *equity*, *social responsibility* and *competitiveness*. The interpretation of the terms is as follows:

- *Public trust* - the concept of the public trust relates to the origins of democratic government and its seminal idea that within the public lies the true power and future of a society. Therefore, ANQA, through its activities, will ensure the trust the public places in tertiary education performance is respected.
- *Social cohesion* - through its activities ANQA will strive to fight against the societal fragmentation Armenia is suffering from. 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. The role of the quality assurance with this regards, 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 layers of the society. One such example is providing equal treatment and enhancement opportunities to both public and private educational establishments.
- *Social responsibility* - social responsibility means ANQA, as an organization, has an obligation to act to benefit society at large. ANQA will strive to achieve its mission through a robust and independent quality assurance system that will safeguard the society from under quality education by making educational provisions at tertiary level transparent for the society.

- *Competitiveness* - promoting visibility and competitiveness of Armenian tertiary education at international level.

The following are ANQA strategic objectives:

- to determine and ensure compliance with appropriate standards of tertiary education;

- to promote and support continuous improvement in the quality and standards of provision of tertiary education provisions, working in partnership and consultation with tertiary education stakeholders;

- to promote TLI's ownership of quality assurance;

- to ensure that clear and accurate information is made publicly available about the quality and standards of TLIs; and

- to apply international best practice in evaluation and reviews of TLIs' provisions.

The ANQA is conscious of the obligations and responsibilities, which TLIs have, to implement and maintain rigorous quality assurance procedures. It is also aware that there is no 'correct model' for quality assurance. It therefore intends that each TLI would develop its own plan in compliance with the ANQA criteria, standards and procedures outlined in this document.

3. ANQA Quality Assurance Guiding Principles

ANQA is committed to safeguarding the public from below-standard education provisions and to ensure public recognition and credibility through the maintenance of standards. ANQA quality assurance provisions are based upon the following principles:

- the ANQA evaluation and quality assurance provisions should be understandable to stakeholders, effectively administered, publicly accountable and cost effective to operate.
- the ANQA quality assurance criteria, which define the performance required of the applicants for them to achieve the ANQA standards, should be appropriate to purpose, explicit and in the public domain.
- ANQA quality assurance provisions should be valid, reliable and practicable, and decision-making should be in line with the set criteria.
- ANQA's responsibility for quality assurance mainly includes but is not limited to provisions of services aimed at continuous improvement and enhancement of quality education provisions. The latter is devolved to

institutions where quality assurance is consistent with the maintenance of national and international standards.

- the ANQA quality assurance provisions should be accessible to all tertiary level institutions that are required to do so by law.
- ANQA quality assurance provisions are intended to protect students from below-standard educational provisions and the outcomes should, by no means, negatively impact students.

ANQA is open when it comes to improvement of the policies and procedures. The ANQA stakeholders can have influence at framework level but, by no means, can they influence the accreditation procedure and may not interfere in the evaluation and decision-making. Thus, ANQA will start and end with the same process and then improve them to start a new cycle. However, ANQA will apply tough regulations when it comes to evaluation and decision-making.

4. ANQA Stakeholders and relationships

ANQA policies underpin two levels of activities with its stakeholders: regular investigation of the needs and benefiting the stakeholders through its activities. To better serve the stakeholders ANQA has identified both the stakeholders and the types of relationships with each. Thus, ANQA stakeholders are:

Stakeholders	Relationships
Tertiary level institutions	To help a TLI become institutionally strong ANQA will work directly with the establishments rather than only with the faculty and QA officers.
Rectors' councils (pubic and private)	To ensure there is consensus at managerial level and top management is committed to the quality assurance regular conferences and workshops with the Rectors' Councils will be held.
Employers	Although currently passive, the employers are to become ANQA stakeholders. ANQA will take steps to make the Employers' Union as well as individual businesses more actively involved in the process.
Professional associations	These units are either not formed in some fields or are not actively involved in professional education. ANQA will take steps to make the professional associations

	more actively involved in the process.
Government	ANQA collaborates with the Government at framework level, which entails policymaking in the sphere of professional education.
Students	ANQA cooperates with students at different levels: student unions, networks individual students. One of the major mechanisms that ANQA is currently using is a student network, Students' Voice, through which ANQA investigates the problems of teaching and learning.
Teachers	ANQA deals directly with faculty through regular conferences and workshops.
Administrators	ANQA deals directly with TLI administration through regular conferences and workshops.

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

II. QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK IN ARMENIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION

1. The Quality Assurance Context

ANQA has adopted a quality definition, which characterizes quality as fitness for purpose. According to this concept, external evaluation has to decide to what extent the service or product meets the goals set. Such definition enables the institutions to define goals in the mission statements– the quality is assessed and presented through mission statement and goal achievement. This approach assumes that fit and foremost the concept and goals of higher education are to be defined; the product or service should meet the needs and wishes of the customer. It also assumes that the customer has to express his/her needs and wishes explicitly. The goals of higher education institution are presented on the general level in the mission statement and more concrete academic level in the programme objectives and intended learning outcomes (ILO). In other words, the institution says what it does, does what it promises and proves it to the third party.

In tertiary education the quality of teaching is linked to the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching. Effectiveness is connected with the objectives of the course whereas efficiency is connected with the resources used in order to meet the objectives. While focusing on the measuring goal compliance, ANQA will first pay a special attention to the relevance of the goal to the society needs and RA Government standards and priorities and only then start analyzing to what extent it has been met.

QA in professional education is the activity that aims at maintaining and raising quality educational provisions through guaranteeing the improvement of standards and quality in tertiary education in order to make the tertiary education meet the needs of students, employers and society at large.

Typically, there are two levels of activities in Armenianquality assurance system:

- "**Political" level:** Here all groups interested in the national system, especially government, bring in their expectations into the development and regular revision of the criteria and into the discussion how the criteria can be interpreted. In the case of Armenia, this discussion processes are facilitated by ANQA as central "arena" for this kind of exchange between the groups interested in the Armenian higher education system.

- **Procedural level:** This is the level where the unconditional independence of the agency in operating each single accreditation procedure must be ensured. In case the government or other interested parties feel the need for adjustments in the accreditation system or the criteria and their interpretation, this would take place at a framework level, when revising the criteria. Essential to the methodology of accreditation is that the criteria cannot be changed during an already started procedure.

Quality assurance is a mandatory process for both the private and public sector.

Quality assurance is composed of two major elements:

- internal quality assurance of TLIs, which is the sole responsibility of institutions
- external quality assurance of TLIs conducted by an independent QA agency.

2. The Quality Assurance Framework

For assuring quality at Armenian tertiary level education ANQA has developed a comprehensive Quality Assurance Framework, which evolves around four mechanisms:

- External quality assurance
- Internal quality assurance
- ANQA recognition by international organizations
- Information provisions.

2.1 External quality assurance

External quality assurance servesthree essential purposes:

- **Accountability and transparency**: quality assurance processes provide one of the key mechanisms for ensuring that the interests of society in the quality and standards of higher education are safeguarded, and for demonstrating the quality of individual higher education institutions both nationally and internationally.
- **Control** means that the institution does not merely control the expenditure of resources but also shows how high quality is achievable with the existing resources. It raises the issue of the definition of "good value".

- **Quality enhancement**: it provides an opportunity for an institution to undertake a broad, corporate reflection on the nature and effectiveness of its quality processes and to consider whether they are contributing to the continued development and embedding of a quality culture within the institution.

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

- Does the TLI have a quality ethos, together with procedures that embed that ethos, throughout the institution and in the academic programmes that it offers?
- Does the TLI systematically monitor its progress towards achieving an appropriate range of quality goals and in particular, further improving and maintaining the quality of the educational provision?
- Are the findings from the quality assurance procedures used to improve the quality of the education and training provision and meet the needs of the learners?
- Does the TLI monitor the effectiveness of the services provided to the learner?
- Is corrective action taken to remedy deficiencies identified by the quality assurance procedures?
- Is relevant information on institutional and academic programme quality given to stakeholders?

ANQA considers that in developing, maintaining and implementing quality assurance procedures, it is important that quality assurance is not reduced to issues that can be easily measured, that is quantitative criteria/data, as this may divert attention from other important aspects of quality provision and delivery, which are measured through a more qualitative approach.

ANQA will review the effectiveness of the academic quality assurance procedures of TLIs on a cyclical basis. The results of such reviews will be made publicly available. This reporting is important in ensuring public confidence that quality and standards are being safeguarded. ANQA will consult with TLIs and other stakeholders regarding these review arrangements.

The Armenian external quality assurance entails two types of accreditation:

- **Institutional accreditation** - a mandatory process for both private and public institutions. It allows for periodic evaluation of how well an institution is operating and whether it serves the mission for which it was established.

- **Academic programme accreditation** – a voluntary process undertaken by TLIs. However, this process is mandatory for the academic programmes that offer medical sciences, both at public and private institutions. It examines specific programmes of study, rather than an institution as a whole. This type of accreditation is granted to specific programmes at specific levels based on learning outcomes and the extent to which the learning outcomes are in line with the qualifications required. It allows for periodic evaluation of how well an academicprogramme is operating and whether it is delivering the intended outcomes for which it was established. Academicprogramme accreditation has two major implications:
  a. Recognition of the qualifications awards at both national and international levels, accumulation and transfer of valid credits.
  b. Financial allocation on the part of the RA Government. Thus, programme accreditation is a necessary condition for financing, but, by no means, does it imply that the finances will be allocated automatically once programme accreditation is granted.

Institutional accreditation is a prerequisite for academic programme accreditation.

ANQA is the only organization authorized by the RA Government to take care of the external quality assurance provisions.

2.1.1 Accreditation Committee

The Accreditation Committee (AC)is the highest quality assurance body within ANQAdesigned to function as the one responsible for

- taking the accreditation decision on institutional and program accreditation based on the evaluation of the expert panel, and
- assuring qualityof the accreditation procedure and methodology in the Agency.

Its composition and high acceptance by the main stakeholders in the tertiary education system as well as by Armenian society in general are crucial elements for the success of the Armenian accreditation system.

Accreditation Committee is an independent, collegial body, which carries out its responsibilities prescribed by the statuteon state accreditation of tertiary level institutions and academic programmes in the Republic of Armenia.

The Accreditation Committee operates within the principles of legitimacy and liberty, guided by the RA Constitution, the RA Law on Education, the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education, the Law on Preliminary (craftsmanship) and Vocational Education and Training, as well as 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, and other legal and normative acts.

The AccreditationCommittee is made up through a rigid recruitment procedure to ensure legitimacy of its functions.

The Accreditation Committee makes decision through a voting system.

To better understand their role, functions and the context of the accreditation process the Accreditation Committee is usually convened prior to the launch of the accreditation process.

2.2 Internal quality assurance

Internal Quality assurance (IQA) of TLIs is a fundamental element of the Armenian tertiary level education quality assurance framework. The internal quality assurance systems should be integrated into the normal academic activities of TLIs.

A commitment to quality assurance implies a commitment to continuous improvement. It involves three basic activities - setting goals and standards, evaluating practice against these standards and improving practice. It embodies Quality Management (QM) driving principle: planning, doing, checking, acting and improving. It is the process through which a TLI assures itself and its stakeholders that it consistently reaches the highest standards possible, in all aspects of its activities.

In the context of accountability, internal quality assurance is used as a mechanism to monitor performance. Learners, graduates, employers and the public at large are demanding high standards from TLIs. Internal quality assurance is a key tool in the educational processes of TLIs, ensuring that they fulfill the demands and needs of society. It also allows for the maintenance of an essential level of TLI autonomy.

To ensure the TLIs' accountability and transparency, external verification of the internal quality assurance policy and procedures is required.

The achievement of satisfactory quality in all of the activities and functions of a TLI requires the maximum clarity of communication and transparency of procedures. The means of communication, or the mode of delivery of the communication, is a matter for the TLI. The mission of the TLI together with all relevant regulations, etc., should be published and made available to staff, learners and all other stakeholders.

2.3   ANQA Recognition

To ensure ANQA's quality assurance provisions are valid and acceptable at international level ANQA envisions undergoing a periodic external review by international agencies based on specific standards comparable to the European ones, a process widely known as recognition. After two years of ANQA active functioning, in 2013, the Ministry of Education and Science will initiate ANQA Recognition process through involvement of international organizations.

2.4   Information Provision

A range of information about Armenia's tertiary level education should be made publicly available. This will provide for transparency of educational provisions.

3. State Accreditation Register

ANQA is the only quality assurance agency authorized to assure quality at national level. To ensure the ANQA accreditation results are publicly available ANQA has established and runs State Accreditation Register (SAR). ANQA is the only quality assurance agency authorized by the RA Government to make changes in the State Accreditation Register, which the Government will take consideration of in the decision-making process. If an institution opts to apply to a foreign quality assurance agency for accreditation, it should do so only through ANQA's Governing Board consent and the conditions that it might imply.

III. ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE

1. Institutional and academic programme accreditation

Accreditation is a process of recognizing educational institutions and academic programmes for performance, integrity, and quality that entitles them to the confidence of the educational community and the public. Accreditation entails that an institution maintains standards requisite for its graduates to gain admission to other reputable institutions of higher learning or to achieve credentials for professional practice. Accreditation is granted for a certain period of time and it guarantees that the institution or programme has the necessary capacity to provide education for a definite time span.

The term "accreditation" in higher education refers to a certificate (or seal) given by a third party, which states compliance with a set of defined criteria. The message of accreditation to the interested public is: "Yes, the criteria for accreditation are fulfilled by the inspected organization at a satisfying level". The accreditation is based upon an external quality assessment procedure.

A core objective in accreditation of higher education is to ensure the outcome is recognized as genuine proof of quality of higher education by the government, the TLIs, student's parents, students, future employers and the interested public in general. For this sake, the independence of the responsible agency in its decision whether to award the accreditation or not, is a major principle. It is the agency's task to prevent single interests to bias the accreditation decision. Furthermore, transparency, comparability as well as legal certainty of accreditation procedures are needed attributes for empowering public confidence in higher education.

In the Republic of Armenia this recognition is conducted by ANQA, an independent organization that is authorized by the RA Government to conduct external quality assurance of Tertiary Level Institutions (TLIs) in Armenia: both public and private. It is ANQA's responsibility to establish and update criteria, standards and procedures for accreditation, conduct external evaluationof TLIs and their programmes, and approve those institutions and programmes that meet State Standards for Academic Programmes and ANQA Accreditation Criteria and Standards.

In Armenian tertiary education, state accreditation performs a number of important functions including but not limited to the encouragement of efforts toward educational effectiveness. The accrediting process requires institutions to examine their own mission, goals, processes, and achievements through a comprehensive self-assessment. It then provides expert analysis by peer

evaluators, and, later, commendations for accomplishments and recommendations for improvement. Since the accreditation status of an institution and academic programme (AP) is reviewed periodically, institutions are encouraged toward continuous self-analyses and improvement.

Accreditation, both institutional and academic programme, is carried out in three consecutive phases:

- ***First phase:*** self-assessment conducted by the educational institution;
- ***Second phase:*** site-visit carried out by an independent external expert panel;
- ***Third phase:*** production of the final report and decision making by ANQA Accreditation Committee.

2. Application for state accreditation

ANQA accepts applications for accreditation throughout the whole year. The act of application acceptance is carried out according to the procedures set forth in the Accreditation Statute. After checking for the eligibility criteria ANQA accepts the application and a contract on provision of paid services is signed between the applicant TLI and ANQA.

Following the contract the educational institution appoints a contact person to care for the organizational and technical issues. The contact person performs two major functions: facilitates the evaluation process at institutional or programme level and liaises with ANQA.

3. Self –assessment

A self-analysis is a process in which the TLI and the academic programme are to be engaged annually. This allows for cyclicalreview of the planned activities, analyses of the results, detection of problems and areas in need of improvement. To close the loop, based on the results of the self-assessment the TLI/academic programme are to revise their short-, medium- and long term plans accordingly, take measures as well asallocate resources for further improvement of the processes the TLI/AP engages in.

To take part in the accreditation procedure the TLIis to conduct self-analysis of its activitiesfor the past five years.

Within the frames of institutional accreditation the TLI is tocarry out internal evaluation of its institutional capacities according to"Criteria and Standards for Institutional Accreditation" of the RA Decree N 959-N "On

establishing accreditation criteria for tertiary education" approved on June 30, 2011 and state academic standards.

In case of programme accreditation the TLI should carry out internal evaluation of the academic programme under scrutiny according to "Criteria and Standards for Programme Accreditation" of the RA Decree N 959-N "On establishing accreditation criteria of tertiary education" approved on June 30, 2011 and state academic standards.

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

- self-assessment forms to guide the TLIs through the process. Both Institutional and Academic Programme Self-Assessment forms make up a constituent part of the State Accreditation Statute;
- a *Guide to Self-Assessment*.

ANQA decides on the act of acceptance or rejection of the self-assessment drawing on the procedure set forth in the Accreditation Statute.

4. Expert panel formation and its composition

To conduct external evaluation of a TLI or an AP, ANQA sets an expert panel. ANQA forms its expert panels drawing on the expert database it holds (http://experts.anqa.am) and the requirements set forth in the *Statute on Expert Panel Formation* approved by ANQA Governing Board.

According to the *Statute on Expert Panel Formation* ANQA Director appoints one of the experts as the panel Chair. The panel Chair is responsible for chairing all the meetings, planning specific activities and following the guidelines set forth in this manual. For the full set of the panel Chair responsibilities see the *Statute on Expert Panel Formation*.

ANQA, on its part, trough the ANQA Director's directive also 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 acceptance of application for accreditation, drafting the final report and ending with making respective notifications in the *State Accreditation Register*. For the full set of the ANQA coordinator responsibilities see the *Statute on Expert Panel Formation*. 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.

One of the steps in the expert panel formation is negotiation of the expert panel members with the TLI or AP under scrutiny. Within the frames ANQA submits a shortlist of experts to the target TLI for their identification of the experts that best fit the specificities of the TLI/AP. Only by drawing on well-grounded justifications can the TLI or AP under scrutiny reject the expert candidacy in the shortlist provided by ANQA(see *Conflict of Interests* section).

Having scrutinized the justification for expert rejection, ANQA makes respective changes in the composition of the expert panel andsubmits the final list to the TLI for endorsement. Overall, the negotiation process may last abouttwo weeks.If the negotiation process does not culminate in agreement between ANQA and the target TLI, the contract between ANQA and theTLI is dissolved. To restart the accreditation process a new application should be submitted to ANQA and a new contract will be signed.

5. External evaluation

The expert panel members function as peers as well as constructive critics. The purpose is to produce an expert panel report, which will be useful forthe TLI/AP and forthe Accreditation Committee, which is to make a decision on theaccreditation status.

During the external evaluation the expert panel is guided by the following regulatory documents:

- State Accreditation Statute;
- State criteria and standards for institutional and programme accreditation;
- State academic standards and other regulatory documents.

The external evaluation evolves around four main steps:

- **Desk-review** – during the process the expert panel get acquainted with the self-assessment submitted by the TLI as well as respective evidences;
- **Site-visit** – during the process the expert panel pays a visit to the TLI to check on-site the state of affairs with regards to the units under scrutiny;
- **Report production** – during the process the expert panel produces a report, which includes analysis of the situation, commendations for the achievements and recommendations for further improvement;

- **Decision-making** – the culmination of the process is convention of the Accreditation Council to make a decision on the evaluation results and announcement of the decision on accreditation status.

5.1 Desk-review

Desk review is a screening tool, which intends to facilitate the review of TLI self-assessments within a relatively short period of time. A desk review utilizes a process, which rates the adequacy of the self-assessment 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.

Once the expert panel receives initial documentation from ANQA coordinator, it generally takes up to four weeks to complete 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-assessment report provide an in-depth analysis of the situation drawing on the strengths and weaknesses of the TLI?
- Does the self-assessment report provide enough evidences for the analysis?
- Does the self-assessment report evolve around and make use of the relevant standards and benchmarks?
- Do the evidences stem from reliable sources?
- Does the self-assessment provide a list of activities aimed at the improvement of the areas in need?

Thus, within the frames of the desk-review the responsibilities of the experts include but are not limited to:

- Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the TLI/AP functioning drawing on each standard, insufficient or missing documentation, as well as those with extraneous or unorganized evidence;
- Outlining the areas in need for further exploration and evaluation;
- Outlining the scope of activities to be carried out as well as a set of respective questions to be explored during the site-visit.

To ensure the expert panel has all the necessary tools to effectively evaluate the performance of the TLI/AP, ANQA will provide them with a portfolio, which includes all the following documentation:

- legislative and normative documentation;

- reporting guidelines and respective form;
- approvedsite-visitagenda;
- otherrespective documents.

The desk-review culminates in production of a brief preliminary report (reference to ANQA form). The preliminary draft of the report is circulated among the expert panel members for their consent prior to its submission to ANQA. The draft report is compiled from the individual reports of each expert and this responsibility lies with the ANQA Coordinator, Chair of the expert panel and the ANQA secretary. The ANQA Director endorses the preliminary report and the activities to be carried out as well as the questions to be discussed during the site-visit.

5.2 Site-visit

5.2.1 Preparatory visit

Prior to the site-visit the ANQA coordinator in consultancy with the Chair of the expert panel develop an agenda for the site visit and negotiates it with the TLI under scrutiny. The agenda should be comprehensive and flexible enough to ensure effective and efficient functioning of the expert panel (see Appendix D for a sample agenda). Thus, one week prior to the site-visit the ANQA coordinator along with theChair of the expert panel pay a preparatory visit to the target TLI/AP to negotiate and agree on the agenda of the site-visit.

During the preparatory week several simultaneous activities take place at the target TLI:

1. A negotiation meeting of the ANQA coordinator and the Chair with the TLI Rector and/orDirector;
2. A negotiation meeting with the TLI contact person and/or quality assurance team;
3. Preparatory meetings of the TLI contact person with the respective staff, students and other participants of the site-visit. With this regards ANQA coordinator provides the necessary information including the site-visit agenda. 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, 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.

In particular these meetings aim to accomplish the following:

- To negotiate the site-visit agenda and its feasibility;
- To request further information on lacking or not sufficient items in the self-assessment report;
- To check whether there are any sensitive issues of which the panel should be aware;
- To review any technical issue that the site-visit might entail (including but not limited to the space provision and other facilities).

During this stage such activities as visits to distant campuses and or units of a TLI/AP may also be arranged for not to overburden the site-visit with similar activities. If such a case occurs, the expert panel will be informed beforehand for respective arrangements.

At the end of the preparatory visit the ANQA coordinator provides the expert panel with the revised and complete agenda as well as submits the latter for ANQA Director's approval.

5.2.2 The site-visit

Site-visit is a part of the external evaluation process when the expert panel visits the TLI/AP under scrutiny to evaluate verbal, written, and visual evidences during accreditation. Site-visits, which usually last 3-7 days, are part of the quality assurance process. The purpose of site-visits includes assessing facilities, observing the educational process, obtaining additional information through interacting with staff and students, accessing documentation, scrutinizing tangible evidence of student achievements and checking the veracity of self-assessment statements. The number of days allocated to the site-visit depends on the size and complexity of the TLI/PA under scrutiny.

The site-visit usually starts withaclose meeting of the expert panel to:

- discuss any additional information available since the production of the draft preliminary report;
- plan, in detail, the content of each interview, meeting and focus group as well as clarify any questions that may arise,
- 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 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 as well

as the order of the inquiry. The Chair is responsible for moderating all the meetings and verifying respective protocols.

5.2.3 Types of meetings during the site-visit
a) Agenda-fixed meetings

To initiate agenda-fixed meetings the TLI/AP contact person provides the expert panel Chair and ANQA coordinator with a list of potential participants and their contact details. The expert panel Chair and the ANQA coordinator, on a random basis, select the target group for the meeting, interview or focus group bearing in mind the representativeness issue. The moderator facilitates the meeting according to the agreed-upon agenda. Additional questions, not envisioned in the agenda, may be asked with the permission of the Chair if there is need for further clarifications.

The expert panel secretary is responsible for arrangements regarding protocoling and minute taking. However, in their turn, all other expert panel members should also take notes during each event to refer to in their individual report and, later on, in the final report.

During the site-visit the expert panel members should join efforts in their operations. However, should necessity arise, the expert panel may split to attend to the areas more relevant to their respective expertise. Should this be the case, the Chair and ANQA Coordinator should be leading different group.

b) Meetings with TLI subdivisions

Usually, meetings with TLI subdivisions aim to reveal the areas that were questioned during the desk-review. The panel members themselves may choose the target to be interviewed. This may entail an interview with a staff member, a student, or an administrative officer or a respective group of those stakeholders. The ANQA coordinator should arrange such meetings with the TLI/AP contact person in advance. Such meetings are arranged on the spot and do not necessarily imply prior fixing in the overall agenda.

c) Close meetings

Close meetings are intended for the expert panel members only andaim 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. Close meetings typically bear three different forms:

a) 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.

b) 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 panel member.

c) 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 points that are to feed into the draft final report. It is the responsibility of the expert panel Chair and the ANQA coordinator to outline the major lines of the final report, record the areas in need of further improvement as well as commendations for the TLI/AP accomplishments.

As a result of these close meetings the expert panel should fill in respective fields in the report and submit it to ANQA on daily basis and after the adjourning of the final close meeting. Such a precaution is meant to avoid fraud and respective corruption.

d) *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 scrutiny two weeks before the site-visit.

The interested staff and students should register with the ANQA coordinator, who will allocate a short meeting with the expert panel, which should not take more than fifteen minutes. Since the time span allocated is limited the persons who register for the open meetings with the expert panel are encouraged to submit a short written statement expressing any concern, opinion or suggestion to the expert panel.

The findings obtained during the open meetings are to be explored by the expert panel, analyzed in detail for relevance and validity and included in respective analysis.

e) Closing meeting

Closing meeting is a formal closure of the external evaluation and is meant to introduce the preliminary results of the external evaluation to the target TLI/AP. Such a meeting is arranged for the expert panel members, the Rector or/and Director of the target TLI/AP and other staff members at theRector's and/or Director's invitation. During the closing meeting the Chair of the expert panel along with the ANQA coordinator deliver a brief verbal report on the expert panel's observations.

During this meeting the staff involved in the accreditation process and the Rector/Director 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 the end of the process the panel should thank the rectors and the TLIs for the time and resources allocated for the site-visit and underline some of the strengths they have encountered. At this point it is important to communicate that there is no decision and there is no room for discussion and the other body, the Accreditation Committee, will be taking care of the decision making.

5.3   Report production

5.3.1 Individual Reports

By the end of the site-visit, each expert develops his/her individual report covering the evaluator's area of responsibility and submits it to the panel Chair and ANQA Coordinator.

The analyses in the individual reports are based on the findings of the desk-review of the self-assessment report and the site-visit. The individual reports are intended to ensure a firm background in the form of evidences, based on which the expert panel comes to its conclusions and are supposed to solve disagreements with any of the conclusions that the expert panel comes up with. Further, the evidences can be used in case of appeal by the TLI/AP under scrutiny.

Individual reports should include expert findings on each accreditation standard, which should feed into logically well-grounded conclusions on each

criterion produced by the panel and led by ANQA Coordinator. If there are any disagreements between panel members on interpretations of evidences or conclusions the ANQA Coordinator is responsible for regulating the situation and leading the discussions in a way that results in a consensus amont the panel members.

5.3.2 Final report

The ANQA Coordinator and panel Chair, on behalf of the expert panel, are responsible for preparing a draft of the final report. The final report, by no means, may comment on individuals (positively or negatively) or their activities.The final report is developed through the following phases:

- **First phase:** evaluation of each standard – there should be thorough and in-depth analyses on each standard backed up with relevant arguments and evidences. This version of the final report is sent to the TLI for review and/or correction of errors of fact within the timeframes stipulated by the respective procedure in the Accreditation Statute. The Rector of the TLI has the right to provide a written response to the draft final report for further consideration by the expert panel. With this regards the educational institution may address its comments and make suggestions on amendments in the draft report to ANQA within timeframes established by respective procedure in the Accreditation Statute.If the institution does not have additional comments and suggestions on making amendments the institution states its agreement on the draft report.
- **Second phase:** evaluation of each criterion – drawing on the findings on each standard and the feedback of the TLI on the first version of the final report, the ANQA Coordinator along with the panel Chair provide an in-depth analyses on each criterion supported by relevant arguments and evidences.
- **Third phase:** judgments on each criterion – having included the judgments on each criterion in the final report, the latter is sent to the Accreditation Committee for decision-making.

During the first phase, in case there is any comment or suggestion on the draft report, the TLI should provide for:

- an explanation of the point at issue;
- background reasoning or evidence to support the comment/correction;
- a precise reference to the relevant text in the draft final report;
- preferred wording where appropriate.

The final report has a special chapter for the TLIs to reflect so that the Accreditation Committeecould form a perception on the comments of the TLI. The only amendment to the final report that the TLI can make is in the chapter that refers to the TLI. No other corrections are accepted. The ANQA Coordinator and the Chair may amend the rest of the chapters only after the TLI inserts its comments in the chapter designated for the TLI. The report takes its final form after the Accreditation Council takes a decision. The history of the final decision should be transparent to enable the reader to understand why the decision was taken. Thus, for each decision there should be a red line enabling tracing the roots and evidences for a particular decision.

It is ANQA Coordinator's responsibility to circulate the written response of the TLI among the panel members and the Director of ANQA. The expert panel is to scrutinize the written response and make respective amendments in the draft final report. The ANQA Coordinator and the Chair then finalize the report and circulates it among the expert panel for their endorsement.Then the final report is submitted to the TLI Rector for endorsement.

The Rector/Director of the TLI may feedback and request clarifications on any point in the draft final report. The expert panel may need to further investigate some of the points in the final report in case the arguments provided fail to ensure a firm background for conclusions for the TLI. By signing and sealing the agreement statement, the Rector/Director of the TLI accepts the results of the external evaluation and agrees to make it publicly available upon completion.

The endorsement of both the TLI's Rector and the expert panel members is expressed through respective signatures and the seal of the respective TLI. According to the Accreditation Statute the preparation of the draft final report, approval by the panel members and submission of the final report to ANQA should be carried out within two weeks.

During the third phase, following the TLI's consent, the report is reviewed by ANQA and submitted to the Accreditation Committee for decision-making. According to the procedure set out in the Accreditation Statute the expert panel submits the final report to ANQA within 6 weeks after the site-visit. The final report goes back to the expert panel for further exploration if the Accreditation Committee finds lack of background/evidences and argumentation for decision-making.

The final report of the expert panel includes the evaluation of strengths and weaknesses per each ANQA quality assurance standard and criterion, commendations for the achievements as well as confidential recommendation

on theaccreditation decision that is supposed to be submitted to the Accreditation Committee.

The final report is considered confidential before the decision is made by the Accreditation Council and may not be disclosed to third party individuals and organizations unless authorization is granted by the TLI under scrutiny.

5.3.3 Commendations and recommendations

An important element of the Final report is the statements made by the expert panel on commendations for the accomplishments and recommendations for further improvement:

- Commendations relate to the good practice identified by the expert panel and considered major accomplishments of the TLI.
- Recommendations relate to the areas the expert panel found to be need of further improvement. The recommendationsare supposed to alert the target TLI/AP rather than instruct it to take a particular action or a series of actions. However, with a prior agreement with ANQA the expert panel may offer some suggestions for improvements. Recommendations are also intended to highlight thepriority issues to be addressed.

The Accreditation Committee expects the TLI to use the report objectively. In preparing public announcements, the institution should avoid quoting the report out of the context or reporting only the favorable or unfavorable passages.

5.3.4 ANQA's Conclusion

Based on the educational institution's self-assessment report, the expert panel report and the endorsed final report, the ANQA Coordinator together with the expert panel Chair prepare a draft conclusion within the timeframes fixed in the Accreditation Statute.

ANQA's conclusion should present, more concisely than the final report, the summary of results obtained through the analysis of the self-assessment report and site-visits. It is required that the spirit of this document and deductions presented in it emanate from the conclusions in the final report.

The ANQA's conclusion should be laid out in at most 10 printed pages and include the expert panel'srecommendation on accreditation- positive or negative. However, along with ANQA's conclusion, the Accreditation

Committee should also receive the final report in full to better understand the conditions leading to a decision type.

The final report along with its conclusion is also sent to the educational institution to enable the latter get prepared for discussions at the convention of the Accreditation Committee.The ANQA Coordinator is responsible for informing the educational institution about the date of Accreditation Committee convention.

5.4   Withdrawal of the application

If the TLI/AP does not meet the criteria for accreditation withdrawing the application may hold the procedure back. The withdrawal is also included in the final report and the TLI is liable for paying for the second round of evaluation. Withdrawal from the procedure provides the TLI/AP with an opportunity to improve the elements that led to failure of a criterion and apply anew to obtain the accreditation status. In this case the TLI will avoid the risk of being negatively labeled on the accreditation status.

5.5   Decision-making

The Statute on Accreditation Committee formation and operationregulates the decision-making process.

Upon the receipt of the draft conclusion and final report prepared by the expert panel and finalized by ANQA the members of the Accreditation Council scrutinize both the conclusions and the reflections of the TLI on the final report. Such scrutiny is intended to check the accuracy of

- Implementation of the ANQA policy and procedures by the expert panel;
- The quality and usefulness of the final report and to the extent that it complies with ANQA requirements.

The members of the Accreditation Committee are also independent readers of the ANQA conclusion and may reflect if some points are not well discussed or formulations are not accurate.After scrutinizing the final report developed by the expert panel and other relevant documents the Accreditation Committee convenes to make a decision on the accreditation status. The target TLI is also invited to send representatives to the Accreditation Committee when the decision is made on granting an accreditation status, which can be reflected in one of the following:

- **Accepted** – meets and exceeds the minimum requirements for the criteria;
- **Conditionally accepted** – meets the minimum requirements, however, needs further redevelopment and is feasible to be achieved in a two-year timespan;
- **Rejected** – fails to meet the minimum requirements and cannot be achieved in a two-year timespan.

During the final discussions of the ANQA conclusion by the Accreditation Committee the TLI representatives as well as the expert panel members may be present if such a necessity arises. However, the participation of the expert panel Chair and the ANQA Coordinator is required.

The expert panel Chair presents the conclusions. The Rector and respective representatives of the TLI are also allowed to reflect on the conclusion. As a culmination of the Accreditation Committee convention the Chair of the Accreditation Committee announces the decision on the accreditation status.

5.5.1 Publication of the decision on accreditation

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

After taking a decision and making the report publicly available the final report along with the decision is sent to the Ministry of Education and Science for certification. Upon the receipt of the accreditation documents, the MoES, within the timeframe set out in the Accreditation Statute, scrutinizes the final report as well as the decision made by the Accreditation Committeeand certifies the decision.To certify the institutional accreditation the MoES issues respective certificates while for validation of each academic programme the MoES issues respective supplements to the institutional accreditation certificates. The decision together with the approved conclusions is also sent to the educational institution.

5.5.2 Inclusion in the State Accreditation Register

After issuing respective certificates and supplements the MoES informs ANQA about the accreditation decision in written form. Following the written decision ANQA makes relevant entries in the State Accreditation Register.

5.5.3 Appeal of the decision on accreditation

Any decision on institutional or academic programme accreditation may become a subject to appeal by the educational institution. Such a procedure is carried out through court according to the Legislation of the Republic of Armenia. However, ANQA is the only agency responsible for carrying out the double review.

IV. ACCREDITATION CRITERIA AND STANDARDS

State Accreditation Criteria and Standards serve as a foundation and framework to guide institutions in self-assessment 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, philosophies and purposes. However, the criteria are precise enough to ensure that critical aspects of acceptable quality are encompassed in the statements. 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 ANQA are reviewed and modified periodically to ensure they are current, valid, relevant and consistent with the emerging trends and developments in the field of quality assurance and accreditation universally.

1. Institutional accreditation standards

General principle

The management activities undertaken by the tertiary education institution in the sphere of teaching and learning, research and services to the society are improved continuously and aim at:

- *Quality culture establishment*
- *Establishment of an organizational 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 accountability of the institution*

- *Promoting comparability and competitiveness as well as transparency of the service provisions at both national and international levels.*

I. Mission and purpose

	Principle	Standards
1	*The institution's mission and purpose are in accordance with the relevant reference levels and are consistent with the policies and practices that guide its operations.*	1.1 The institution has a clear, well-articulated mission that represents the institution's purposes and goals and is in accordance with the Armenian National Qualifications Framework (hereafter ANQF). 1.2 The mission statement reflects the needs of the internal and external stakeholders. 1.3 The institution has formal mechanisms and/or procedures to evaluate the achievement of its mission and purpose and to further improve them.

II. Governance and administration

	Principle	Standards
2	*The institution's system of governance ensures ethical decision-making and efficient provision of human, material and financial resources to effectively accomplish its mission, educational and other purposes.*	2.1 The institution's governance and administrative structures and practices promote effective and ethical leadership and decision making congruent with the mission and purpose of the institution. 2.2 The institution's system of governance provides for student and teachers input in decision making in matters directly affecting them. 2.3 The institution carries out short, medium, and long term planning consistent with its mission and purpose as well as appropriate monitoring tools ensuring implementation of the plans. 2.4 The institution conducts environmental scanning and draws on the findings to

		enhance its effectiveness.
		2.5 The management of 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 mechanisms in place providing up to date, objective and impartial quality (quantitative and qualitative) information on the academic programmes offered and qualification awards.

III. Academic programmes

	Principle	Standards
3	*The programmes are in concord with the institution's mission, form part of institutional planning and resource allocation, are intellectually credible 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 state academic standards.
		3.2 The institution has a policy that promotes alignment between teaching and learning approaches and the intended learning outcomes and ensures effective learning.
		3.3 The programme ensures impartial evaluation of students' level of achievement against the learning and educational objectives and promotes academic integrity
		3.4 The programmes are intellectually credible, designed coherently, and articulate well with other relevant programmes, promote mobility of students and staff as well as internationalization.
		3.5 There are mechanisms in place ensuring academic programme approval, monitoring, and periodic review.

IV. Students

	Principle	Standards
4	*The institution has student advising and support services which provide for productive and learning environment.*	4.1 The institution has set mechanisms for promoting equitable recruitment, selection, and admission procedures. 4.2 The institution has policies and procedures for assessing student educational needs. 4.3 The institution provides opportunities for extra-curricular activities aimed at supporting student learning. 4.4 There are special hours set for students to visit the faculty administrative staff for additional support and guidance. 4.5 The institution has special student career support services that prepares graduates for employment 4.6 The students are actively involved in the research the university majors in. 4.7 The institution has established policies and procedures that promote student active involvement in the institution's governance. 4.8 The institution has a special body that promotes students' rights protection 4.9 The institution has set mechanisms that ensure quality of the student services and the students are involved in the quality assurance practices.

V. Faculty and staff

	Principle	Standards
5	*The institution provides for a high quality faculty and staff to achieve the set goals for academic programmes and institution's mission.*	5.1 The institution 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 institution has well established policies and procedures for the periodic evaluation of the teaching staff
		5.4 The institution promotes teacher professional development in accordance to the needs outlined during regular evaluations (both internal and external)
		5.5 There is necessary permanent staff to provide for the coverage of qualifications adequately
		5.6 There are set policies and procedures for the staff promotion in general and the young ones in particular
		5.7 There is necessary technical and administrative staff to achieve the strategic goals.

VI. Research and development

	Principle	Standards
6	*The institution promotes its research objectives, projects and expected outcomes. There is a research ethos and culture, and mechanisms for the validating research outcomes.*	6.1 The institution has a clear strategy promoting its research interests and developments.
		6.2 The institution has a medium and short term programs which address its research interests in a due manner.
		6.3 The institution promotes development and innovation through sound policies and strategies.
		6.4 The institution emphasizes internationalization of its research.
		6.5 The institution has well established mechanisms for linking research with teaching
		6.6 There are mechanisms in place assuring quality of research and development.

VII. Infrastructure and resources

	Principle	Standards
7	*The TLI has its own property and resources, which effectively support the implementation of its stated mission and objectives and create a learning environment.*	7.1 The institution takes due care to create a learning environment appropriate to the academic programmes offered
		7.2 The institution endeavors to secure adequate financial resources and distribution of the latter to provide, maintain and operate the facilities and equipment as needed to achieve its mission and objectives
		7.3 The institution has sound financial policies and capacity to sustain and ensure the integrity and continuity of the programmes offered at the institution.
		7.4 The institution's resource base supports the institution's educational programmes and its strategic plans for sustainability and continuous quality enhancement.
		7.5 There is a sound policy and procedure to manage information and documentation
		7.6 The institution ensures the environment is safe and secure through health and safety mechanisms that also consider special needs of students
		7.7 There are special mechanisms in place that ensure quality of the resources, their effectiveness, applicability and availability.

VIII. Societal responsibility

	Principle	Standards
8	*The institution is accountable to the government, employers and society at large for the education it offers and the resources it uses to meet these objectives.*	8.1 There is clear policy on institutional accountability.
		8.2 The institution ensures transparency of its procedures and processes and makes the results of the latter publicly available.
		8.3 There are strong links with the society and it is expressed through firm feedback mechanisms
		8.4 The institution has mechanisms that takes care of knowledge transfer to the society and contributes to development of citizenship.

IX. External relations and internationalization

	Principle	Standards
9	*The institution promotes experience exchange and enhancement through its sound external relations practices, thus promoting internationalization of the institution*	9.1 The institution promotes its external relations through sound policies and procedures aimed at creating an environment conducive to experience exchange and enhancement and internationalization.
		9.2 The institution's external relations infrastructure ensures smooth flow of the process.
		9.3 The institution promotes fruitful and effective collaboration with local and international counterparts.
		9.4 The institution ensures the appropriate level of a foreign language for internationalization purposes.

X. Internal quality assurance

	Principle	Standards
	The institution has a set infrastructure for internal quality assurance, which promotes establishment of a quality culture and continual development of the institution.	3.1 The institution has internal quality assurance policies and procedures that are in line with the ESG standards. 3.2 The institution allocates sufficient time, material, human and financial resources to manage internal quality assurance processes. 3.3 The quality assurance strategy, policy and procedures have a formal status, are publicly available and include a role for students and other stakeholders. 3.4 The internal quality assurance system is periodically reviewed. 3.5 The internal quality assurance system provides valid and sufficient background for the success of the external quality assurance processes. 3.6 The internal quality assurance system provides for the transparency of the processes unfolding in the institution through providing valid and up to date information on the quality of the latter.

2. Academic programme accreditation standards

General principle

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.*

I. Academic programme design and approval

	Principle	Standards
1	*The program 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 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, which correspond to an academic qualification. 1.4 The learning outcomes of the programme are in line with the ANQF, national qualifications descriptors, and state academic standards. 1.5 The programmes are intellectually credible, designed coherently and articulate well with other relevant programmes. 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

	Principle	Standards
2	*A high quality staff provides for the achievement of the set goals for the academic programme.*	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 capable of ensuring programme intended learning outcomes. 2.2 There are well established policies and procedures for periodic evaluation and promotion of the teaching staff 2.3 Teacher professional development is promoted in accordance to the needs outlined during

		regular evaluations (both internal and external)
		2.4 There is necessary permanent staff to provide for the coverage of qualifications adequately.

II. Teaching and learning practices

	Principle	Standards
3	*The programme promotes productive teaching and learning practices based on the evidence of student learning outcomes as well as provides for the faculty effectiveness in achieving its educational objectives.*	3.1 The programme clearly defines the teaching and learning approaches necessary to achieve the intended learning outcomes. 3.2 The teaching and learning draw on the progressive approaches accepted at international level. 3.3 There are set mechanisms evaluating quality of teaching and learning approaches.

III. Student assessment

	Principle	Standards
4	*The institution ensures impartial and consistent evaluation of students' level of achievement against the intended learning and educational objectives and promotes academic integrity.*	a. The program evaluates students' level of learning outcome achievement against the intended learning outcomes in accordance with the evaluation methods and criteria described in the prospectus. b. The assessment of the achieved learning outcomes is based on clearly stated and transparent policies and procedures as well as standards. c. There are set mechanisms for review and improvement of student assessment. d. The institution treats students fairly and equitably through policies and procedures, which address student conduct and grievances. e. The institution has clearly articulated policies promoting academic integrity and tracking for plagiarism

IV. Research and development

	Principle	Standards
5	*The programme promotes its research objectives and projects while ensuring links between teaching and learning and research.*	a. The programme has a long-term strategy and medium and short-term programs which address its research interests in a due manner. b. The programme promotes development and innovation through sound policies c. The programme emphasizes internationalization of the research d. There are well established mechanisms for linking research and teaching

V. Learning environment

	Principle	Standards
6	*The quality educational provisions are ensured through creating an environment conducive to learning.*	6.1 The programme has its property and resources, 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 understand the requirements and receive timely, useful and regular information and advice about relevant academic requirements. 6.3 There are necessary teaching and learning resources to meet ensure achievement of intended learning outcomes.

VI. Quality assurance

	Principle	Standards
7	*The programme has internal quality assurance system that promotes its maintenance and continuous improvement.*	7.1 The quality assurance is designed and operated to attend to societal needs and students' requests, as well as to check the functions of the system itself.
		7.2 There are well-established policies and procedures for programme internal quality assurance.
		7.3 The programme provides an educational feedback system that examines it on the basis of the results of evaluation regarding the level of student achievement against the intended learning and educational objectives.
		7.4 The internal and external stakeholders are involved in the quality assurance processes.
		7.5 There are set mechanisms in place ensuring dissemination of good practice to other relevant programmes.

3. Evaluation of the TLI/AP performance

The ANQA criteria and standards stipulate a dual evolution on each criteria, that is yes or no decision with strong evidences for each criterion. The *yes* and *no* decision is taken at the end of the procedure by the Accreditation Committee.

In general, there are three major questions that are to be answered by the Accreditation Committee to come to an evaluation decision:

- Is there enough information to come to a conclusion on each criterion? What other information is necessary to obtain to provide for a just and objective conclusion?
- Given the information at hand, what is the tendency for decision-making? What are the evidences for each tendency?
- What are the arguments for *yes* or *no* on each criterion?

In their turn, the peers in the expert panel are to provide for the following:

- In-depth analysis of the state-of-the-arts as well as evidences on each standard and criterion;
- Tendency for yes or no on each criterion supported by the respective evidences;
- Projections for the future developments (how do you think the things will evolve in the future? Provide respective arguments). Is there trust in future developments? Are there evidences for the trust?
- Recommendations if the state-of-the-arts provides for necessary evidences for *yes* or no decision?

Drawing on the expert panel report, the Accreditation Committee is to take a decision whether the evidences and arguments put forth are enough for *yes* or *no* decision. The decision on accreditation status is achieved through voting among the members of the Accreditation Committee.

V. GUIDELINES AND CRITERIA FOR PEER-REVIEWERS

Within the frames of external quality assurance processes ANQA will draw upon the experience of highly qualified experts, who will carry out desk-reviews, site-visits and as a result of the whole external evaluation procedure produce a final report.

The selection of external experts is of key importance since recognition of accreditation decisions is closely linked to the implementation of accepted selection criteria and procedures involving external experts. The European Consortium for Accreditation (2005) members agreed on the following principles:

- Any decision regarding the composition of the expert team is to be based on the rules and regulations of the accreditation organization or on pertinent legislation; the selection process must be fully transparent.
- Institutions or other units undergoing accreditation are given the opportunity to object to the selection of experts.
- The accreditation decisions are not made by the group of experts themselves, but by the accreditation organization.
- Experts must be independent and in a position to make unbiased judgments.
- Depending on the objectives of the accreditation procedure, expert teams should bring together the relevant expertise.

Thus, ANQA expert selection criteria and procedure ensure the compliance with the ECA standards.

The professionals and students selected to be expert team members and process facilitators are drawn from the ANQA pool of highly qualified, experienced and well-respected local and international personnel who already have skills in the core activities of quality assurance processes. In particular, the experts will be selected for their highly developed and practiced skills of written and oral communication, conduct of meetings, focus groups, analysis and synthesis of a wide variety of information, and evaluation leading to sound judgment.

ANQA will organize expert and ANQA coordinator trainings to build on these skills and to assist the expert team members and ANQA coordinator to apply them to a specific review process. The expert recruitment, selection, training and development policy is made publicly available through ANQA website.

ANQA will ensure the TLIs under review benefit from the quality assurance processes through

- Instilling confidence that review team members and facilitators are properly trained to undertake review work professionally, and confidently;
- Providing consistent application of each review method;
- Ensuring consistency in the messages about the review method, which the review team members and facilitators take back to their institutions.

1. Expert panel composition

ANQA sets up a visiting team (expert panel) for a site-visit to the institution or programme seeking an institutional audit and/or accreditation status. This team is often made up of peers and stakeholders hired and trained by ANQA based on their background qualifications and because of their strong interest in the quality of higher education institutions. The team also includes a full-time employee of ANQA, ANQA Coordinator.

The ANQA Coordinator, in consultation with the ANQA Director, is responsible for nominating candidates for expert functions. Nominations of student representatives are beyond the ANQA Coordinator's scope of responsibilities; nominations for student representatives are requested from institutional student organizations.

The TLIs are given an opportunity to comment on the composition of panels before the actual appointments. In case of objections regarding any of the experts in the proposed panel the TLI has to file a written objection to ANQA.

There are two major groups of experts intended for institutional and programme accreditation. Both groups of experts must have competences in at least one of the following fields:

- Programme and institutional evaluation;
- Programme design and monitoring;
- Policy and procedure development;
- Educational administration;
- Quality assurance;
- The discipline area under evaluation or other relevant area.

The composition of the expert panels depends on the unit subject to accreditation. It may include five to seven experts. One of the experts in the panel is recruited from the expert databases of prominent foreign quality

assurance agencies. The expert panels are always nominated upon the acceptance of an institutional orprogrammeself-assessment reports by ANQA.

The expert panel is usually composed of

- Professors from universities with
    - proven specialist expertise;
    - proven activity in the relevant specialist field;
    - accreditation or evaluation experience, university-level didactic competences, international experience, experience of university administration (desirable);
    - a broad international teaching and/or evaluation experience;
    - methodology expertise;
    - additionally, participation history in training opportunities on accreditation/audit issues.
- Representatives of professional practice/industry with
    - proven specialist expertise;
    - experience of employing an working with university graduates in the workplace (in a human resources capacity);
    - accreditation or evaluation experience, international experience, experience of university administration (desirable);
    - additionally, participation history in training opportunities on accreditation/audit issues
    - prior learning experience in the programme/institution in target (alumni).
- Students whoare enrolled in a subject relevant to the accreditation procedure
    - already have experience as a student, but not have clearly exceeded the standard period of study;
    - additionally, participated in training opportunities on accreditation/audit issues
- Educational managers with
    - proven specialist expertise;
    - experience in accreditation or evaluation
    - international experience
    - experience in university administration
    - additionally, participation history in training opportunities on accreditation/audit issues.

Specific requirements to programme accreditation experts

- For the accreditation of academic programmesat higher education institutions recognized qualifications on the level of a PhD or status of an assistant and associate professor or higher;
- For the accreditation of the academic programmes at institutions delivering vocational education and training (VET) recognized qualifications on the Master's level;
- With the exception of accreditations at the VET level, at least one of the panel members must be recruited abroad.

Specific requirements to experts in the panels for institutional accreditation

- For the accreditation of higher education institutions 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) recognized qualifications on the Master's level;
- At least one member of the expert panel must have competence in institutional management;
- With the exception of accreditations at the VET level, at least one of the panel members must be recruited abroad;
- The panel must have one representative with experience from (other relevant) sector of work or public service.

Language Proficiency

The local experts should be proficient in both spoken and written Armenian language. One of the local experts in the panel should be proficient in the English language.

Knowledge of and skills in applying institutional and programme accreditation criteria and standards

All the experts should have an in-depth knowledge of

- the RA accreditation criteria and standards, policies and procedures and their practical application;
- the ESG standards and their practical application;
- ANQA evaluation methods;

Experts should also

- appropriately interpret and apply the criteria to actual assessment situations;
- have highly developed and practiced skills of written and oral communication, conduct of meetings, focus groups, analysis and synthesis of a wide variety of information, and evaluation leading to sound judgment.

Expert selection principles

Prior to the approval of the expert panel composition, the applicant TLI/programme is informed of it. The TLI/programme may request that experts be replaced where a suspicion of bias exists. Such requests may only be based on the following:

- Non-relevance of the expert qualifications with the unit under review;
- Inadequate experience in the field under review;
- Conflict of interest.

Each ANQA expert panel member is required to sign a confidentiality agreement and declaration of impartiality prior to the commencement of the quality assurance processes. The expert panel conducts the review based on the requirements and procedural principles set by ANQA and supplementary aids distributed to all experts prior to the review visit.

The expert panels are responsible to

- conduct a desk-review prior to the site-visit;
- conduct the site-visit at the target TLI;
- participate in the preparation of the final report, based on the desk-review of the self assessment, required documentation and on the site-visit results;
- review documentation of the fulfillment of requirements (in case of conditional recognition) and provide the Accreditation Committee with a final evaluation and recommended decision.

1.1 Distribution of responsibilities among the panel members

To preserve ANQA's image and avoid misinterpretation of the roles and responsibilities it is necessary to come up with a non-formal description and explanation of the roles of the experts involved in the expert panel as well as those of ANQA Coordinator.

1.1.1 Role of ANQA Coordinator

ANQA coordinator is the only contact point between the expert panel and the TLI under scrutiny. He/She acts as a guarantor of the accreditation methodology. ANQA Coordinator does not evaluate nor does he/she make judgments on the TLI/AP performance. ANQA coordinator is thus responsible for

- the smooth flow and success of the procedure (handling debates, regulating misunderstandings);
- for writing down the report;
- facilitation of the process and protection of the panel members;
- analysis of the situation to come up with right solution in case ad-hoc ones are needed;
- ensuring continuous quality assurance for the panel functioning and the procedure.

In some cases, there might be a need to assign two ANQA Coordinators to work in tandems during institutional accreditation.

The ANQA Coordinator asks each member of the panel in what direction they think. Each member of the panel should leave the final meeting with a detailed outline of the final report that includes preliminary results and recommendations. The paper should also include the major issues for further discussions by the panel. At the end the site-visit the Coordinator should also have a list of the documents that might be necessary for the final report. The coordinator should make sure that he/she has all the notes of the experts.

1.1.2 Role of the Chair

The Chair of the expert panel is responsible for

- conducting desk-review;
- conducting site-visits;
  - chairing the meetings;
  - facilitating on site;
  - dividing the tasks of what each expert should do;
  - keeping the schedule (facilitate, give speaking time, make sure all the experts ask questions, check that all the questions are posed).

Led by the ANQA Coordinator the Chair is to

- participate in the desk-review report production;
- participate in the development of the final report;

- take care of the methodology of the process.

1.1.3 Role of the expert panel members

Each expert is responsible for

- conducting desk-review;
- conducting site-visits;
    - participating in site-visit events;
    - asking the questions designated to them by the ANQA Coordinator and Chair;
    - taking their own notes to feed into their individual report.

The experts are not allowed to bring in their impressions and are not supposed to reveal anything on their own. The experts are not supposed to use terms like satisfactory, unsatisfactory, good or bad.

2. Expert attributes

The expert attributes include but are not limited to the following. The ANQA experts should

- Be open minded and mature and willing to consider alternative ideas or points of view;
- Possess sound judgment, analytical skills, and tenacity;
- Have the ability to perceive situations in a realistic way to understand complex operations from a broad perspective and to understand the role of individual units within an organization;
- Be able to distinguish crucial or essential points from less important ones;
- Be ethical – fair, truthful, sincere, honest and discreet;
- Be diplomatic – tactful in dealing with people;
- Be observant – actively aware of physical surroundings and activities and habits;
- Be tenacious – persistent, focused on achieving objectives;
- Be decisive – reaches timely conclusions based on logical reasoning and analysis;
- Be self-reliant – acts and functions independently while interacting effectively with others.

Expert should be able to apply the above-mentioned attributes in order to:

- Obtain and assess objective evidence fairly;

- Remain true to the purpose of the assessment without fear or favor;
- Evaluate constantly the effects of assessment observations and personal interactions during an assessment;
- Treat concerned personnel in a way that will best achieve the assessment objective;
- React with sensitivity to the national conventions of the country in which the assessment is performed;
- Perform the assessment process without deviating due to distractions;
- Commit full attention and support to the assessment process;
- React effectively in stressful situations;
- Arrive at generally acceptable conclusions based on objective evidence collected during assessments;
- Remain true to a conclusion despite pressure to change that is not based on objective evidence.

3. Expert recruitment and selection

With the purpose to recruit the most competent and reliable national and international experts ANQA has established an expert recruitment database, which can be accessed through ANQA website (http://experts.anqa.am). Potential experts are encouraged to fill in the required data and upload their resumes. Based on the ANQA expert pool the ANQA Coordinator will conduct short-listing for each case and therefore, recruitment.

Expert competence is measured by the demonstration of the application of specific expert knowledge, skills and personal attributes. Various methods may be used by ANQA to evaluate the competence of expert. These methods will be used in an appropriate combination to give the required level of confidence in expert competence. Demonstration and evaluation of expert competence include, but are not limited to the following:

- **Examination/testing/training evaluation**. Essays or interviews may be used to determine an expert's knowledge and skills as appropriate to the needs of ANQA.
- **Demonstration.** The planned and formal witnessing of specific expert skill performance, such as in focus groups.
- **Formal evaluation**. The formal, planned and structured witnessing and evaluation of expert performance during an actual assessment.
- **Casual observation**. The unplanned or informal witnessing of limited expert performance. This observation could take place in actual assessment or other situations in which assessment skills or personal attributes can be observed.

- **Documentation**. Recorded information, such as resumes, assessment logs, training certificates, transcripts, certifications, and professional licenses.
- **Review of previous work**. The review of expert reports, completed checklists, assessment plans or other writing samples.
- **Interview.** Interviews may involve one or more interviewers and the use of selection boards or evaluation panels. Interviews may also be used to verify evidence from other sources.

4. Expert orientation/trainings

All ANQA experts will undergo an extensive orientation period after the selection and approval by the TLI under scrutiny.

4.1 Initial training

ANQA provides for initially training people to ensure a high level of confidence that they can competently perform on their first assessment. If actual performance during the first one or more assessments is not satisfactory, the expert candidate should either not be used further or, if not of a technical nature, additional training and/or counseling will be provided. Each expert team member and facilitator can expect the ANQA to:

- provide induction to the work of the ANQA, its mission, standards and values;
- train him/her in specialist skills needed to carry out or facilitate quality assurance processes; for expert team members, this includes effective use of the electronic communications system set up to support assessments;
- assist him/her to develop sufficient confidence to undertake or facilitate their first assessment;
- provide training reference material to use after completion of their training;
- provide the ANQA's documents they need to conduct the reviews to which they are assigned;
- add them to the ANQA's mailing list for receipt of relevant new publications and information about the ANQA's work;
- provide them with opportunities to contribute to the evaluation of the methods in which they have reviewed.

Assuming successful completion of initial training, the ANQA will:

- provide expert team members with feedback on their performance on their first review and, where appropriate, guidance on their further development;
- encourage each team member to engage in the further development of his/her role as reviewer;
- take into account experience of prior ANQA training and experience when training expert team members and facilitators to carry out ANQA review methods which are new to them.

ANQA envisions progress of experts through a series of levels, typically from an expert-in-training level to technical and/or expert level based upon successful completion of a certain number of assessments at each level coupled with acceptable performance. Activities of an expert in training may range from observing a qualified expert, usually on the first one or two assessments, to carrying out the assessment, partially or in full, under the supervision of a qualified expert.

4.2   Ongoing training

ANQA provides for their qualified expert 'refresher' training sessions and periodic short courses to help keep them updated on evolving procedures and requirements and to give them an opportunity to share experiences and to learn from each other. Within the scope of its activities, ANQA will organize special meetings, as appropriate, for expert, and, where relevant technical experts, in specific fields to discuss specific problem areas. This will promote consistency of assessment and overall improvement in the quality assurance processes. These training activities will be held regularly. ANQA will consider requiring its experts to attend a minimum percentage of these periodic training activities over a multi-year period in order to maintain their status as an approved expert.

5.   Monitoring and evaluation of expert performance

Ensuring competent performance of assessment is essential. Further, to promote confidence in the ANQA quality assurance procedures the work of the expert panel will be regularly monitored and evaluated. Accordingly, ANQA has a formal program and procedures for both the initial evaluation and the ongoing evaluation and monitoring of the performance of its experts.

5.1 Initial evaluation

ANQA will monitor and evaluate on-site the initial assessment(s) of new experts usually with experienced staff, or technical experts performing the on-site evaluation. The criteria used will be tailored to reflect the ANQA's specific policies and procedures for the proper conduct of assessments. ANQA also considers using feedback from the institutions regarding their assessments and feedback from reviewers of expert reports as part of their evaluation of expert performance.

5.2 Ongoing evaluation and monitoring

ANQA will also monitor the ongoing performance of their experts using a planned combination of the following ways:

- **Formal observation.** Qualified personnel of the ANQA conduct onsite audits and report on the performance of expert and recommended appropriate follow-up to improve performance. All experts will be audited periodically at least once every three years or more frequently if there are no other ways of establishing an expert's continued mental acuity and physical stamina to perform assessments.
- **Reviewing expert reports**. Qualified personnel of the ANQA will check the expert's report of findings and completed documentation such as checklists to ensure appropriate interpretation of requirements, adequate documentation of evidence, and clarity of writing. These checks will be done systematically and documented for suitable feedback to the expert.
- **Collecting feedback from institutions**. Soliciting oral and written feedback from institutions is one of the tools to supplement the expert performance evaluation program. The collection of institutional feedback will be done systematically and documented for suitable feedback to the expert.
- **Collecting feedback from team members**. Oral and written feedback from peer expert (solicited or unsolicited) will also be used as a useful tool towards evaluating the particular expert and adding to the uniformity of the assessment process because of the differing points of view that may be discerned.
- **Casual observation**. The unplanned or informal witnessing of limited expert performance may also be applied. This observation may take place in actual assessment or other situations, such as group meetings and refresher training, in which assessment skills or personal attributes can be observed.

6.   Conflict of interests, confidentiality and integrity

Before accepting a specific assignment, the potential experts must disclose any professional, financial and work-related interest that could be construed as a conflict of interest. ANQA has adopted a strict conflict of interest policy for experts nominated for participation in the accreditation process. A candidate for the expert panel is considered to have a possible conflict of interest if such individual has

- formal connections with, or functions at the institutions or programmes undergoing accreditation,
- any kind of close relationships,
- an existing or potential financial or other interest which impairs or might appear to impair independent, unbiased judgment in discharging responsibilities on behalf of ANQA Such interests may include, but are not limited to:
- financial or other interests in institutions/programmes seeking accreditation through ANQA employment or consulting arrangements with institutions/programmes engaged in the accreditation process
- the seeking of employment or consulting arrangements with institutions/programmes engaged in the accreditation process, without prior disclosure to the Chair of the Accreditation Committee
- ownership of some or all of the institution/programme, its assets, or the stock of the company that owns or operates the institution/programme that is involved in the accreditation process;
- service as an officer or director of a institutions/programmes that is engaged in the accreditation process;

If the candidate is uncertain whether a particular interest should be declared, the individual shall describe the interest in writing to the ANQA Coordinator, who will issue a binding ruling as to whether the matter in question constitutes a reportable interest.

Confidentiality: Experts are expected to sign an agreement of confidentiality guaranteeing that all information received from and about each assessed institution is held in strict confidence and no confidential information should be disclosed without the written permission of the institution, unless the law requires such information to be disclosed without such consent.

Integrity: ANQA will have arrangements 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: ANQA does not allow its experts to consult with the institutions that they have assessed; at least until such time as the responsibility for the issues of that particular institution has been fully discharged (e.g. a new assessment team has been assigned).

VI. EXTERNAL EVALUTION 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 Governing Board.