FOLLOW-UP REPORT

FEBRUARY 2019

National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance, Foundation

YEREVAN |

Contents

INTRODUCTION

At its meeting of 13-14 February 2017, the Board of ENQA agreed that Armenian National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance, Foundation (hereinafter ANQA) met the necessary requirements for being granted ENQA Full Membership based on an external review conducted during 2016.

ANQA analysed the panel report thoroughly, made a follow-up plan containing all the recommendations by the panel and actions that are to be taken as a result of the external review outcomes.

The current follow-up report provides updates on ANQA's developments in general, introduces the improvements that have been implemented as a result of ENQA-coordinated external review and relative recommendations.

ANQA team takes this opportunity to express its appreciation to the expert panel for the notable review process and helpful recommendations.

GENERAL DEVELOPMENTS

In 2018 the first cycle of institutional accreditation process has been completed in the Republic of Armenia (hereinafter RA). As a result of first cycle, internal quality assurance systems have been embedded at the all higher education institutions and the respective improvement plans have been developed by higher education institutions (hereinafter HEIs). Currently about 90% of students in the RA study in accredited higher education institutions. Hence, the goal of the first cycle of institutional accreditation has been reached.

The second cycle of institutional accreditation ANQA launched by introducing a new accent in institutional context: fostering tertiary level institutions (hereinafter TLIs) to consider the risks of all academic programmes in developing institutional polices.

ANQA also introduced a new framework for conducting monitoring in the TLIs that envisions reviewing internal quality assurance systems at non-accredited institutions as well as conducting thematic monitoring visits.

ANQA took efforts to increase the engagement of vocational education institutions (hereinafter VET) in the quality assurance processes considering European approaches.

Valuing communication with its stakeholders ANQA maintains a constant dialogue with them by continuing its close cooperation with local and international stakeholders promoting also regional collaboration.

To increase student's participation in internal and external quality assurance activities ANQA cooperates with the Armenian National Students' Association (ANSA) which is a member of European Students' Union (ESU) as well as with different TLIs. The aim of the cooperation is to establish a National Students' Expert Pool.

ANQA actively participated in legislative changes in the field of higher education by proposing a number of reforms aimed at improving the quality of higher education, the respective amendments were involved in the "RA Government programme for 2017-2022" and in the draft law on "Higher Education and Research".

EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES (PART 3)
3.1. ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

> **Recommendation:**
> To increase the activities of external quality assurance.
> Particularly, to develop capacity to carry out evaluation of the programmes on a regular basis.

ANQA strives to increase external quality assurance activities and develop capacity to carry out programme accreditation. However, according to the Armenian legal framework the programme accreditation is not mandatory yet. Considering this issue ANQA prepared a proposal and submitted it to the Government for the draft Law on Higher Education and Research where ANQA suggested to make the programme accreditation mandatory at least for the next two cycles and to introduce initial programme accreditation.

Meanwhile, to review the academic programmes in a regular basis ANQA fostered TLIs to analyze the data of all academic programmes within the frames of second cycle of institutional accreditation processes. ANQA also promotes TLIs reviewing the academic progarmmes in accordance with international professional standards. Also, ANQA redeveloped its electronic questioner for the second cycle of institutional accreditation including quantitative data to be presented by the TLIs for all the programmes.

To encourage programme accreditation implementation in Armenia, ANQA in cooperation with stakeholders developed clusters programme accreditation framework, criteria and standards and discussed it with the Ministry of Education and Science.

> **Recommendation:**
> To publish ANQA Annual Plan

List of main evidences:	
ANQA Annual plans	**Web**

In the strategic plan, ANQA has defined its mission, goals and objectives that are based on the analyses of internal and external environments of ANQA. Based on the goals and objectives yearly action plans with certain deadlines and responsible people are set which correspondingly ensure the implementation of strategy.

Taking into consideration ENQA experts' recommendations, ANQA publishes its Annual action plan on its web-site.

> **Recommendation:**
> The Register Committee understood from the panel's response that ANQA provides collective training opportunities to Armenian higher education institutions, but does not render services to individual institutions, and that, therefore, there is no specific potential for conflict of interest.
> The Register Committee, however, underlined that in case ANQA provides consultancy to individual institutions in the future it would have to implement appropriate policies to prevent that ANQA accredits the same institution to which it rendered consultancy services.

One of ANQA's strategic goals is to significantly support the enhancement of tertiary level education quality in RA. ANQA encourages TLIs to act in conformity with national and international quality standards and

continuously improve the quality of provision in higher education. For this purpose, ANQA promotes a dialog between all stakeholders: organizing workshops, capacity building trainings, round table discussions, consultations, annual and biannual fora and Quality weeks. Meanwhile, the same information is provided to all the institutions, the involvement of all stakeholders in ANQA fora/conferences/trainings is ensured; the same accreditation criteria and standards are applied, the process for external evaluation is the same for all TLIs.

To avoid and prevent provision of consultancy to individual institutions ANQA has recently developed a draft Policy and procedure on organisation and implementation of events/trainings organized by ANQA. It defines the types of events, regulates the relationship between the parties, state the planning and time-periods for the implementation of the events, budget, etc. Currently, the policy is in the phase of discussion with stakeholders.

3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Recommendation:
To avoid undue influence and to increase transparency in the decision-making process, the panel recommends limiting the role of the representatives of the Ministry to that of silent observers in the preparatory meetings of the Accreditation Committee.

In addition, the panel recommends that the Ministry directly ratifies the decisions of the Accreditation Committee. There is no obvious reason why the Minister should be able to judge ANQA's procedures selectively and individually.

As part of its follow-up plan ANQA intends to revise the ANQA Accreditation Manual and Regulation of Formation and Operation of Accreditation Commission considering the outcomes of the discussions with the Ministry representatives. During the discussions the participation of the MoES representatives in the Accreditation Commission's meetings was evaluated as non-effective as the practice of the Accreditation Commission's meetings demonstrates that only once a representative of MoES participated in the Accreditation Commission meeting as a passive observer. Hence, according to a mutual understanding reached with the MoES, the respective parts will be revised in the above-mentioned documents.

Considering that all the certificates on the decisions of the ANQA Accreditation Commission have been ratified by the Ministry of Education and Sciences without any exception, it was communicated with the Ministry representatives to revise the corresponding parts in the Statute of State Accreditation to: "the MOES directly ratifies the certificates on the decision of the Accreditation Commission". As a result of joint agreement with the Ministry representatives the Statue has been revised correspondingly and submitted to the MoES but it can't be approved until the adoption of the new Law on Higher Education and Research.

Recommendation:
To strengthen the Boards independence and autonomy, the panel recommends adding an international perspective to the Board.

To strengthen the Boards independence ANQA was recommended to add an international representative to it. However, taking into consideration that ANQA Board is composed by the RA Government, as well as the limitation of RA legislative framework to have international member in the Board (having an international member in the Board requires a legislative change), ANQA decided to compose a permanent Advisory Board

consisted of international stakeholders. For the reason a Regulation on Composition and Operation of the Advisory Board has been developed and discussed with ANQA Board members. However, based on the results of the discussions and recommendations of the ANQA Board, it was decided to nominate 1-2 international advisers, who will provide consultations to the Board of Trustees and the Director of the ANQA on strategic development when necessary. The Advisor provides consultation when asked by the Director or the Board or can give unsolicited advice. It was communicated with international QA expert with huge experience and agreed to work with ANQA Board and Director as an advisor.

Recommendation:
To ensure meaningful student representation in the governance bodies the panel recommends that students can be nominated only by student representation bodies.

The founder of the agency is the Republic of Armenia represented by the RA Government. Hence, the members of the Board of Trustees are composed and approved by the Prime Minister of RA. The representation of the Board is fixed in the ANQA Charter. The practice of the Board composition showed that the RA Government referred to a student representation body to nominate a student representative to the Board. To fix this approach ANQA proposed the Board a revised Charter where the part of involving a student has been revised correspondingly: "the student member is nominated by student representation bodies". The revised Charter still needs to be approved by the RA Government.

3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Recommendation:
The panel recommends that the report Comprehensive analysis of the accreditation process becomes a periodic analysis of the accreditation process.

List of main evidences:

Comprehensive analysis of Accreditation process (Available in Armenian)	Web

On each accreditation procedure ANQA collects feedback from the all stakeholders (experts, HEIs, coordinators) on the effectiveness of the process through surveys. The survey is aimed at assessing the effectiveness of the accreditation process, discovering the best practices in the process, revealing the shortcomings and obstacles, hence contributing to the improvement and review of the regulatory documents, methodology and analyzing the impact of accreditation on the development and enhancement of TLIs. The collected data is analyzed afterwards. Based on the analysis the major points and issues are identified for the discussion with the same stakeholders for validating the collected data. The results of the survey and focus group discussion is being analyzed and included in the comprehensive analysis which is being published on ANQA web-site.

Recommendation:
The panel recommends broadening the thematic analysis, for example, carrying out analysis by disciplines.

ANQA is conducting thematic analysis in different areas through meeting with various stakeholders (teachers, administrative staff of HEIs and VET institutions, students, ministry representatives etc). Starting

from 2019 thematic monitoring visits are foreseen each year on the different themes. Based on stakeholders' feedback ANQA has identified "student assessment" as a priority theme to review for the current year.

List of main evidences:			
Year	**Event / Analysis**	**Goal**	**Availability of results**
Publications			
2017	MAHATMA Project as an Experience of Cluster Accreditation in Armenia and in Georgia	The aim of the paper was to analysis the results of the pilot programme accreditation in cluster in Armenia and Georgia and draw out effective mechanisms of cluster accreditation.	**Web**
	Bringing Employer Context to Education: Employer Engagement Framework	The aim of the paper was to reveal the state of art in the employer engagement and to offer a a piloted framework for better dialog with employers and the university.	**Web**
	Quality Assurance of Academic Programmes due to Effective Communication with Employers: A Framework and Tools. /Workshop presentation at EQAF/	The aim of the workshop was to present a framework for employer engagement and discuss with the European community the results of the piloted framework.	**Web**
	System problems in Armenian HEI's: comparative analysis of accredited higher education institutions' expert reports. Implemented by students (available in Armenian).	The aim of the analysis is to reveal the common issues and challenges at the accredited universities based on the recommendation of external experts.	**Web**
2018	Results and analysis of the pilot accreditation of state regional colleges (available in Armenian).	The aim of the paper was to analyse the current situation of inter quality assurance system at regional colleges hence targeting opportunities for them.	**Web**
Events			
2017	Quality week that includes a two-days stakeholders'	The aim of the week was to focus the attention of the representatives of education sphere,	**Web**

	conference on "Quality in the Classroom: Improvement of assessment systems""	governing bodies and public on quality assurance, to discuss the current issues of the sphere, to share the best practice and to form the general vision for the future. During the week workshops on the issues related to students, young lecturers, the alignment of academic programs to National Qualifications Framework took place. The week was summed up by a two-day conference on the improvement of assessment systems.	
2018	"'Education and Professional: Tertiary Level Education Today and Tomorrow", stakeholders' 4th Forum	The Forum focused on topics which are now on the agenda of the Armenian Government. The different presentations and panel discussions touched upon the following topics: 'Key Performance Indicators', 'Review of Quality Frameworks,' 'Short-Cycle Education' and 'University-Employer Communication Models.' We will bring together over 200 stakeholders (representatives from the top and middle management of HEIs, teaching staff and students, VET-representatives, employers, government officials and international experts) to discuss the current challenges which will later be included in the country's education development priorities.	**Web**

Table 1: List of the ANQA Research studies and events

3.5 RESOURCES

Recommendation:
The panel recommends that ANQA foresees in the medium term the needs of staff and budget, and establishes the necessary measures to carry out all the foreseen activities.

According to the follow up plan ANQA has launched a process of midterm planning of the needs of staff and budget with a view of meeting its strategic goals and making its activities more effective. For that ANQA has foreseen the necessary number of staff members to carry out all the planned activities for the upcoming 3 years. The most problematic issue was the number of coordinators from the perspective of increasing the accreditation processes as within the Republic of Armenian as well as in the region (regional joint accreditations). To increase the number of coordinators ANQA has adopted the following mechanism: as a result of regular meetings organized by Students' Voice project with the students studying Education Management, ANQA invites outstanding students to be a part of the accreditation processes as an assistant of a coordinator. Being an assistant for several times and participating at all the other ANQA activities the method of learning by doing

gives its positive results. Another mechanism to recruit a necessary staff is supervising internships and final thesis of the students. Though it might seem that the process is time consuming but ANQA seeks a sustainable staff who shares the values of the agency.

As for the budget, ANQA highlights the financial independence and for that a comprehensive midterm plan of diversification of financial resources has been developed. The plan touches upon the financial planning of the accreditation processes, trainings conducted by the ANQA representatives, participation in international projects, etc.

ANQA has a stable increase of its reserve fund from each accreditation process of the HEIs and VET institutions. The reserve fund is primarily used for the necessary developments done by the ANQA staff as well as by the outsourced staff.

Recommendation:
It is necessary that the Board of the Trustees forecast new staff and more budget to face new activities not funded or foreseeing a possible decrease of European projects. It is necessary to take into account that a part of the budget depends on the universities, which also show problems lack of funding, for that reason there is a possibility that they cannot face the rates tied to the accreditation of programmes.

The issues regarding the new staff and financial planning have been presented to the President of ANQA Board and it was decided to change the agency's organizational structure and the workloads of the staff members, hence the financing system identifying the activities and financing mechanisms per projects. The proposal on changing the organizational structure and respectively its financing is to be submitted to the RA Government for the state funding which is currently the most sustainable source of finance for the agency. Another sustainable source of finance is accreditation, ANQA saves a fixed sum from each process for its reserve fund.

As regards the rates of programme accreditation, ANQA undertakes several steps to relieve the financial burden from the TLIs. Particularly ANQA introduced the mechanism of cluster accreditation to its stakeholders which will significantly reduce the accreditation fee. The mechanism was assessed by the stakeholders as positive and feasible. It is also important to mention that ANQA organized several meetings with the representatives of MoES and HEIs' leadership to discuss the possible ways of financing the program accreditations with the state budget. The final decision on the accreditation of programs will be made after the adoption of the new Law on Higher Education and Research.

3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Recommendation:
The panel recommends revising periodically their internal and external procedures, for example doing internal audits.

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

For the revision of external procedures, ANQA regularly analyses the feedback of the stakeholders (TLIs, experts) on the effectiveness of the processes and conducts meetings with the stakeholders. Based on the annual reports of quality areas and analysis of the effectiveness of agency's external activities the respective improvements are made if necessary. The subject that has been highlighted for the current year is more effective selection procedure of local experts.

Agency's annual report is prepared and submitted to the Director and the Board of the Trustees.

Recommendation:
The panel would like to recommend reducing the number of surveys carried out or to space them in the time, in order to not saturate the system with an excess of surveys

As part of its follow up plan ANQA analysed the effectiveness of its surveys. For that, the mechanisms, target groups and the frequency of the evaluation of the internal and external activities have been discussed among ANQA staff, TLI representatives and experts. As a result of the focus group meetings it turned out that the frequency and the number of the internal and external surveys are overall effective, targeted and process driven. The only change was applied to the questionnaire given to the participants after each meeting during site visits. It was decided to do a qualitative analyse of the filled in questionnaires (instead of quantitative) by the coordinators in the end of each day of site visits because the coordinators assessed the questionnaire as a good communication tool with the experts during closed panel meetings: the questionnaire helps the coordinators to prevent any possible shortcoming during the visits. It was discussed to add open questions in the questionnaire to make it more effective and useful for the coordinators.

Recommendation:
It also recommends establishing a channel in the web page to collect suggestions or consulting of students, teachers, or society not linked directly in the processes of external quality assurance.

Evidences:	
ANQA blog	**Web**
"Contact us" section on web-site	**Web**

ANQA has activated its blog on the website where all the stakeholders and/or experts of the field may raise topics and discuss them with the interested parties.

ANQA also changed the content of the Section "Contact us" on the website. It became another opportunity for the stakeholder to get consultancy, guidance as well as provide some feedback/suggestions on agency's activities. Through this channel ANQA received over 80 requests on different issues.

Another opportunity for the stakeholders is the Network of Quality Supporters established at the beginning of 2017 where different stakeholders actively discuss different issues on the quality assurance, accreditation, share their experience and good practice. The number of the members involved in the group is over 300, including representatives from HE and VET sectors, experts, students, ANQA staff etc.

COMPLIANCE WITH EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES (PART 2)

2.2. DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Recommendations:

The panel recommends using the same approach for the future cycle of Institutional Accreditation.

ANQA launched the second cycle of accreditation processes by maintaining the basic elements of already adopted external quality assurance system. In this cycle of institutional accreditation, all academic programmes would be considered by the expert panel. Also, in the second cycle of institutional accreditation processes the newly embedded academic programmes of TLIs would be reviewed by the experts.

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

2.3. **IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES**

Recommendations:

The panel recommends improving the follow-up processes, once implanted in the different centres. Aspects that should be taken into account should be:

— it is satisfactory that HEIs have to submit follow-up and improvement plan, in order to be monitored also after decision making. But the panel had concern about the time frame. The 6-month delay for the submission of the follow-up report is too short and should be reconsidered.

— the effectiveness of follow-up of the institutions valued positively should be carried out externally, including the participation of external experts from the institution, in order to consider the results of the actions taken by institutions.

As a part of its follow-up plan, ANQA launched the amendment process of follow-up procedure. For that, a written feedback was gathered from relative stakeholders (TLIs, experts, ANQA staff) to understand how to improve the procedure in the future. Having analysed the feedbacks, various discussions were organized with stakeholders. Both TLIs and experts provided suggestions on the improvement of the template for the provision of follow-up plan. Their suggestions were considered, discussed and the template was correspondingly revised. The new format emphasizes the outcome driven approach.

The issues regarding the time-frames for the submission of the follow-up reports and the methodology of conducting the follow-up monitoring have also been discussed with the stakeholders. The respective changes on the time-frame are fixed in the draft of the new Statute of State Accreditation. As for the methodology of conducting periodic monitoring of the follow-ups, ANQA developed the Regulation on Monitoring where it is stated that external experts along with the ANQA representatives can be involved in the monitoring panels in case needed.

2.4. PEER REVIEW EXPERTS

Recommendations:

The panel recommends, in the measure of its possibilities, increasing and /or maintaining the number of international experts. This fact would be beneficial specially taking into account agency future plans of internationalisation.

According to the ANQA regulations each expert panel mandatorily has one to two international experts. Currently ANQA strives to enlarge the involvement of international experts to accreditation processes taking into consideration the geographical representation to ensure that new wave of approaches is introduced in each process. Considering that this approach can be a financial burden for institutions under accreditation, ANQA takes efforts to activate the cooperation and involve experts from the region which will reduce the expenses and bring the regional context to the processes.

International experts are selected from the international expert pool of ANQA, expert pool of an authoritative international accreditation (quality assurance) agency, from the international networks/associations (EURASHE, INQAAHE, ECA, etc.) and from the EU and regional project partner institutions.

To increase the number of international experts, a letter of request for international experts was sent to different international organizations and agencies to recommend experts and disseminate the information in their experts' pool. ANQA employees provided necessary guidance and support to interested candidates to register in the pool. As a result, in the recent years the ANQA pool of experts was enlarged with over 400 international experts.

2.5. CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Recommendations:

The panel recommends improving the Manual of accreditation to make more clear which aspects, indicators or evidence are required for each criterion.

Self-evaluation report template	**Web**

The template of self-evaluation includes explanations on each criteria and standards as well as respective requirements and evidences on each standard. The document is available at the ANQA web-site. As a part of follow-up plan, currently, ANQA Accreditation Manual is in the revision phase and the self-evaluation template would be included in the Manual.

Recommendations:

Likewise, the panel recommends publishing the decision rules used by the Accreditation Committee to differentiate their accreditation decisions

According to the follow up plan ANQA conducted several meetings with the Accreditation Commission and discussed the criteria for decision making. After the discussions ANQA in cooperation with Accreditation Commission has improved the criteria for decisions considering the implementation of PDCA cycle in TLIs procedures. The approach is currently discussed with stakeholders and will be published by the middle of the current year.

2.6. REPORTING

Recommendations:
The panel recommends using always the same vocabulary (positive/ negative vs. satisfactory/unsatisfactory vs. yes/no) to qualify each criteria, even though the result is clear and it has not produced any confusion.

List of main evidences:	
ANQA reports	**Web**

Considering the recommendations of ENQA experts and gained experience, ANQA has revised:
- the template for the preparation of the reports,
- an induction package with mostly used terms for the translators,

Also, a tool (with responsible people and time-frame) for the monitoring of the experts' reports have been developed and agreed.

Recommendations:
The reports of the pilot programme accreditations were not published on ANQA web-site

According to the Statute on State Accreditation of Institutions and their academic programmes in RA, as well as ANQA Accreditation manual, the reports become public right after the Accreditation Commission takes a decision. The pilot programme accreditations, conducted by ANQA does not have any formal outcome, that is why the reports are not published on ANQA web-site. However, as soon as ANQA starts conducting programme accreditation, all the reports along with the decisions will be published on web-site according to the regulatory framework.

2.7. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Recommendations:
The panel recommends that ANQA reconsiders its appeals process, considering the aspects quoted, in order to avoid any confusion between an appeal procedure and a second chance procedure. The panel recommends that if the appeal is evaluated by a new panel, ANQA should consider including a student.

According to the analyses of the feedbacks received from the stakeholders, the appeal procedure that has been applied by the ANQA for the first cycle of accreditation was acceptable for the stakeholders. ANQA is currently revising the appeal procedure for the second cycle of accreditation. For that a working group has been established to analyse the legislative framework of RA to understand the obligations and limitations, communicate with the relevant stakeholders and develop new appeal procedure. So far, a draft of the procedure has been developed and circulated among the ANQA staff. After the finalisation of the draft, it will be disseminated among the external stakeholders and discussed with the relevant parties. The finalisation and publication of the procedure is foreseen in the upcoming future.