

ENQA AGENCY REVIEW

# NATIONAL CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE FOUNDATION (ANQA)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report considers how ANQA (National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation) meets the expectations of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG-2015). In addition to the agency and its stakeholders within the Republic of Armenia, the report aims to provide information for the ENQA Board's decision on ANQA's continued membership and to EQAR to support the agency's reapplication to the register. This is the second review of the agency. ANQA was established in 2008. Since 2017 the agency has been a member of ENQA and registered on EQAR. ANQA is a well-established agency.

ANQA promotes continuous quality enhancement in the tertiary education system contributing to autonomy and accountability. It is recognized by the government of the Republic of Armenia as the quality assurance body in charge with the accreditation of tertiary level education. In this respect, two types of procedures are foreseen to be implemented by the agency: institutional accreditation and academic programme accreditation; the scope of this ENQA review covers both procedures.

ANQA's external review process followed the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and was informed by *Use and Interpretation of the ESG* by the EQAR's Register Committee. The panel for the external review of ANQA was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Mr. Almantas Šerpatauskas (Chair), Director, Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, Lithuania - ENQA nominee;
- Prof. Dr. Simona Lache (Secretary), Professor and Vice-rector for Internationalization and Quality Evaluation, Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania - EUA nominee;
- Ms. Gohar Hovhannisyan, Project and Policy Officer at European University Association, Belgium - ENQA nominee;
- Mr. Francisco Joaquin Jimenez Gonzalez, Master student in Science and Technology in Architecture at Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena, Spain, Member of the European Students' Union Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool - ESU nominee.

Ms. Anais Gourdin (senior project manager at ENQA), acted as the review coordinator.

The panel considered the evidence given in the self-assessment report, additional evidence requested by the panel and provided by the agency, and the video clip introduction to the ANQA facilities and performed a remote site visit by videoconference software where meetings with a wide range of audiences were held. Simultaneous translation was provided, when necessary. The panel thoroughly analysed and discussed all the evidence and concluded that ANQA complies with the ESG as follows:

- compliance is achieved with ESG 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6 3.7, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6.
- partial compliance is achieved with ESG 2.1 and 2.7;

corresponding recommendations are added in each case.

At the same time, commendations have been made under the standards 3.1 and 3.6.

**In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered, the ENQA review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, ANQA is in compliance with the ESG.**

# INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation – ANQA / Masnagitakan krt'ut'yan voraki apahovman azgayin kentron himnadram – VOAAK with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. It is based on an external review conducted from July 2021 to May 2022.

## BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

### BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

ENQA's regulations require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they act in compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

As this is ANQA's second review, the panel is expected to provide clear evidence of results in all areas and to acknowledge progress from the previous review. The panel has adopted a developmental approach, as the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* aim at constant enhancement of the agencies.

This review and the findings of the panel are also used towards ANQA's application to extend its listing in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), on which the agency has been registered since its external review in 2017. For the complete terms of reference (ToR), please see Annex 2. For the glossary of terms used, please see Annex 3.

### SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

The panel was cognisant, from the beginning of the review process, of the terms of reference set for the scope of the review. This report deals with each of those aspects below:

Deemed to be within scope:

- Institutional accreditation.

This is dealt with in full in this report.

- Programme accreditation.

**During the course of the site visit, the following became apparent:**

- **The programme accreditation is on a voluntary basis. As for now, no higher education institution has volunteered to accredit its academic programmes. Consequently, although ANQA has developed the methodology for programme accreditation, it has not been implemented yet.**
- **The mandatory nature of programme accreditation has been included in the new Law on Education and Science which is still waiting to be adopted.**

For these reasons, the review panel did not pursue programme accreditation as one of the activities within the scope of the review. It can, however, report that ANQA conducted a number of so-called 'pilot programme reviews' within the framework of Erasmus+ projects. As those procedures were specifically designed as project activity and used only for project implementation purposes, did not entirely follow the programme accreditation methodology of ANQA but were ad-hoc, did not conclude with external review reports published on the agency's website, and no accreditation decisions resulted, the review panel is not able to consider them as pilot programme reviews in the sense of the programme accreditation methodology developed by ANQA.

## MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2017 REVIEW

The previous ENQA coordinated review took place in 2017. With respect to the ESG (2015) it found ANQA:

- fully compliant with eight standards as follows: ESG 3.2 (Official status), 3.6 (Internal quality assurance and professional conduct), 3.7 (Cyclical external review), 2.1 (Consideration of internal quality assurance), 2.2 (Designing methodologies fit for purpose), 2.3 (Implementing processes), 2.4 (Peer-review experts) and 2.6 (Reporting);
- substantially compliant with six standards as follows: ESG 3.1 (Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance), 3.3 (Independence); 3.4 (Thematic analysis), 3.5 (Resources), 2.5 (Criteria for outcomes) and 2.7 (Complaints and appeals).

The 2017 review also listed several points of attention as recommendations to ANQA on specific standards:

- To increase the activities of external quality assurance. Particularly, to develop capacity to carry out evaluation of the programmes on a regular basis (ESG 3.1).
- To publish the annual plan (ESG 3.1).
- 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 (ESG 3.3).
- The Ministry to directly ratify the decisions of the Accreditation Committee (ESG 3.3).
- To strengthen the Boards independence and autonomy, the panel recommends adding an international perspective to the Board (ESG 3.3).
- To ensure meaningful student representation the panel recommends that students can be nominated only by student representation bodies (ESG 3.3).
- The report *Comprehensive analysis of the accreditation process* to become a periodic analysis of the accreditation process (ESG 3.4).
- To broaden the thematic analysis, for example, carrying out analysis by disciplines (ESG 3.4).
- To foresee in the medium term the needs of staff and budget and establish the necessary measures to carry out all the foreseen activities (ESG 3.5).
- To revise periodically their internal and external procedures, for example doing internal audits (ESG 3.6).
- To reduce 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 (ESG 3.6).
- To establish 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 (ESG 3.6).
- To use the same approach for the future cycle of Institutional Accreditation (ESG 2.2).
- To improve the follow-up processes, once implanted in the different centres (ESG 2.3). Aspects that should be taken into account should be:
  - In the measure of its possibilities, to increase and /or to maintain the number of international experts. This fact would be beneficial specially taking into account agency future plans of internationalization (ESG 2.4).
  - To improve the Manual of accreditation to make more clear which aspects, indicators or evidence are required for each criterion (ESG 2.5).
  - To publish the decision rules used by the Accreditation Committee to validate their accreditation decisions (ESG 2.5).
  - To always use the same vocabulary (positive/ negative vs. satisfactory/unsatisfactory vs. yes/no) to qualify each criterion, even though the result is clear, and it has not produced any confusion (ESG 2.6).
- ANQA reconsiders its appeals process, considering the aspects quoted, in order to avoid any confusion between an appeal procedure and a second chance procedure (ESG 2.7).

- If the appeal is evaluated by a new panel, ANQA should consider including a student (2.7).

EQAR considered the ENQA external review report (2017) and concurred with the conclusion that ANQA:

- complied with ESG 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 2.1, 2.2 and 2.4;
- partially complied with ESG 2.3, 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7.

After the external review in 2017, ANQA was granted ENQA membership for five years and inclusion on the EQAR Register until 28 February 2022.

In 2019, the agency submitted to ENQA a follow-up report on recommendations in the panel report, which was approved by the ENQA Board.

## REVIEW PROCESS

The 2022 external review of ANQA was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The panel for the external review of ANQA was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Mr. Almantas Šerpatauskas (Chair), Director, Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, Lithuania – ENQA nominee;
- Prof. Dr. Simona Lache (Secretary), Professor and Vice-rector for Internationalization and Quality Evaluation, Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania – EUA nominee;
- Ms. Gohar Hovhannisyanyan, Project and Policy Officer at European University Association, Belgium – ENQA nominee;
- Mr. Francisco Joaquin Jimenez Gonzalez, Master student in Science and Technology in Architecture at Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena, Spain, Member of the European Students' Union Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool – ESU nominee.

Ms. Anaïs Gourdin (senior project manager at ENQA), acted as the review coordinator.

ANQA produced a self-assessment report (SAR) that provided the basis for the panel's work. Panel members received the SAR from ANQA in December 2021 and immediately began to evaluate its contents against the ESG. Beyond the standard debriefing call, which took place on 21 December 2021, several online meetings, grouped in two days, were organized prior to the site visit: on 24 January 2022 – review panel's kick-off meeting and the meeting with the resource person; on 1 February 2022 – pre-visit meeting with the agency's resource person, pre-visit meeting for presentation of ANQA premises and the review panel's final preparation meeting. The panel conducted an online site visit to ANQA from 2 to 4 February 2022, where it further examined both the claims made in the self-assessment report and cross-checked other evidence as provided by the agency. The panel was also able to clarify any points at issue. During the site visit, the simultaneous translation was provided (when needed) by a professional interpreter ENQA approved in advance. Finally, the review panel produced the external review report based on the following sources: the SAR, additional information provided by the agency upon the panel's request, information collected during the online site visit, and other evidence (e.g., website, a video on agency's premises, and previous external evaluation reports). In doing so, the panel provided an opportunity for ANQA to comment on the factual accuracy of the draft report. The review panel confirms that it was given access to all documents and people it wished to consult throughout the review process.

## **Self-assessment report**

The self-assessment report provided an overview on the Armenian tertiary level of education with focus on the higher education system, and the higher education reforms in relation to external quality assurance. ANQA's history, profile and activities, and a description of processes and methodologies used were also included in the document. The report contained a self-assessment on compliance of ANQA's quality assurance activities against the ESG, followed by opinions gathered from stakeholders, recommendations and main findings from previous review and agency's resulting follow-up, a SWOT analysis and a description of key challenges and areas for future development.

The SAR was prepared by a team of five people, which included an external expert and a student who have experience participating as a panel member in ANQA accreditation procedures. The document was discussed with key stakeholders and at the agency level, so that all staff had good knowledge of the findings.

The review panel found the SAR to be informative and reflective, as the findings allowed the agency to identify its strengths and weaknesses, current challenges, and areas for further development. It also served as a valuable source of information to the panel.

## **Site visit**

Due to the travel restrictions caused by COVID-19 pandemic, the review panel members and the agency agreed on having the site visit online. The site visit was conducted from 2 to 4 February 2022, and prior to that, pre-visit meetings took place, as is presented in the visit schedule (Annex1). The visit schedule was agreed upon with the agency. The panel found the visit to be well planned and organized, thus the review panel was able to meet and interview all key internal and external stakeholders of the agency, including the ANQA's director and the president of the Board of Trustees, representatives of the Board of Trustees and the Accreditation Committee, staff in charge of external QA activities, administrative staff, representative of the Ministry, heads and QA officers from HEIs, members of the experts' pool, including international experts, students involved in external QA activities, and other stakeholders. The discussions in the meetings were triangulated with the self-assessment report and the documentary evidence as provided by the agency in advance, which altogether allowed the panel to come to conclusions and judgements on the compliance as presented in this report.

The panel wishes to express its thanks to all involved parties that dedicated their time to meet with and help the panel to better understand the activities of ANQA and the context within which it operates. The frankness of communication and the openness shown by the interviewees are highly appreciated.

The staff of the agency demonstrated professionalism during the entire review process and provided excellent assistance to the panel regarding all matters. At the end of the site visit, the panel held an internal meeting, where agreed on the preliminary conclusions on the level of compliance of ANQA on each of the standards of Part 2 and 3 of the ESG. The panel secretary drafted the report in cooperation with the rest of the panel. The draft report was submitted to ANQA for fact checking in April 2022 and then finalised and sent to ENQA at the beginning of May 2022.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY**

### **HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM**

The legal framework under which the higher education system operates in the Republic of Armenia (RA) is regulated by the Law on Education (1999) and the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional

Education (2004). According to the law, the following types of education institutions are in place: (1) pre-school; (2) general education; (2') primary vocational (handicraft); (3) secondary vocational; (4) higher professional; (5) supplementary education, including extracurricular upbringing; (6) post-graduate professional education.

The higher education Institutions (HEIs) are divided into universities, institutes, academies, and conservatories. According to the laws, they deliver the following degrees: (i) Bachelor's degree; (ii) degree of a Certified Specialist; (iii) Master's degree and (iv) Doctoral studies, medical internship, and residency medical training. Since 2005, when Armenia formally joined the Bologna process, the higher education system has been organised in three cycles: Bachelor's at first level, Master's at the second level and Researcher's and Candidate of Sciences (Postgraduate/ Doctoral) at the third level.

In terms of funding, there are public, private, and transnational higher education institutions. According to the SAR, which cites official websites (<https://armstat.am/en>, <https://escs.am/am>), in Armenia are currently operating 62 HEIs: 23 public, 25 private, and 14 transnationals (out of which 6 are HEIs founded by interstate agreements and state participation, 3 are branches of foreign private universities and 5 are branches of foreign state universities). The same source indicates (for 2020) the total number of students as 80.501 (85,7% being registered in the 48 Armenian HEIs – public and private), and 10.831 teaching staff.

## QUALITY ASSURANCE

According to the Government Decree N 978-N of 30 July 2011, '*Statute on State Accreditation of Institutions and their Academic Programs in The Republic of Armenia*', the mechanisms that assure the quality of the Armenian tertiary<sup>1</sup> education system are associated to the following activities:

- institutional accreditation, granted for 6 or 4 years;
- academic program accreditation (hereinafter referred to as program accreditation), granted for 5 years.

The same document cited above states that 'institutional accreditation is a cyclic mandatory process for all education institutions within RA territory', while 'programme accreditation is a voluntary process carried out only in the case of a positive result of the institutional accreditation with the exception of the medical academic programmes'. The panel learned that no tertiary level institution applied for programme accreditation up to now. On the other hand, there is a new Law on Education and Science waiting to be adopted, which regulates the mandatory nature of the programme accreditation.

The National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (hereinafter referred to as ANQA) is the quality assurance agency responsible for practical operation of the state accreditation procedures for institutions and academic programmes, while state control in the sphere of education is exerted by the government and the Ministry on Education, Science Culture and Sports (MoESCS). Besides ANQA, the legislation allows institutional and programme accreditation to be organised by any agency registered with EQAR or ENQA full member. In addition, HEIs/ branches of HEIs from countries outside EHEA carrying out academic programmes in Armenia may be accredited by foreign quality agencies recognized by the Ministry. It is a general requirement for education institutions which choose to accredit with a foreign agency to inform ANQA on the launch of the

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<sup>1</sup> Tertiary education system includes higher education institutions (HEI) and vocational education and training institutions (VET)

process and about the results of the accreditation. Only by complying with these rules, the results of the accreditation process are registered in the State Accreditation Registrar.

## ANQA

ANQA was established in 2008, as an independent organization founded by the RA government. As stipulated in the Mission Statement, <http://www.anqa.am/en/about-us/#Mission>, ANQA aims to support tertiary level institutions to create a quality culture in accordance with the legislation of RA. The agency implements quality assurance processes through institutional and programme accreditation in preliminary, vocational, and higher educational institutions. For the time being, it operates only at the national level, but the panel learned that it is planned to carry out reviews in other countries as well.

Since its foundation, ANQA has been reviewed by ENQA in 2017; following that process, the agency was granted ENQA full membership and registered with EQAR.

## ANQA'S ORGANISATION/ STRUCTURE

ANQA is founded as a non-membership and non-commercial organization (foundation), with the registered office in Yerevan, Armenia. As stated in its Charter (Annex I), the foundation's bodies are the Board of Trustees, with the role of supervision, and the Director, with the role of operational management.

The Board of Trustees has 12 members, representing the main stakeholders, one of which is a student. It is led by a President elected from among the Board members for a period of four years. All Board members are approved by the RA Prime Minister. The Director is elected by the Board of Trustees, as a result of a public competition, for a period of four years.

Besides these two bodies formed according to ANQA's Chart, the organizational chart includes: the Accreditation Committee, the Field Commissions and the Advisory Board.

The Accreditation Committee is an independent, collegial, permanent body having the following responsibilities (SAR, page 13):

- defining decision-making approaches and principles of accreditation;
- making decision on institutional and academic programme accreditation;
- making suggestions to ANQA for the improvement of the accreditation procedure.

Its formation and operation are regulated by a document issued by the Board of Trustees (*Procedure on formation and operation of the "National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation" Accreditation Committee*), and it consists of 13 members: 10 are stakeholders from higher education and 3 from vocational education. Their mandate is for four years, and one person cannot be a member more than twice in a row. The Accreditation Committee members are elected by the Board of Trustees, considering the nominations received from the higher education and vocational education and training institutions, based on a set of criteria defined by the regulatory document.

The Field Commissions, although foreseen in the organizational chart, have not been established yet. During the site visit, the review panel learned that this is due to the fact that academic programme accreditation is still pending, as its mandatory character is regulated only in the new law still waiting to be approved.

The Advisory Board is described in the SAR as a body aiming to provide consultancy to the Board of Trustees and the Director on strategic development. However, the review panel was told by the

resource person that the Board of Trustees decided not to have a permanent Advisory Board as there were no financial allocations for that purpose. Instead, ANQA receives feedback and advice, on request, from international experts who are involved in the accreditation procedures, as the panel understood from the interviews with the Director and some of the international experts.

The Director and the other bodies of the foundation are supported in their work by an office consisting of:

- Policy Development and Implementation Division, responsible for development and implementation of policies, procedures, other supporting regulatory documents, and for the communication with stakeholders;
- Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division, responsible for conducting the external evaluation procedures and providing support to the Accreditation Committee to ensure consistency of the decision making process;
- Secretariat, which provides technical assistance to the agency in relation with its internal and external stakeholders;
- Director's office, which includes specialists in Human Resource, International Relations, Internal Quality Assurance, Legal counsel and procurement, Information Technology, Databases, Public Relations; lawyer; accountant; assistant to Director; technical staff.

## ANQA'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

The ANQA's purpose and goals are stipulated in its Charter. The purpose is *'to make studies, analysis, recommendations and evaluation in the sphere of professional education'* and the main goals are defined as follows (Annex I):

1. Conduction of the required expertise for accreditation of preliminary professional (vocational henceforth), secondary and higher (professional henceforth) education;
2. Development of criteria and procedures for accreditation and external evaluation of quality of education institutions and academic programs;
3. Submission of Academic Program Accreditation Results and Decision on Accreditation to MoES with the aim of awarding Certificate on Accreditation;
4. Submission of the Results of the academic audit of education institution, Quality evaluation, Accreditation and Decision on Institutional Accreditation to MoES with the aim of awarding Certificate on Accreditation;
5. Publication of ranking indicators of education institutions based on the results of external quality evaluation of education institutions and academic programs;
6. Evaluation of Internal Quality Assurance systems of education institutions and provision of recommendations to education institutions for further development of those systems;
7. Provision of consultancy to education institutions on the development of criteria and methods for students formative and summative assessment;
8. Raising public awareness on the state of the arts of quality assurance of education institution and academic programs;
9. Promotion of the integration into European Network for QA, thus ensuring RA participation in projects;
10. Making analysis of professional education system.

In addition, the agency is allowed by its Charter to conduct entrepreneurial activities, as follows (Annex I):

- Publication of methodical informative materials and books;

- Organization and implementation of capacity building and qualification enhancement trainings for the staff of education institutions;
- Conduction of external quality evaluation of academic programmes and necessary expertise for accreditation purposes;
- Conduction of evaluation of education institution’s internal quality assurance systems, academic audit of those education institutions and necessary expertise for accreditation purposes.

The external quality assurance activity of the agency consists of conducting external evaluations in the view of institutional accreditation and academic programme accreditation. Institutional accreditation has been evaluated against the ESG in the present ENQA review. **Regarding the academic programme evaluation, as it has been already mentioned, during the course of the site visit the panel learned that this activity has not been implemented yet because it is not foreseen as mandatory in the current legislation and there are no institutions having applied yet for it. The agency conducted some programme reviews within the framework of Erasmus+ projects, without granting accreditation, but given the arguments presented in the introductory section of this report, the panel considers they do not fall under ESG.**

Accreditation procedures are conducted following the provisions of the RA Government Decree N 978 – N (‘Statute on state accreditation of institutions and their academic programs in the Republic of Armenia’). They are based on a self-evaluation report, include a site visit (on site or virtual, as imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic) and are finalized with a report. A follow-up activity is also considered. ANQA supports both the reviewed institutions and the external experts by providing guidelines for the evaluation process.

In relation with these processes, ANQA has developed other activities which help in promoting quality enhancement of HEIs and VETs:

- Monitoring: a service offered by ANQA ‘to promote the continuous enhancement of HEIs at different dimensions: academic programmes, governance, quality assurance system’ (SAR, page 16); monitoring activities are conducted both at institutional and programme level. In the last years, this activity has also been extended to VETs.
- Accreditation of VET: a process conducted by ANQA which started in 2018, after several years of piloting.

## ANQA’S FUNDING

Approximately half of the ANQA’s annual income is made up of state funding; the other half comes from accreditation fees, trainings, international projects, and other activities, as shown in the table below.

Table I. ANQA’s financing sources

Source of income	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
	share [%]				
State budget	56.6	52.2	59.8	41.2	64.78
Accreditation fees	15.2	19.5	27.8	43.1	30.00
Trainings	2.5	1.95	1.6	8.5	0.38
International projects	25.7	24.4	6.8	6.2	3.15
Other income	0.00	1.95	4.00	1.00	1.68

The main part of the expenditure goes, every year, on staff costs and purchase of goods and services. The agency’s financial reports are publicly available at <http://www.anqa.am/en/about-us/#Budget>.

# FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF ANQA WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)

## ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

### ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

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

#### 2017 ENQA review recommendations:

- “The panel recommends increasing the activities of external quality assurance. Particularly, to develop capacity to carry out evaluation of the programmes on a regular basis.”
- “The panel recommends publishing the annual plan.”

**2017 EQAR RC’s conclusion:** “[...] 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.”

#### Evidence

ANQA is an independent organization founded by the RA government in 2008. The development of external quality assurance activities is clearly stated in the relevant regulations (i.e., RA Government Decree No. 1486-U/ 27 November 2008: ‘Charter of “National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance” Foundation’ and RA Government Decree N 978-N/ 30 July 2011: ‘Statute on state accreditation of institutions and their academic programs in the Republic of Armenia’) as being among the duties of the agency. As a result, the main activity areas of ANQA in the field of quality assurance are the following:

- Institutional accreditation of higher education institutions (HEIs) and vocational education and training institutions (VETs);
- Academic programme accreditation.

ANQA also carries out additional activities such as providing monitoring of HEIs and VETs for development of quality culture and quality enhancement, publishing reports (e.g., Comprehensive Analysis on ANQA accreditation processes) and organizing events (meetings with stakeholders, training, etc.) as well other activities in the framework of different international projects.

All these activities are described in detail within the SAR and annexes; their information and usefulness were verified by the review panel during the interviews with the stakeholders. The panel found that the main activity of the agency, in terms of resources and time allocation, has been until now the institutional accreditation of higher education institutions - mandatory both for state and private HEIs operating in the territory of the RA. It is worth highlighting that all state HEIs in RA and majority of private HEIs have already participated in the first cycle of this process (conducted between 2011 and

2018) and are now in the process of passing through the second cycle. The panel heard from several sides that implementation of the second institutional accreditation process for many institutions has been smoother as QA culture in institutions has been already created during the first cycle. In 2019 the institutional accreditation of VETs started, as well.

The programme accreditation is voluntary and there have been no applications from HEIs so far. ANQA has performed only several programme evaluation procedures under Erasmus+ projects according to project activities and which fall out of the voluntary programme accreditation framework.

ANQA has made efforts to introduce programme accreditation as a mandatory component in external quality assurance activities. As a result, this provision is included in the new Law on Education and Science – a document which hasn't been adopted yet. In the meanwhile, the agency took several actions to develop the culture of academic programme review on regular basis, such as: regular monitoring of academic programmes (choosing three programmes with detailed directions; one bachelor degree, one master degree and one doctoral programme among those offered by the reviewed institution); closer look at a few programmes as samples within institutional accreditation process; emphasizing the academic programme evaluation during the training of experts or capacity building sessions (SAR, page 23).

During interviews with representatives of universities and other stakeholders, the panel was assured that ANQA activities are well known and perceived as tools for improvement. Relevant stakeholders are included in consultation processes while developing documents for external evaluations, in different forms: participation in surveys, focus groups, etc. The attendees also emphasized the role of ANQA in fostering a quality culture in the Armenian higher education system and appreciated the positive effect of the monitoring activities conducted within the HEIs.

The panel didn't meet students from student representative organizations, but students involved in external QA activities of ANQA as experts and participants in trainings. As indicated by the agency and other stakeholders there are challenges in place regarding involvement of student representatives in QA processes - both at institutions and on the national level. The panel learned, both through the SAR and through the site visit, that the agency sometimes organises meetings with “students and graduates of the academic programmes to discuss current trends and challenges of the education system” (SAR, page 37).

The ANQA's mission, vision, values, and strategic objectives are publicly available on its website and are within the scope of the strategic plans, both the former (2016-2020) and the current (2021-2025) ones. The agency produces annual activity plans and reports on its activity and finances, which are published on the website.

The main stakeholders are included in ANQA's leading body, the Board of Trustees, consisting of (Annex I):

- One member from RA Government staff;
- One member from Steering Committee on Science, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport of National Assembly of RA;
- One member from the RA Ministry of Education and Science;
- 4 members from teaching staff of public and private education institutions, two of which cannot be state servants at the same time;
- One member from students of public and private education institutions;
- One member from representatives of the Republican Union of Employers of Armenia established by RA Law on Employers' Union;
- One member from representatives of the Banks Union established by RA Law on Banks and Bank Activities;

- One member from the Board of National Competitiveness;
- One member from representatives of Central Bank of the Republic of Armenia.

During the interview with ANQA's Director the panel learned about the agency's attempts to address the recommendation of the previous ENQA review regarding the inclusion of international members in the Board of Trustees, which were not successful because of legislative restrictions and financial reasons. However, international experts are always included in the expert panels formed by ANQA, besides academic experts and students, while employers are involved as much as possible.

The Accreditation Committee, which is the independent body responsible for making decisions on institutional and programme accreditation processes, is formed solely from representatives of tertiary level institutions (10 from HEIs and 3 from VETs).

The other activities conducted by the agency, such as monitoring or training, are **offered to all the higher education institutions, including those that are not accredited**. The panel did not find any evidence of consultancy provision to individual institutions which are being accredited by ANQA.

### **Analysis**

Based on the information provided in the SAR and gathered during the site visit, the review panel confirms that ANQA is engaged in regular EQA activities in accordance with its legal acts. External quality assurance in the form of institutional accreditation of HEIs, extended also to VETs since 2019, is the main activity of ANQA. The panel notes that this is also reflected in the mission and goals of the agency, published on the ANQA's website.

Referring to the 2017 ENQA review recommendation that ANQA should increase the activities of external quality assurance, particularly to develop capacity to carry out evaluation of the programmes on a regular basis, the agency provided to the panel the explanation in the SAR as well as during the discussions at the site visit. It was explained to the panel that activities related to academic programme accreditation hadn't been implemented because of the voluntary nature of the process. However, the panel acknowledges the constant efforts taken by the agency to address this issue, which have resulted in provisions about the mandatory character of the programme accreditation in the new draft Law on Education and Science (waiting to be adopted). The panel also notes that the agency invests time and resources in developing the capacity of its own staff for conducting programme accreditation procedures, for example, by exercising this activity within different Erasmus+ projects.

The panel understands that the adoption of the new Law on Education and Science (expected by summer 2022) is likely to imply mandatory programme accreditation requirements for HEIs. Yet, during the panel site visit, there was no clear and common understanding at ANQA and among the stakeholders about the programme accreditation approach. Therefore, when the methodology and the approach will be developed, the panel strongly recommends conducting at least one pilot phase before implementing regulatory mandatory mechanisms. The recommendation was also raised by the international experts interviewed during the site visit.

The accreditation of higher education institutions and their academic programmes is regulated by government decree 'Statute on state accreditation of institutions and their academic programmes in the Republic of Armenia'. The same regulation has applied to accreditation of vocational education and training institutions, starting with 2019. To avoid possible confusion and better reflect the needs of the two sectors, the review panel recommends separate regulations and procedures to be developed for accreditation of HEIs and VETs.

At the same time, although it is clear that external quality assurance activities are run on a regular basis, the panel encourages the agency to pursue the decision-making authorities to set the cycle of

external evaluation activity (i.e., within what period of time all HEI's/ academic programmes should be accredited).

From the interviews with HEIs representatives the panel learned that the periodic monitoring of HEIs conducted by ANQA has been positively received and seen as a great opportunity for institutions to develop and enhance the internal quality assurance. Moreover, the panel got clear understanding that both monitoring and trainings are conducted by the agency for all higher education institutions and none of its activities are to be considered as consultancy to the accredited institutions.

The monitoring of HEIs is carried out by ANQA as delegated by the RA Government and in accordance to its Charter. The overall aim of the monitoring is to promote the continuous enhancement of HEIs at different dimensions: academic programmes, governance, quality assurance system, etc. In the panel's views, this is a good practice example of how the mission of the QA agency translates into the daily work beyond the institutional accreditation procedures. The organisation of yearly conferences and dedicated events (e.g., "Quality Week") also contributes to promoting dialog among institutions in terms of management and administration, internal quality assurance units, academic staff, and students.

Both the strategic plan and the annual reports are publicly available on the ANQA's website. The strategic plan includes all the activities of ANQA and is extremely relevant for the further development of the agency, specially by promoting 'wider involvement of stakeholders in the Armenian tertiary education system quality assurance'. Annual activity plans have been available on the website since 2017, as a result of the recommendation received at the previous ENQA review.

The panel also recognises the ANQA's active work in the international context. Participation in international networks and projects allows the agency to benchmark its activities with the other European agencies, accumulate best practices and promote them to the Ministry as well as to HEIs. The emphasis on internationalisation is also reflected in the strategic plan.

The panel learned that stakeholders are involved in the governance and activities of the agency through the Board of Trustees and the Accreditation Committee. The panel understands that legislative restrictions do not allow for formal involvement of international representatives into the Board and financial reasons prevent the Advisory Board from being active, but ANQA should think of ways of indirect involvement of international advisors, for example through their participation as observers in the meetings of Board of Trustees (online, if not possible in person). The international experts interviewed by the panel expressed their openness for such an approach. The panel is of the opinion that this would be beneficial to the agency both for planning the external quality assurance activities as well as for proposing suggestions for legal changes.

In addition to this, the panel notes that the organizational chart displayed on the website includes two structures that either are not currently active – the Advisory Board, or not established yet – the Field Commissions. ANQA should therefore review the organizational chart and make public the one in line with the real structure of the organization.

As mentioned by ANQA, the national students' union in the Republic of Armenia is not currently active due to internal issues and the university student unions are disengaged on the topic as well, therefore ANQA engages students into external QA processes through the 'Student voice' project. Although the panel acknowledges the agency constantly does this and succeeds to include students in every evaluation panel, it is important that the agency finds ways of engaging and involving the university student unions in its work, as well as supporting the functioning of the national level student representation which can then actively participate in the policy making processes and procedures, including in external QA.

Overall, the panel notes that students and professional practitioners participate in the agency's activities, as they are represented in the Board of Trustees and in the expert panels. Nevertheless, increasing student involvement in other relevant processes of ANQA such as decision-making of accreditation, by including a student representative into the Accreditation Committee, would provide added value and enlarge the committee's perspective. The agency might consider the same suggestion when establishing the Field Commissions, in the future.

### **Panel commendations**

1. The panel commends the agency's initiative to conduct periodic monitoring of HEIs, as an efficient means of enhancing internal quality assurance of institutions and promoting quality culture.

### **Panel recommendations**

1. The panel recommends the agency to develop separate regulations and procedures for accreditation of HEIs and VETs to avoid possible confusion and better reflect the needs of the two sectors.
2. The panel recommends the agency to identify ways to involve international representatives in the agency's governance.
3. The panel recommends the agency to review its organizational chart and correctly reflect the current structure of the organization and display the reviewed version on the website.
4. The panel recommends the agency to conduct at least one pilot phase before implementing regulatory mechanisms for programme accreditation once it becomes mandatory by the law.
5. The panel recommends the agency to actively engage student representatives in QA-related discussions and increase student involvement in other relevant processes such as decision-making of accreditation, by including a student representative into the Accreditation Committee.

### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

1. The panel suggests the agency to continue pursuing the decision-making authorities to set the timeframe of the first, second and following cycles of institutional accreditation activity with a clear terminal point for each cycle by when all HEIs should undergo external accreditation. The same approach is suggested for programme accreditation when this process is to be implemented.

### **Panel conclusion: compliant**

## **ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS**

Standard:

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

### **2017 ENQA review recommendation: none**

#### **Evidence**

The SAR states that ANQA was established on November 27, 2008, under the Government Decree (No. 1486N) and based on the founder's voluntary property payments, as a non-membership and non-commercial organization.

ANQA is officially recognized by the RA authorities as ‘primary provider of quality assurance services and the body responsible for external review for Armenian tertiary education, particularly middle level professional education and higher education’ (SAR, page 25).

The agency’s activities and results are recognised by the state, according to the Government Decree N 978-N of 30 July 2011, ‘*Statute on State Accreditation of Institutions and their Academic Programs in The Republic of Armenia*’.

During the site visit, the review panel met the Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of RA, responsible for higher education, who expressed the appreciation and support for ANQA in its efforts to improve the quality of HEIs.

### **Analysis**

The panel was provided with the relevant legal documentation in translation, which clearly corroborate the statements in the SAR.

All those to whom the panel spoke, including Ministry, HEIs, students’ and employers’ representatives were fully cognisant and supportive of ANQA’s legal position as quality assurance agency for tertiary education institutions in Armenia.

### **Panel conclusion: compliant**

## ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Standard:

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

### **2017 ENQA review recommendations:**

- “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.”
- “To strengthen the Boards independence and autonomy, the panel recommends adding an international perspective to the Board.”
- “To ensure meaningful student representation the panel recommends that students can be nominated only by student representation bodies.”

### **Evidence**

#### Organizational independence

On the website, ANQA declares itself “an independent organization founded by the RA government”. The organizational independence is also featured in the Charter, stating that ANQA is a non-membership and non-commercial organization, having as beneficiary “the State Authorized Body in the sphere of education, education institutions and organizations providing professional education in RA, with their staff”. The agency’s governance is ensured by the Board of Trustees, consisting of 12 members approved by the RA Prime Minister, selected from a list of proposals submitted by different stakeholders: state authorities, HEIs, employers and students. The Director is selected by the Board

of Trustees based on a public competition and is responsible for carrying out the day-to-day activities of the agency and for its management. The authorities/ tasks of both bodies (Board of Trustees and Director) are defined in the agency's Charter.

The SAR states that international experts participating in accreditation procedures are sometimes invited in meetings with the Director or the Board of Trustees, as advisers, to give feedback on matters related to strategic development of the agency. This was confirmed to the panel during the interview with international experts.

The Accreditation Committee is an independent, collegial, permanent body, whose 13 members are elected by the Board of Trustees, considering the nominations received from the higher education and vocational education and training institutions, based on a set of criteria defined by the Board. The members cover different professional areas of tertiary education and are required to have experience and expertise in both quality assurance and their own field of activity.

The agency is responsible for the implementation of tasks stated in the Charter, within which it independently organises its activities in the field of selection and training of experts, offering organisational, financial, and methodical support for accreditation procedures and performing different types of analyses and assessment of collected information.

#### Operational independence

The SAR states and the review panel heard during the interviews that ANQA independently recruits its staff by open calls. Staff selection is also possible by observing candidates with good performance during the QA meetings or student workshops organized by the agency. Both recruitment and selection of staff are regulated by the Human Resource management policy and procedure.

ANQA is independent in selecting and training the expert pool members, as the qualification requirements for experts and the procedure for their selection are established by the Board of Trustees. The Accreditation Committee is responsible for appointing experts from the pool of expert panel and the reviewed HEIs have the possibility to object on the panel composition. The experts have to sign a written consent confirming commitment on confidentiality and exclusion of conflict of interests.

All the activities are conducted under the rule of the Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct, which includes principles of ethical behaviour and independence from third parties both for the agency staff and external experts and has clear provisions on avoiding conflict of interest for the members of all bodies of the agency (including not voting and not participating in discussions about the institution of which the person belongs).

The agency has established and implemented mechanisms for collecting experts' opinion on their independence during the entire review process, including reporting. According to the SAR, the results confirmed a high degree of independence of experts in exerting their role within the external review panel, while the panel did not learn otherwise during the interviews.

The accreditation procedures are conducted according to the '*Statute on state accreditation of institutions and their academic programs in the Republic of Armenia*', which is an official document approved by the government. ANQA is able to initiate updates and make suggestions for changes, to discuss them with the Ministry, but the final decision is up to the government.

#### Independence of formal outcomes

During the interviews with experts and ANQA staff involved in external quality assurance procedures, it has been learned that the staff support the expert panel in drafting the review report solely by ensuring all the standards are properly addressed and all the information gathered during the site visit

and desk review has been included in the report. Writing the findings of the assessment process and making judgements on the compliance with standards is exclusively the task and responsibility of experts, as further described under ESG 2.6.

The decisions on accreditation procedures are made by the Accreditation Committee, based on open voting, according to the *Procedure on formation and operation of the “National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation” Accreditation Committee* issued by ANQA, and they are published on the agency’s website. At the same time, the decisions are sent to the Ministry and ratified by it without any possibility for changes from the Ministry side. For now, this conclusion is based on the agency’s statement from the SAR that all the certificates on the decisions have been ratified by MoES without any exception; the new *Statute of state accreditation*, which is to be approved, includes the provision: “the MoES directly ratifies the certificates on the decision of the Accreditation Committee”.

### **Analysis**

The organisational independence is set out clearly in the relevant regulations for the agency, as mentioned in the evidence section above. During the interviews, the panel did not detect any concerns in relation to this matter.

The panel acknowledges ANQA addressed the first 2017 ENQA review recommendation by excluding the MoES representatives in the Accreditation Committee’s meetings, as it is now stated in the revised version of its internal regulations. The recommendation of adding an international perspective to the Board has been also considered by the agency but the panel has considered it under the ESG 3.1 and detailed it there. With regard to nominating students only by the student representation body, this recommendation has been included, at ANQA’s proposal, in the revised Charter which is to be approved by the RA government.

The operational independence from external stakeholders is largely guaranteed through the legislation and the internal procedures of the agency. The staff is recruited and selected by the agency, without any external influence. The appointment of external experts is the responsibility of the Accreditation Committee. In the view of the panel, this approach guarantees independence from third parties. In addition, the panel notes the engagement of international experts in all accreditation procedures, which make the independence even stronger. The only issue that affects ANQA is the political context which constantly delayed the approval of the revised legal framework (the new Law on Education and Science, the Statute of state accreditation and the Charter) and slowed down important changes the agency is prepared and willing to implement.

The way expert panels and the Accreditation Committee are composed contributes to the independence of outcomes. The panels consist of experts with different backgrounds in the academic field or the labour market and students, all include an international expert and are selected based on transparent procedures. All experts act as independent persons and sign a declaration of impartiality and confidentiality.

Regarding the second recommendation of the 2017 ENQA review, the panel is clear it has been addressed by the agency, as it is explained in the last paragraph of the evidence section.

### **Panel conclusion: compliant**

## ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Standard:

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

### 2017 ENQA review recommendations:

- “The panel recommends that the report *Comprehensive analysis of the accreditation process* becomes a periodic analysis of the accreditation process.”
- “The panel recommends broadening the thematic analysis, for example, carrying out analysis by disciplines.”

### Evidence

The Charter governing the agency specifically states ANQA’s aim to produce studies and analyses in the field of tertiary education. The current strategic plan sets as the first goal ‘to promote and foster continuous enhancement culture of the tertiary education quality’ which is implemented by actions that include collecting and disseminating ‘authentic information about the tertiary education system’.

ANQA produces and publishes comprehensive analysis on accreditation processes every three years (e.g., the last document of this kind was published in 2021 and presents an analysis of the processes conducted during 2018-2020). The research answers to questions regarding the independence, transparency, effectiveness, and usefulness of the accreditation procedures, the problems encountered during their implementation or the factors that promote or hinder the development of higher education institutions.

At the same time, the panel read in the SAR and heard as well during the interview with the Director that the agency conducts other research with different topics chosen following the findings of the external review reports and the proposals resulted from the meetings with stakeholders (teachers, administrative staff of HEIs and VET institutions, students, Ministry representatives, etc.). The agency sees as thematic analysis also the outcomes of the international projects, the research publications, and the system wide analysis, as presented in the SAR (Table 7, page 30-36) confirmed by the Director. All these publications are available on ANQA’s website.

The Board of Trustees told the review panel of its plans to enrich the thematic analysis in the future by publishing reports on research conducted by the agency in cooperation with research centres of the Armenian higher education institutions.

### Analysis

The panel was able to read the publications on comprehensive analysis on ANQA’s accreditation processes (2015-2017 and 2018-2020) and considers them a good example of thematic analysis. The panel acknowledges the progress made in this area since the previous external review, and that the first recommendation of the 2017 ENQA review has been fully addressed. Still, while the list of publications provided in the SAR (page 30-36) shows that the agency is active in disseminating outcomes of various activities, the most of those publications, workshops, conferences, forums are not sufficient to be treated as thematic analysis.

As regards the second 2017 ENQA recommendation, although the panel understands that carrying out analysis on disciplines is still difficult since the programme accreditation hasn’t been implemented yet, it is obvious that the data collected through institutional accreditation procedures offer opportunities to the agency to produce far more thematic analyses, that could improve not only

ANQA's accreditation procedures but also the tertiary education institutions in Armenia (e.g., sector or field of knowledge analyses).

The same idea came up during the meetings with different stakeholders, who expressed the interest to see more thematic analysis relevant for the RA tertiary education system published on the agency's website.

### **Panel recommendations**

6. The panel recommends the agency to further work on broadening the thematic analysis by selecting and analysing various relevant aspects for the higher education sector. The themes could focus not only on accreditation processes (as it is now), but also analyse good practices and trends of the tertiary education system in Armenia, including through the findings of the external review reports.

### **Panel conclusion: compliant**

## ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:

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

**2017 ENQA review recommendations:** "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."

### **Evidence**

#### Human resources

ANQA has a team of 18 employees, consisting of the director, the head of the Policy Development and Implementation Division, the head of the Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division, 8 specialists in policy development and coordination of accreditation procedures, and the support staff: assistant to director, lawyer, accountant, IT specialist, other persons with responsibilities for secretariat, human resources, public relations, international relations and internal quality assurance.

The agency has in place a policy for human resource management which clearly describes the process of recruitment, job assessment and career planning, different provisions for employee's retention (e.g., training and development, remuneration and rewards, regulation of labour relations and conflict management). ANQA makes sure that all its staff are properly trained and provides training opportunities based on a needs analysis, as the panel learned from the SAR and the additional documents requested from the agency. This has been also confirmed during the interviews with the agency's staff, who acknowledged their involvement in different staff development activities such as trainings abroad, participating in webinars and discussions, involvement in project activities, etc.

According to the SAR, ANQA also pays higher salaries than the country's average level, thus aiming to attract high professional staff members and keep the experienced ones. The panel learned about the staff turnover each year (i.e., outflow of 2-3 employees/ year, inflow of 2-4 employees/ year) and that the small staff number and low retention rate are acknowledged by the agency as one of its weaknesses.

ANQA states that it estimates the necessary number of staff for two years in advance and it is able to maintain stable its human resources by involving new staff members through ‘Student voice’ initiative. In case of a need, review coordinators can also be contracted outside of the main staff of the agency.

For carrying out the accreditation procedures, the agency uses independent experts from its own database. The panel understood, by discussing with several groups (staff involved in procedures, HEIs representatives, local and international experts), that the expert pool consists of highly experienced persons.

#### Financial resources

ANQA receives funding from the state, accreditation fees from HEIs and VET institutions, international projects, trainings, conferences, etc. Additional information provided by the agency shows that state funding has significantly increased since 2019 (Table 2), when the accreditation of VET institutions started. The income from accreditation fees has also a positive trend but it depends on the number of accreditation procedures performed. The income from trainings and other sources decreased due to COVID-19 pandemic, but this represents a rather small share of the total budget and does not have significant impact on the overall activities of the agency.

Table 2. ANQA’s cash inflows during 2016-2020

<b>INDICATOR</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
Cash inflows, of which:	145.420,00	148.444,00	89.905,00	178.689,00	129.944,00
<i>1 State funding</i>	68.160,00	68.022,00	64.336,00	81.089,00	84.185,00
<i>2 Accreditations</i>	32.615,28	42.072,76	14.173,35	77.787,00	38.987,00
<i>3 Trainings</i>	3.793,00	3.057,50	1.600,00	4.425,00	500,00
<i>4 International cooperation</i>	37.260,00	31.222,38	4.925,37	13.484,00	4.089,00
<i>5 Other sources /Conference, deposit interest rate, etc. /</i>	3.591,72	4.069,36	4.870,28	1.904,00	2.183,00

The expenses (mostly personnel costs and costs of the procedures) are covered; moreover, a sum of each accreditation procedure is allocated for ANQA’s development, as the panel learned during the discussions with the Director. According to the SAR, the agency has savings equivalent to about one year's state budget, to be used “in any extraordinary situation to continue development of the main mission of EQA in Armenia and possible reorganizations” (SAR, page 41).

The panel was able to see the planning of staff and finances, performed on yearly basis, and the financial annual reports published on its website.

#### Other resources

ANQA provided a video material to show their premises and working environment and the panel noted they were appropriate for the agency’s work. The office is installed on an area of 750 sqm, has suitable access to the internet and is endowed with sufficient equipment and licensed software (SAR, page 36). The agency’s staff mentioned, during the discussions with the panel, that all employees have laptops, access to the internet, cloud, Microsoft 360, and Zoom.

## Analysis

It is clear to the panel that ANQA makes all efforts to recruit motivated and qualified staff. At the same time, based on the evidence and the discussions with different stakeholders, the panel is able to conclude that the agency has adequate and appropriate human resources to carry out its work. However, ANQA is encouraged to be mindful of addressing the low retention rate of its personnel; implementing exit-surveys might be considered for analysing the reasons of this phenomenon and identifying solutions to staff turnover and retention of experienced staff. Attention should also be paid to the gender balance, as currently the staff is highly female dominant.

The panel considers that, to this point, the agency's budget has been adequate for the implementation of the assigned activities. Increase from state funding during the last three years shows the stable support from the government and there are no concerns on sustainability of needed resources. At the same time, the panel encourages ANQA to pursue other types of activities and thus gain further resources for its own development.

While ANQA developed planning of its staff and finances two years in advance, thus addressing the 2017 ENQA recommendation, the panel believes the agency should be prepared to raise the employees' number to cope with the increasing workload, if the new Law on Education and Science is adopted and programme accreditation becomes mandatory. On the other hand, to further guarantee the sustainability of all the foreseen activities, it is crucial for the agency to be properly financed by the RA government.

The current premises and infrastructure are adequate for the development of the agency's activities, and it seems there is potential for developing the working environment for ANQA's employees if it's permanent staffing needs to increase.

## Panel recommendations

7. The panel recommends the agency to ensure that enough resources are available to extend its activities once the new Law on Education and Science is adopted.

## Panel suggestions for further improvement

2. The panel encourages the agency to pursue its efforts for retaining the experienced personnel and diminish the staff turnover.

## Panel conclusion: compliant

## ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Standard:

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

## 2017 ENQA review recommendations:

- “The panel recommends revising periodically their internal and external procedures, for example doing internal audits.”
- “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.”

- “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.”

## **Evidence**

ANQA established a comprehensive approach on Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) in 2011 and formalized it in the document ‘ANQA Internal Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures’. The document has been regularly reviewed to harmonize it with the different stages of development of the agency (i.e., in 2016 and 2021, in line with the strategic plans).

Besides the information presented in the SAR, the panel was able to read additional materials the agency provided at its request which confirmed the adequate implementation of the protocols governing the ANQA’s IQA. The activities conducted by the agency are currently grouped in nine areas: Leadership, Policy, Strategy and HR; Institutional and programme accreditation of TLLs; Monitoring of TLLs; Secretariat and Accreditation Committee; Legal affairs; International affairs; Communication and public relations; Resources and ICT; Internal quality assurance. Each area follows the PDCA cycle, and all protocols include description of strategic goals, targets, indicators for evaluation of targets, main activities, evaluation, responsibility, reporting, improvement and regulatory documents. Annual reports are prepared on every area and submitted to the Director and the Board of the Trustees.

ANQA has created internal and external feedback mechanisms that lead to continuous improvement within the agency. Surveys are applied to HEIs, experts (local and international) and coordinators after each accreditation procedure to gather objective information aimed at enhancing the agency’s activities. The agency applies procedures and tools (e.g., regular internal meetings and feedback sessions, focus groups and meetings with stakeholders) guaranteeing the periodic revision and continuous enhancement of its activities. Staff is inquired yearly about its satisfaction on equipment and resources offered by ANQA. All staff members the panel spoke to seemed engaged in and committed to the agency, showing a positive opinion on how the activities are implemented.

The personnel working for ANQA are well prepared and experienced, keen on their regular training and upgrading of the knowledge and skills necessary for their growth and development.

Requirements for experts’ competence and professionalism are set by the Board of Trustees. ANQA has a rather rigorous procedure of testing and certifying experts before including them in the database. All experts should follow the Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct. Each expert signs a written consent confirming commitment on confidentiality and exclusion of conflict of interests. The agency has feedback mechanisms to ensure the quality of the external review reports and the independence of experts involved in accreditation procedures.

ANQA ensures appropriate communication channels and close cooperation with its stakeholders. It is quite active on social media and the website includes the option of sending direct messages, which facilitates the agency to offer guidance and to gather feedback.

## **Analysis**

Considering the evidence presented in the section above, the review panel notes that all the recommendations of the 2017 review have been addressed by the agency.

Processes are clearly described for all activities of the agency, and there is a structure in place for assuring and enhancing the quality of its work. The agency seems to know exactly what IQA means and how to approach it, as the panel could learn either from the SAR and the additional material provided or during the interviews.

The panel acknowledges that the agency is very committed to promoting communication and cooperation with stakeholders and is successful in gathering feedback and inputs, especially from experts, HEIs and its own staff. ANQA organises various events at which it presents results of its findings and responses of HEIs to the organisation and implementation of state accreditation procedures. These meetings and sessions are used also for gathering feedback from stakeholders.

The panel commends the agency for its efforts and engagement in the field of information exchange and professional conduct. ANQA outlines appropriate communication and the involvement of external stakeholders in improving its procedures.

The agency has increased its social media presence resulting in more opportunities for the public to engage with it.

### **Panel commendations**

2. The panel commends the agency for its efforts and commitment to providing quality services in state accreditation procedures, which was also confirmed by all interviewees.

### **Panel conclusion: compliant**

## ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

Standard:

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

### **2017 ENQA review recommendation: none**

#### **Evidence**

ANQA's internal documents on internal quality assurance foresee the cyclical external evaluation of the agency, once in five years.

The first ENQA external review was conducted in 2017 and ANQA was granted ENQA membership for five years and inclusion on the EQAR Register.

In 2019, the agency submitted to ENQA a follow-up report on recommendations in the panel report, which was approved by the ENQA Board.

The panel learned during the site visit that, according to the current Armenian legislation, agencies must be registered on EQAR to be able to carry out accreditation procedures in Armenia.

#### **Analysis**

The panel is convinced that ANQA undergoes the periodic external reviews as stipulated by the ESG 3.7. Moreover, the review panel notes that all recommendations from the previous review have been considered and progress has been made in their implementation.

The current Armenian legislation requires the agencies conducting accreditation procedures in Armenia to be registered on EQAR. ANQA undergoes a cyclical review every five years to renew its ENQA and EQAR membership by demonstrating compliance with the ESG and the steps taken to follow up on any recommendations provided.

### **Panel conclusion: compliant**

## ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

### ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part I of the ESG.

#### 2017 ENQA review recommendation: none

#### Evidence

The external quality assurance activities of ANQA have been described in the introductory part of this report. They are subject to national regulation, i.e., Government Decree N 978-N of 30 July 2011, 'Statute on State Accreditation of Institutions and their Academic Programs in The Republic of Armenia', which states that standards for academic programmes and for institutional accreditation are approved by RA Government. They are also published on the ANQA's website.

ANQA provided documentation (*'Harmonization of the criteria for institutional and programme accreditation with Part I: European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance in the institutions of higher education'* and Table 10 of the SAR) indicating the alignment of the agency's assessment schemes with the ESG Part I.

The panel notes that all procedures use a self-evaluation report as the first stage of the review process. It also acknowledges the agency's support to HEIs in drafting the self-evaluation report, **through several workshops and trainings organized especially during the first cycle of the institutional accreditation. The interviews confirmed that guidance in terms of general information on writing the self-evaluation reports and on external evaluation process was offered by ANQA to all interested institutions, and not selectively, as consultancy.**

The panel was able to read, both in English and Armenian, two external review reports (Expert panel report on institutional accreditation of Armenian State University of Economics and Expert panel report on institutional accreditation of European University); other reports available on the website were also consulted, and all have a clear structure set by ANQA.

#### Analysis

In this section, the panel describes to what extent the external quality assurance procedures used by ANQA assess the effectiveness of HEIs' internal quality assurance processes in relation to ESG Part I. In addition, it is presented in the SAR that institutional accreditation procedure mandates the assessment of three study programmes (at bachelor and/ or master level) in order to assess the extent to which the university quality assurance system is effective at the study programme level. The panel notes that the evaluation of the three study programmes is integral part of the institutional accreditation procedure and not a separate programme accreditation procedure.

The review panel believes that the references provided by the agency are largely supported by the evidence found in the specific documentation, except for ESG I.4, ESG I.5, ESG I.9 and ESG I.10, which are not entirely covered, as demonstrated below.

#### 1.1 Policy for quality assurance

In the institutional accreditation procedures, it is required the HEI to have policy and practices in accordance with its mission, its system of governance, administrative structures and their practices are effective and intend to the accomplishment of its mission and purposes by keeping the governance

code of ethics and that there is in place an internal quality assurance system for promoting establishment of a quality culture and continuous improvement of all the processes of the HEI.

After considering stakeholder feedback, the panel believes that the procedures focus on the presence of processes for internal quality assurance.

### 1.2 Design and approval of programmes

In the institutional accreditation procedures, the academic programmes are required to be in accordance with the HEI's mission and part of the institutional planning; they should promote mobility and internationalization. They have to be designed considering the learning outcomes and the teaching and learning process should be aligned to this approach. Similar provisions are included for the programme accreditation procedures. During the additional meeting the panel had with the resource person it was explained the process of design and approval of the academic programmes and how ANQA addressed it.

### 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching, and assessment

This standard focuses on how students are encouraged to take an active role in their learning process. The panel notes in the documents ANQA provided that the concept of student-centred learning, teaching, and assessment is integrated. At institutional level, the standards require policies for: "alignment between teaching and learning approaches and the intended learning outcomes of academic programs promoting student-centered learning", "students' assessment according to the learning outcomes and ensures academic integrity", "revealing student educational needs", promoting student involvement in research activities. At programme level there are standards that assess the teaching, learning and student assessment practices for ensuring the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

### 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition, and certification

While, according to the documentation provided, this standard is reviewed as part of the assessment criteria for institutional (and supposed to be reviewed as criteria for programme accreditation), the panel considers that publishing regulations that cover all the phases of the student "life cycle" is not addressed in ANQA standards and criteria which are mapped to align with ESG 1.4.

The panel notes that the institutional accreditation reports sometimes address issues of publicly available information (on the university website) under criteria and standard N8 of ANQA. In the panel's views, ANQA's criteria and standard 8 aligns well with ESG 1.8. However, the ESG 1.4 requirement of publicly available information about **all the phases** of the student "life cycle" is not covered under any of the ANQA criteria and standards. Accordingly, even though occasionally addressed under considerations and analysis in the reports, the recommendations given to the universities usually do not address the lack of publicly available regulations covering all phases of the student life cycle. The panel recommends reformulating the ANQA criteria and standard N4 to address publicly available regulations covering all the phases of the student "life cycle".

### 1.5 Teaching staff

In the context of evaluation of teaching staff, the accreditation procedures ensure that the expert panel checks compliance with the associated ANQA requirements, which include stipulations on sufficient teaching and support staff with appropriate qualification, policies for staff periodic evaluation, professional development, and promotion. However, the panel notes that ANQA's criteria and standards do not address transparency of recruitment and staff development processes. The institutional accreditation reports sometimes address issues of transparent processes under considerations and analysis of ANQA's criteria and standards N5, but the recommendations given in those reports usually do not address the lack of transparent processes. The panel recommends

reformulating the ANQA's criteria and standards N5 to ensure transparency of processes for recruitment and development of staff is addressed.

#### 1.6 Learning resources and student support

The agency assesses learning resources and student support in institutional accreditation procedure (also foreseen at programme accreditation procedure). Criteria are the supporting staff and services and the learning resources available for students; they are explicitly mentioned and checked by the expert panel.

#### 1.7 Information management

As provided in the ANQA's documents, this standard is reviewed as part of several standards (N2, N4, N7, N8 for institutional accreditations and foreseen in N2, N3, N7 for programme accreditation). The panel considers this standard fully covered by ANQA's criteria and standards, as it could be confirmed also from the review reports.

#### 1.8 Public information

The panel saw that all assessment procedures conducted by ANQA ensure that institutions publish information on their programmes. The HEIs need to demonstrate institutional accountability, transparency of their procedures and feedback mechanisms in place. At the same time, information on internal quality assurance processes has to be provided in a transparent way to the stakeholders.

#### 1.9 Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes

The positive impact of ANQA's first cycle of institutional accreditation on the development of the internal quality assurance of HEIs is largely acknowledged by all stakeholders. It seems this has become even more relevant during the second cycle of the accreditation of institutions once the focus on programme review has been increased. However, the panel notes that communicating actions planned/undertaken to those concerned isn't addressed in ANQA standards and criteria. Therefore, the agency is advised to include in ANQA criteria and standards (e.g., N3.4, N3.5, N4.2 or N4.8) formulations addressing communication of planned or taken actions to those concerned in the institutions, so that a wider academic community is informed and not only those that take part in decision making processes.

#### 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

The ANQA standards and criteria require the HEI to have “an internal quality assurance system for promoting establishment of a quality culture and continuous improvement” of all its processes and that “the internal quality assurance system provides valid and sufficient background for the success of the external quality assurance processes” (criterion NI0.5). The panel learned from the external review reports at its disposal that the analysis, considerations, and recommendations under ANQA criteria and standards NI0.5 usually address the implementation of the IQA. Cyclical nature of EQA isn't addressed, however. The panel acknowledges the provisions of the Armenian external quality assurance regulations requiring mandatory institutional accreditations for all the HEIs, but without being set the period for cyclical review, which can heavily affect the continuous improvement of HEIs. As regards the mandatory programme accreditation processes and their cyclical review, these provisions are included in the new Law on Education and Science not yet adopted.

### **Panel recommendations**

8. The panel recommends the agency reviews its criteria and standards in the view of addressing:
  - publicly available regulations covering all the phases of the student life cycle (ESG 1.4);
  - transparency of processes for recruitment and development of staff (ESG 1.5);

- communication of planned or taken actions to those concerned in the institutions (ESG 1.9);
- clear definition of the period of EQA cycle and run procedures within it covering all HEIs in Armenia (ESG 1.10).

**Panel conclusion: partially compliant**

## ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard:

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

**2017 ENQA review recommendations:** “The panel recommends using the same approach for the future cycle of Institutional Accreditation.”

### Evidence

External quality assurance (EQA) in Armenian tertiary education is regulated by the ‘*Statute on State Accreditation of Institutions and their Academic Programs in The Republic of Armenia*’, adopted by the RA government and the ‘*Accreditation manual*’, elaborated by ANQA and approved by the Board of Trustees of the agency (first version in 2015, updated in 2021). According to the Accreditation manual, the EQA has three essential aims: 1)- accountability and transparency, 2)- control and 3)- quality enhancement. In Armenia, the external quality assurance is carried out through accreditation performed by ANQA. The regulation in force sets two types of procedures: institutional accreditation and programme accreditation. While the first procedure is mandatory both for public and private HEIs operating on the territory of the RA, the second is a volunteer process. The panel learned during the interview with the Director that, until the moment of the site visit, no HEI had volunteered to accredit its academic programmes.

The agency has elaborated several documents for supporting the decision-making process of its EQA procedures (i.e., ‘*Policy on decision-making of awarding institutional accreditation by Accreditation Committee of the “National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance” foundation*’) or the HEIs (e.g., Self-assessment form for institutional accreditation, Guideline for preparation of the Follow-up plan of TLIs, Template for appeal). During the pandemic of COVID-19, ANQA took initiative to discuss new challenges for quality assurance with HEIs, experts, Accreditation Committee, Ministry. At the same time, the agency introduced guidelines to assist HEIs in assuring quality in pandemic situations (i.e., ‘*Procedure on organization and conduct of accreditation in the state emergency by the “National Center for Professional Quality Assurance” foundation*’).

Institutional reviews have a follow-up procedure (once every two years accredited institutions write follow-up reports which are sent to the agency and analysed by the Accreditation Committee). Besides the follow-up, a monitoring procedure has been put in place at ANQA’s initiative (a monitoring visit to accredited and non-accredited institutions) and mandated by the Ministry. The Ministry defines how many monitoring procedures should be done each year and allocates funds in this respect. Based on these numbers and the needs for follow-up activities, ANQA establishes the institutions to be monitored. The monitoring visit can coincide with the follow-up report timing and the follow-up report can be discussed during the monitoring visit if the latter happens to be around the same time.

ANQA regularly collects feedback through various surveys, focus group discussions, consultations with stakeholders to verify effectiveness of accreditation procedures and updates its documents or forms. The consultation events are disseminated on the agency's website, and it was also confirmed by the representatives of HEIs, members of the Board of Trustees or ANQA staff the panel spoke to. The results show that HEIs find the institutional accreditation procedure and its outcomes useful for development of quality culture. There are several examples of actions taken by the agency considering stakeholders' feedback, such as: the development of the new Policy on Accreditation Decision Making by Accreditation Committee for the second cycle of the institutional accreditation (SAR, page 59) or the elaboration of the procedure on "Organization and conduct of accreditation in emergency situations" considering the survey among stakeholders (SAR, page 52).

Although the agency ensures stakeholders' participation by involving them in the Board of Trustees, Accreditation Committee, and all the expert panels, the panel notes that students are not included in the Accreditation Committee, which is responsible for defining decision-making approaches and principles of accreditation, making decision on institutional and academic programme accreditation, and making suggestions to ANQA for the improvement of the accreditation procedures (SAR, page 13). The panel was explained that for completing these tasks high professionals were required and because of that reason students were not considered.

The SAR states and the interviews with different stakeholders confirmed the efficient way in which ANQA conducts the accreditation procedures and the good communication with HEIs and with the expert panels, which is facilitated by having a dedicated agency staff appointed to each accreditation mission. The experts reported that they feel very well prepared for assignments due to the in-depth and efficient training offered by the agency. They also seem to have good knowledge about the differences between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle of the institutional accreditation (e.g., the focus on programme assessment or increase of student engagement, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle).

While the panel acknowledges the pro-activeness of the agency in initiating changes of its procedures for their improvement, it is also noted that ANQA's proposals need to be approved by the government before actual implementation. At the same time, there is no link between the institutional accreditation of HEIs and their licensing, which still allows non-accredited institutions to operate in RA. The interviews with the agency and the deputy minister revealed that there is joint will to synchronize accreditation and licensing processes and discussions are going on in this direction, although not implemented yet.

### **Analysis**

ANQA performs clearly defined external quality assurance procedures, implemented in a regulated context of the RA. The stakeholders confirm their fitness for purpose (e.g., awareness of national context and culture, development of IQA in HEIs, etc.). Besides institutional accreditation, monitoring activities have also been initiated by the agency and supported by the Ministry. As the monitoring visits can be used as an opportunity to also discuss the follow-up reports produced by HEIs after the institutional review, the panel noted during the site visit a kind of confusion towards which procedure serves for what purposes and with which methodology. A way to avoid this lack of clarity might be ANQA to consider merging these two procedures into one clearly defined follow-up procedure for accredited institutions, while a separate monitoring procedure could be retained for non-accredited institutions only.

The panel read in the SAR and was able to confirm during the interviews that the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle of institutional accreditation was launched, and the procedure maintained the same approach as the one from the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle, thus addressing the 2017 ENQA recommendation.

The agency carefully considers feedback and opinions of various stakeholders, as the panel learned during the site visit. ANQA incorporates them in its processes but is able to do so only for the documents developed and approved by the Board of Trustees, as the methodologies for accreditation need to be approved by the government.

The panel acknowledges the agency's commitment to involving stakeholders through a wide range of activities, disseminated on its website. In particular, the dialogue which is currently carried out between ANQA and the Ministry on linking accreditation procedures to licensing of HEIs the panel sees as a positive development. Consequently, the panel believes that making this alignment would ensure that accreditation procedures have consequences on the ability of HEIs to issue diplomas and to operate on the RA territory, in general.

Wherever relevant, the agency invests in providing adequate documentation to ensure the proper implementation of procedures (e.g., policy for decision-making process, guidelines for conducting procedures in emergency state, etc.). It was clear to the panel from the interviews it held with various stakeholders that, once the procedures are implemented, the agency continues to gather feedback in a systematic way for their further improvement. Although the agency involves students in the Board of Trustees and in all expert panels, the panel considers that ANQA could also gain great benefit from involving students in the Accreditation Committee. This might be achieved by developing cooperation with students' unions of HEIs, if the students' representation at national level is weak, as the panel learned during the interview with the agency.

#### **Panel recommendations**

9. The panel recommends the agency to pursue the dialog with the Ministry of Education and Science for linking the accreditation procedures to licensing of HEIs operation on the RA territory.

#### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

3. The panel suggests the agency to consider merging the monitoring and follow-up procedures into one clearly defined follow-up procedure for accredited institutions, while a separate monitoring procedure could be retained for non-accredited institutions only.

#### **Panel conclusion: compliant**

### ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Standard:

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent
- an external assessment normally including a site visit
- a report resulting from the external assessment
- a consistent follow-up

**2017 ENQA review recommendations:** “The panel recommends improving the follow-up processes, once implanted in the different centers. Aspects that should be taken into account should be:

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

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

**2017 EQAR RC's conclusion:** "Given that one of the two follow-up processes appears to be considered ineffective by the panel, that the other follow-up process was not reviewed by the panel and that the implementation of programme accreditation was not analysed by the panel, the Register Committee was unable to concur with the panel's conclusion and considered that ANQA only partially complies with the standard.

### **Evidence**

As already elaborated under ESG 2.2, the institutional and programme accreditation procedures follow national (*Statute on State Accreditation of Institutions and their Academic Programs in The Republic of Armenia*) and international (ESG) regulations (although the programme accreditation procedures could not be considered by the panel because of lack of implementation).

The *Accreditation Manual*, which is published on ANQA website, describes in detail the procedures, along with the guiding principles, criteria, and standards. Both institutional and programme accreditations consist of a self-assessment stage (self-assessment documentation submitted by the institution); a review by an expert panel, which includes a site visit during which stakeholders are interviewed; and a report with findings about the extent to which the accreditation criteria are met and recommendations for the actions to be taken by the institution. During the site visit, besides the regular meetings with management, teachers, students, graduates and external stakeholders, the experts also conduct so-called "professional talks" for each of the three programmes reviewed within an institutional accreditation procedure. In these meetings, the expert panel gathers information on the academic programmes offered by the HEIs in terms of learning outcomes, student assessment assignments, etc., as presented in the SAR and confirmed during the interviews.

Writing the findings in the external review report lies entirely with the expert panel members and the draft report is sent to the institution, which is able to comment on the findings. All reports are published on the agency's website. An ANQA coordinator is assigned to each procedure to oversee the proper implementation of the review and accreditation procedures.

Expert panel's role and responsibilities, as well as coordinators' roles are clearly defined in the *Accreditation Manual*, which also states that the review process is the sole responsibility of the experts.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, accreditation procedures have been conducted online or hybrid, based on a document ANQA produced in that respect (i.e., *Procedure on organization and conduct of accreditation in the state emergency by the "National Center for Professional Quality Assurance" foundation*) and published on the website.

The Accreditation Committee checks and approves all the reports and takes the decision on accreditation; this can be granted for two, four or six years. HEIs receiving accreditation for two years are required to submit follow-up reports each six months, while the HEIs accredited for four or six years submit follow-up reports to ANQA each two years. These follow-up reports go to the Accreditation Committee, but they are only informative: the committee members can make comments or give recommendations, but there is no real impact on the formal decision.

The panel read in the SAR and learned from the interviews with agency's Director and staff that the 2017 ENQA recommendation was endorsed. As ANQA explained, according to Statute on state accreditation of institutions and their academic programmes in the Republic of Armenia, 6-month period for submitting a written report on follow-up actions to ANQA is applied only for HEIs that received conditional accreditation for 2 years. HEIs that received 6- or 4-year accreditation are obliged

to implement experts' recommendations and present a report to ANQA every two years. In addition, the agency took the initiative to conduct one-day monitoring visits to the institutions, which include: review of the follow-up plan and report on how the recommendations have been implemented so far; meetings with internal stakeholders; final discussions with the leadership. The panel understood that the initiative was very well received by the HEIs, as an opportunity for quality enhancement. Over the last years, the government decided that monitoring was mandatory for all HEIs, accredited and non-accredited. The process is carried out by ANQA staff without involving expert evaluators in a systematic way and, up to now, it has not resulted in any formal decision.

### **Analysis**

The 1<sup>st</sup> cycle of institutional accreditation conducted by ANQA is very much appreciated by the HEIs, being considered a real step forward in introducing QA in the Armenian HE system, as the panel learned from the HEI representatives during the site visit. The HEIs also acknowledge the differences between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> cycles, the latter being oriented on improvement of IQA and on more in depth looking at the academic programmes. The panel notes that the institutional accreditation process has positively impacted the tertiary education system in Armenia, but the cyclical process of reviews is not entirely implemented.

The Accreditation Manual and other support documents elaborated by the agency are clear and well written; the panel also considers the current monitoring process to be very good support for HEIs to implement the follow-up plan and to increase quality.

The presence of a coordinator from ANQA in each review ensures the consistency in implementation of procedures. At the same time, the Accreditation Committee verifies the consistency of the reports produced by the expert panels. This approach is valued for its contribution to consistency in the results of quality assurance processes.

The panel confirms that the institutional accreditation procedures include the first three steps required by the ESG: a self-assessment, a site visit, and an external review report. It can be only assumed that the same applies to programme accreditation procedures, as the panel was able to read in the SAR and regulating documents but could not check since the process is not operational yet. The panel acknowledges this being a limitation imposed by the current legislation. A similar limitation is encountered for the follow-up process, which hasn't been changed since the previous ENQA review, therefore the 2017 recommendations haven't been met yet. The follow-up has no formal decision attached, which, in the panel's view, might affect the effectiveness of the process itself. The agency seems to be aware of this issue but has not made changes due to the political context and constant delay in adopting the new legislation by the government. However, the monitoring of HEIs every two years is acknowledged as a positive initiative of the agency for what is in its powers, although there is no formal decision resulting from this process, either. Neither follow-up nor monitoring involve experts in a systematic way, due to financial constraints. The panel encourages the agency to pursue its efforts to engage external experts, as it believes this would further add to the value of these processes.

### **Panel recommendations**

10. The panel recommends the agency to involve external experts in the follow-up process.
11. The panel keeps the 2017 ENQA recommendation regarding the follow-up procedure after 6 months, as it hasn't been addressed yet and is still relevant.

### **Panel conclusion: compliant**

## ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

Standard:

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

**2017 ENQA review 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.”

### Evidence

The expert selection for accreditation procedures conducted by ANQA follows the principles defined by the *Statute on Accreditation* and the provisions of the *Accreditation Manual* (section V – Guidelines and criteria for peer-review experts). The expert panels are set according to the *Regulation on the formation of ANQA expert panel* and consist of 5 to 7 members from the following categories: academic staff, representatives from the field of education management, representatives of the professional or economic sector, students. It is mandatory for at least one international expert and one student to be involved in the expert panel. Every panel has a chair and is appointed a coordinator from ANQA’s behalf – responsible for the adequate implementation of the procedure (including organizational aspects).

The process of appointing the experts is as follows: ANQA staff sets a shortlist of 7 to 10 trained experts and forwards it to the Accreditation Committee for approval; finally, the experts are nominated from the respective list, under the signature of ANQA’s Director. In doing this, the agency seeks to ensure adequate background of the persons involved with respect to the programmes to be in depth looked at during the institutional accreditation of the HEI in question, besides their expertise in quality assurance. The HEI is informed about the composition of the expert panel and is able to amend it in case of conflict of interest or any other good reason.

ANQA has its own pool of experts covering a wide range of areas of expertise, established based on open calls regularly launched by the agency followed by training sessions and trainees’ assessment. The recruitment and training of students is done through the ‘Student Voice’ project, which started several years ago and continues to be one of ANQA’s successful projects. Simultaneously, the agency uses the option to contact international networks to supplement the number of international experts. During the site visit the panel was provided, on request, the list of experts ANQA used in accreditation procedures and was able to note that there were 92 females out of 197 persons.

All expert panel members are trained before being included in the ANQA’s database; student experts’ training is organized for all the registered students and lasts two months. During the two-month training the students have the opportunity to look in-depth at previous self-evaluation reports from institutions, analyse them, write down questions, have role-play activities, write a report, and evaluate the HEIs performance in the students’ perspective. The agency organizes 4-5 training sessions per year, aiming at addressing the updates on its processes. The panel learned both from the SAR and the interviews that the training methods have been significantly diversified in the last years, moving from presentations to more practical approaches (e.g., role play). Being trained does not assure that the trainee will become a review expert in ANQA, as their role and expertise is individually assessed by ANQA staff with the possibility of being rejected to become part of the experts’ pool of the agency. The students are encouraged to take part as observers in a review before participating in full capacity of panel members.

Regarding international experts, although they do not always receive a formal training before being involved in a review, they confirmed that the informal preparation, consisting in several meetings before the site visit and discussions about the RA tertiary education and the reviewed HEI, was very efficient. On the other hand, they acknowledged the accreditation procedure was a long and quite demanding process, with too tight deadlines, sometimes, that needed very intense effort to be met. The international experts consider ANQA could benefit from improving its procedures if it would appoint them also as chairs, not only as members of the external review panels.

The quality of experts' work is assessed through different channels, such as the agency's staff, the review coordinator, and the reviewed HEI.

ANQA has adopted a strict conflict-of-interest policy for experts nominated for participation in the accreditation process and designed the Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct, which regulates the principles of experts' behaviour and independence. As already mentioned under ESG 3.3, all experts sign a written consent confirming commitment on confidentiality and exclusion of conflict of interests.

### **Analysis**

The accreditation procedures under ENQA review are carried out by groups of external experts which include academics, students, and representatives of the professional field; in addition, all reviews engage at least one international expert. The presence and intervention of international reviewers has been maintained and even improved since the last ENQA review, thus addressing the 2017 recommendation. Currently, almost 46% of the external experts are female, thus, the agency's efforts to ensure a gender balance seem to be successful.

ANQA makes good use of the 'Student Voice' project in selecting students and conducting their training sessions for students. Although students are trained separately from the rest of experts, the practice of involving them as observers in a first review is seen as positive. The students confirmed that they had an equal role in the panel compared to the other members. They usually lead the session with students within the site visit but also contribute to the other activities during the assessment process. Overall, the students have a positive feeling as part of the expert panel and appreciate the support received from the other members of the group.

Training and selection criteria carried out for external experts are developed in a good way, ensuring high quality of the experts. The panel acknowledges as added value the individual assessment of each expert participating as trainee, by considering their capacity at the training but also their involvement with QA in their home institutions. The experts interviewed were positive about the training and guidance they received from ANQA. The smooth communication with the agency all along the assessment process was highly appreciated. Yet, the agency might consider better planning of tasks and requests to the international experts, to respect their time and availability, for example by delivering formal training. At the same time, the panel believes that considering them also as chairs of external review panels, not only members, could be for ANQA an opportunity to improve its procedures.

Appropriate mechanisms to avoid conflict of interest, both by the agency and the reviewed institutions, are in place. All experts with whom the review panel spoke were aware of the written consent they had to sign and of the need to ensure that there is no conflict of interest in the process.

### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

4. The panel suggests the agency consider formal training for the international experts, to loosen the intensity of the process in terms of number and length of expert group meetings during the accreditation procedure.

5. The panel suggests the agency consider appointing international experts also as chairs of the external review panel, not only as panel members.

**Panel conclusion: compliant**

ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Standard:

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

**2017 ENQA review recommendations:**

- “The panel recommends improving the Manual of accreditation to make more clear which aspects, indicators or evidence are required for each criterion.”
- “Likewise, the panel recommends publishing the decision rules used by the Accreditation Committee to differentiate their accreditation decisions.”

**2017 EQAR RC’s conclusion:** “The Register Committee concluded that ANQA does not fully publish the criteria it uses and was therefore unable to concur with the panel's conclusion but considered that ANQA only partially complies with the standard.”

**Evidence**

The institutional accreditation procedures conducted by ANQA are based on explicit criteria published on the agency’s website. ANQA strictly applies the criteria set by the Accreditation Manual, as an integral part of the ‘*Statute on State Accreditation of Institutions and their Academic Programs in The Republic of Armenia*’ and approved by the RA government. The review panel saw their content and that they overall are aligned to ESG (cf. ESG 2.1).

In 2020, the ANQA Board of Trustees adopted a new version of the Procedure on formation and operation of the “National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation” Accreditation Committee, followed by the ‘*Policy on decision-making of awarding institutional accreditation by Accreditation Committee*’, approved by Accreditation Committee also in 2020. Thus, the agency addressed the recommendation of the 2017 ENQA review.

SAR (page 52) mentions that the Board of Trustees was about to approve the new *Accreditation Manual* by the end of 2021; the review panel was provided, at its request, with an overview in English of what had been proposed to change compared to the old version. However, the panel notes that, by the time of the site visit, the new manual was not approved.

The agency has developed a template of self-evaluation that includes detailed explanations on each criterion and standard, together with guidelines regarding the requirements and evidence needed to be provided. This is appreciated by the HEIs as a valuable support for their self-evaluation process, as the panel heard during the interviews.

To ensure that the procedures are applied in a coherent way and the criteria are consistently interpreted and evidence based, the following mechanisms are used:

- Templates for self-evaluation to support HEIs to prepare for procedures, sharing the same structure regarding criteria;

- All documents and templates regulating accreditation procedures published on the website and made known to all HEIs in advance;
- Clear procedure for the selection of experts, guaranteeing that the experts meet the required profiles;
- Training sessions for the experts participating in external review panels;
- Judgments in expert panels reached by consensus; divergent opinions are discussed until consensus is reached;
- Scrutinizing of each external review reports by a group of three members of the Accreditation Committee, to check that the criteria and standards are being applied consistently. In the case of divergence, the Accreditation Committee takes the necessary action to resolve the inconsistency;
- Analysis and review of experts' conclusions by the Accreditation Committee, which approves all the external review reports and makes the final decisions;
- Assistance of the expert panel by agency staff, as review coordinators, during the whole process to guarantee that the accreditation process fits the established criteria and procedure.

There are three types of possible decisions the Accreditation Committee makes: 1- institutional accreditation for a period of 4 or 6 years, 2- conditional institutional accreditation for a period of two years, 3- denial of institutional accreditation.

As for academic programmes, although the SAR (page 62) states three possible decisions, too (i.e., 1- accreditation for a period of 5 years, 2- conditional accreditation for a period of two years, 3- denial of accreditation), the panel was not able to check any outcomes of this procedure due to the reasons already explained in this report.

### **Analysis**

During the site-visit, the review panel was able to confirm that the criteria for accreditation and procedures are public and easily accessible to all stakeholders. ANQA procedures and IQA processes ensure that there is sufficient evidence to support judgements. The views expressed in the various meetings indicated a positive approach to the consistency and fairness of the different review processes. Overall, ANQA is regarded as being very professional and rigorous in its judgments.

The agency's Accreditation Committee has an important role in guaranteeing the consistent application of assessment procedures. Based on its discussions with different stakeholders, the panel is convinced that this approach allows a high level of consistency. This is complemented by other measures previously taken, such as guidance for HEIs regarding elaboration of self-evaluation reports or challenge within the expert panels until the consensus is reached, during the elaboration of external review reports.

The panel acknowledges the agency's efforts to improve its compliance with this standard since the previous ENQA review and understands its limited powers for adopting documents (i.e., new version of the *Accreditation Manual*) for which the government approval is required.

In general, all representatives of HEIs confirmed that they felt ANQA procedures were demanding and valuable. The recommendations included in the external review report are the basis of the follow-up plan, which is approved by the expert panel and then the agency monitors its implementation.

### **Panel conclusion: compliant**

## ESG 2.6 REPORTING

### Standard:

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

**2017 ENQA review 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.”

**2017 EQAR RC’s conclusion:** “Given that there were no substantial reasons given why these reports are not published, the Register Committee was unable to concur with the panel's conclusion and considered that ANQA only partially complies with the standard.”

### Evidence

The external review reports are prepared by the expert panels, who are assisted in this process by the ANQA coordinators assigned for each assessment procedure. The process of producing the external review report is described in detail in the *Accreditation Manual*.

Based on the documentation and the interviews with agency’s staff and experts, including students, the panel is convinced that all expert panel members contribute to the draft report, under the guidance of the coordinator; the latter’s task is to ensure that each standard is properly assessed, and that the information gathered during the desk review and site visit is included in the report in an adequate way. The expert panel chair and the coordinator are responsible for reviewing the draft, after being completed by the contribution of all panel members; the English version is sent to the international expert. The final version of the report agreed among expert panel members is sent to the HEI, for factual checks; if needed, meetings of the expert panel with the reviewed HEI are organized to discuss the objections, which, however, are just missed or misunderstood facts, no new evidence being accepted. All reports are then sent to the Accreditation Committee for being scrutinized and approved. The Accreditation Committee is also responsible for taking the decision on granting accreditation to the institution based on a package of documents which includes the external review report (see SAR, page 62).

The structure of the reports follows the provisions of the Accreditation Manual and the template established in advance. ANQA uses its own template, with clear structure: an introduction including the executive summary outlining the main strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations; a procedural part describing the process and the persons involved; the main part with findings on each standard, considerations following from findings and conclusions regarding whether the standard is met. Recently the agency reviewed the template and added an induction package with the most frequently used terms, to ensure the same vocabulary and avoid confusions, including for translators.

The external review reports are always issued as common documents (based on a consensus between all expert panel members) and must provide clear justifications for their conclusions. The decisions taken by the Accreditation Committee are issued as separate documents.

The agency ensures all review reports and decisions on accreditation are accessible to the academic community, external collaborators, and other stakeholders, by publishing them on the website. A high number of reports are uploaded to the EQAR database (DEQAR).

Regarding the programme accreditation procedure and the so-called ‘pilot programme reviews’ conducted in the framework of Erasmus+ projects: during the site visit it became clear to the panel that what ANQA called pilot programme accreditations were, in fact, programme review activities with no outcomes (in the form of a decision), implemented under Erasmus+ projects in cooperation with other project partners, and not based solely on ANQA’s programme accreditation procedures. Therefore, the panel does not consider them as pilot programme accreditations and the reports resulting from those activities are not required to be published on the website.

### **Analysis**

Based on the evidence presented above, the panel concludes that the 2017 ENQA recommendations to ANQA were considered and addressed by the agency. The external review reports and decisions on institutional accreditation, including the negative ones, are duly published on ANQA’s website.

The HEI has a chance to point out factual errors, which are mentioned in the final report. The Accreditation Committee is responsible for scrutinizing and approving the review reports.

Following the discussions with different interviewees, the panel is convinced that the content of the reports is the result of the independent work of the expert panel members, further analysed and approved by the Accreditation Committee.

The panel analysed different reports, including by reading both the Armenian and English versions for two of them and it was able to conclude they were clear and understandable to interested parties (prospective students and other stakeholders). ANQA uses its own template for reporting, which is mainly focused on the extent to which the criteria and standards are met but also include reference to the institution’s strengths and weaknesses or recommendations of the expert panel.

Although the panel does not consider the programme reviews conducted in the framework of different Erasmus+ projects as “pilot programme accreditations”, it acknowledges that these review activities to some extent help to build the capacity of ANQA for implementing programme procedures.

### **Panel conclusion: compliant**

## ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Standard:

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

### **2017 ENQA review 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.”

**2017 EQAR RC’s conclusion:** “While the Register Committee considered that the standard does not prescribe a specific appeals procedure, it considered that the review report identified serious shortcomings in the appeals procedure and was therefore unable to concur with the panel’s conclusion, but considered that ANQA only partially complies with the standard.”

## **Evidence**

Following the recommendation of the 2017 ENQA review, in 2020 ANQA's Board of Trustees adopted a new appeals procedure, after consultations with the stakeholders (SAR, page 65). This procedure is part of the *Procedure on formation and operation of the "National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation" Accreditation Committee* (chapter X), which is published on the website. According to the provisions of the above-mentioned document, corroborated with the ones of the *Accreditation Manual*, appeals against decisions for accreditation must be submitted to ANQA Secretariat by email or in writing, within one month of receipt of accreditation decision (a template is provided on the website). The appeal is forwarded to the Board of Trustees, which appoints an Appeal Commission consisting of three members from the expert's database to analyse the case. The panel could not identify any evidence that the Appeal Commissions appointed until the moment of the site visit included students. The Appeal Commission analyses the appeal and makes its conclusions based on consensus principle; they can either reject the appeal and leave the Accreditation Committee's decision unchanged or accept the appeal and propose the Accreditation Committee to review the documents and make a new decision. The new decision cannot be appealed to ANQA again. The HEI is informed by ANQA's Secretariat on the results of its appeal.

As far as complaints are concerned, the agency's approach is presented in the SAR and consists of the HEI's possibility to make objections/ comments on the preliminary version of the external review report, within two weeks of its receipt. There may be addressed solely circumstances that have not been previously considered by the expert panel, no new circumstance is admitted. The panel read in the SAR and confirmed during the interviews that meetings were held between the expert panel and the HEI to discuss the issues raised by the HEI. The set of documents forwarded to the Accreditation Committee to take the decision includes the HEI's feedback on the preliminary review report. From the interview with HEIs representatives, the panel understood that complaints on expert panel members during the accreditation process were able to be directly addressed to the review coordinator and the issue solved on the spot. The HEIs are also aware of the survey they are asked by ANQA to fill in after the site visit, which they see as another opportunity to express their opinions, including complaints, on how the procedure has been conducted.

## **Analysis**

In 2017, the external review against the ESG recommended ANQA to reconsider appeals procedure in relation to the ESG and to consider including a student in the Appeal Commission. While the panel confirms this recommendation has been addressed and a new appeals procedure has been put in place since 2020, it cannot state that the Appeal Commissions formed up to now included students. The panel believes that ensuring the student involvement with the Appeal Commission would increase the relevance of the process, therefore suggests it to be further considered by the agency.

The agency has developed a clear appeals process, which is mentioned in its accreditation procedures and information related to it is available on the website. The interviews with representatives of HEIs confirmed that they know about the possibility of submitting appeals to ANQA. The panel was able to conclude that the agency's multiple channels of collecting feedback from stakeholders are appreciated and seem to be efficient, as the number of appeals is very low. The good communication ANQA engages with the reviewed HEIs seem to help in solving issues before reaching a formal appeal.

The panel notes that the complaints procedure, as understood in ESG, is currently not in place. ANQA staff explained that complaints by HEIs regarding conduct of accreditation process or experts are discussed during the site visit. However, ANQA's approach which allows complaints from the HEI's behalf to the review coordinator (ANQA staff) or in the survey it is asked to fill in after the site visit cannot be considered by the panel as a complaints procedure. Therefore, ANQA should develop a clear and transparent complaints procedure and make it publicly available on the website.

**Panel recommendations**

12. The panel recommends the agency to establish a clear and transparent complaints procedure and publish it on the website.

**Panel suggestions for further improvement**

6. The panel suggests the agency to ensure that students are involved in the Appeal Commissions.

**Panel conclusion: partially compliant**

# CONCLUSION

## SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE	1. The panel commends the agency’s initiative to conduct periodic monitoring of HEIs, as an efficient means of enhancing internal quality assurance of institutions and promoting quality culture.
ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT	2. The panel commends the agency for its efforts and commitment to providing quality services in state accreditation procedures, which was also confirmed by all interviewees.

## OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The panel recommends the agency to develop separate regulations and procedures for accreditation of HEIs and VETs to avoid possible confusion and better reflect the needs of the two sectors.</li><li>2. The panel recommends the agency to identify ways to involve international representatives in the agency’s governance.</li><li>3. The panel recommends the agency to review its organizational chart and correctly reflect the current structure of the organization and display the reviewed version on the website.</li><li>4. The panel recommends the agency to conduct at least one pilot phase before implementing regulatory mechanisms for programme accreditation once it becomes mandatory by the law.</li><li>5. The panel suggests the agency to actively engage student representatives in QA-related discussions and increase student involvement in other relevant processes such as decision-making of accreditation, by including a student representative into the Accreditation Committee.</li></ol>
ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>6. The panel recommends the agency to further work on broadening the thematic analysis by selecting and analysing various relevant aspects for the higher education sector. The themes could focus not only on accreditation processes (as it is now), but also analyse good practices and trends of the tertiary education system in Armenia, including through the findings of the external review reports.</li></ol>
ESG 3.5 RESOURCES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>7. The panel recommends the agency to ensure that enough resources are available to extend its activities once the new Law on Education and Science is adopted.</li></ol>
ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>8. The panel recommends the agency to review its criteria and standards in the view of addressing:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• publicly available regulations covering all the phases of the student life cycle (ESG 1.4);</li><li>• transparency of processes for recruitment and development of staff (ESG 1.5);</li><li>• communication of planned or taken actions to those concerned in the institutions (ESG 1.9);</li></ul></li></ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clear definition of the period of EQA cycle and run procedures within it covering all HEIs in Armenia</li> </ul>
ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE	9. The panel recommends the agency to pursue the dialog with the Ministry of Education and Science for linking the accreditation procedures to licensing of HEIs operation on the RA territory
ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES	10. The panel recommends the agency to involve external experts in the follow-up process. 11. The panel keeps the 2017 ENQA recommendation regarding the follow-up procedure after 6 months, as it hasn't been addressed yet and is still relevant.
ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS	12. The panel recommends the agency to establish a clear and transparent complaints procedure and publish it on the website.

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, ANQA is in compliance with the ESG.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT

ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE	1. The panel suggests the agency to continue pursuing the decision-making authorities to set the timeframe of the first, second and following cycles of institutional accreditation activity with a clear terminal point for each cycle by when all HEIs should undergo external accreditation. The same approach is suggested for programme accreditation when this process is to be implemented.
ESG 3.5 RESOURCES	2. The panel encourages the agency to pursue its efforts for retaining the experienced personnel and diminish the staff turnover.
ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE	3. The panel suggests the agency to consider merging the monitoring and follow-up procedures into one clearly defined follow-up procedure for accredited institutions, while a separate monitoring procedure could be retained for non-accredited institutions only.
ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS	4. The panel suggests the agency consider formal training for the international experts, to loosen the intensity of the process in terms of number and length of expert group meetings during the accreditation procedure. 5. The panel suggests the agency consider appointing international experts also as chairs of the external review panel, not only as panel members.
ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS	6. The panel suggests the agency to ensure that students are involved in the Appeal Commissions.

# ANNEXES

## ANNEX I: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

24.01.2022 - ONLINE MEETING WITH THE AGENCY'S RESOURCE PERSON				
<a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88581419155?pwd=QnJhRzFDMzFCeWR0Qlk4aDRSdStqQT09">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88581419155?pwd=QnJhRzFDMzFCeWR0Qlk4aDRSdStqQT09</a>				
SESSION No.	TIMING (CET+3)	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
	15 minutes	Checking the stability of internet connection (review coordinator and the agency's contact person)	Anais Gourdin and ANQA designated person	
1	17.00-18.30 (90 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 14.00-15.30 <b>LT-RO</b> 15.00-16.30	An online clarification meeting with the agency's <b>resource person</b> regarding the specific national/legal context in which an agency operates, specific quality assurance system to which it belongs and key characteristics of the agency's external QA activities	<b>Ruben Topchayn</b> , ANQA Director <b>Varduhi Gyulazyan</b> , Head of the Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division	Almantas Šerpatauskas; No need for translation
	15 minutes	Break + Connection set-up		
2	18.45-20.45 (120 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 15.45-17.45 <b>LT-RO</b> 16.45-18.45	Review panel's kick-off meeting and preparations for site visit	Review Panel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Almantas Šerpatauskas</b> Director at Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) Lithuania (Chair, QA professional, ENQA nominee)</li> <li>• <b>Simona Lache</b> Professor and Vice-rector for Internationalisation and Quality Evaluation at Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania (Secretary, academic, EUA nominee)</li> <li>• <b>Gohar Hovhannisyan</b> Project and Policy Officer at European University Association (EUA), Belgium (Panel member, QA professional, ENQA nominee)</li> <li>• <b>Francisco Joaquin Jimenez Gonzalez</b> Master student in Science and Technology in Architecture at Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena, Spain (Panel member, student, ESU nominee, member of the European Students' Union Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool)</li> </ul>	Almantas Šerpatauskas

## 01.02.2022 – DAY 0 (PRE-VISIT)

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86322641990?pwd=a3JlWm8vTVdUem5qK2RFaG5maXgwdz09>

SESSION NO.	TIMING (CET+3)	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	LEAD PANEL MEMBER; TRANSLATION; QUESTIONS
3	15.00-16.00 (60 min) <i>BE-ES 12.00-13.00</i> <i>LT-RO 13.00-14.00</i>	Review panel's pre-visit meeting and preparations for day 1	Review panel	Almantas Šerpatauskas
	15 minutes	Break + Connection set-up		
4	16.15-18.00 (105 min) <i>BE-ES 13.15-15.00</i> <i>LT-RO 14.15-16.00</i>	A pre-visit meeting with the agency's <b>resource person</b> to clarify any remaining questions after the online clarifications meeting. Presentation of ANQA premises and infrastructure	<b>Ruben Topchyan</b> , ANQA Director <b>Varduhi Gyulazyan</b> , Head of the Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division	Almantas Šerpatauskas; No need for translation

## 02.02.2022 – DAY 1

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86322641990?pwd=a3JlWm8vTVdUem5qK2RFaG5maXgwdz09>

SESSION NO.	TIMING (CET+3)	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	LEAD PANEL MEMBER; TRANSLATION; QUESTIONS
	15 min	Connection set-up		
	11.00-11.30 (30 min) <i>BE-ES 08.00-08.30</i> <i>LT-RO 09.00-09.30</i>	Review panel's private meeting		Almantas Šerpatauskas
	5 min	Connection set-up		
5	11.35-12.20 (45 min) <i>BE-ES 08.35-09.20</i> <i>LT-RO 09.35-10.20</i>	Meeting with the <b>Director and the President of the Board of Trustees</b>	1. <b>Ruben Topchyan</b> (ANQA Director) 2. <b>Samvel Karabekyan</b> (Head of the Board of Trustees)	Almantas Šerpatauskas; Need for translation
	12.20-12.35 (15 min) <i>BE-ES 09.20-09.35</i>	Review panel's private discussion		Almantas Šerpatauskas

<b>LT-RO</b> 10.20-10.35				
	5 min	Connection set-up		
6	12.40-13.25 (45 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 09.40-10.25 <b>LT-RO</b> 10.40-11.25	Meeting with the <b>team responsible for preparation of the self-assessment report</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Varduhi Gyulazyan</b> (Head of the Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division)</li> <li>2. <b>Ani Mkrtchyan</b> (Senior specialist at Institutional and Programme Accreditation division, responsible for ANQA IQA)</li> <li>3. <b>Meri Barseghyan</b> (specialist at Policy Development and Implementation Division: responsible for Monitoring and Students Voice project (SV))</li> <li>4. <b>Anahit Terteryan</b> (Specialist at Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division, responsible for VET sector EQA)</li> <li>5. <b>Ashkhen Arzumanyan</b> (student expert)</li> </ol>	Almantas Šerpatauskas; No need for translation
	13.25-13.40 (15 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 10.25-10.40 <b>LT-RO</b> 11.25-11.40	Review panel's private discussion		Almantas Šerpatauskas
	5 min	Connection set-up		
7	13.45-14.30 (45 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 10.45-11.30 <b>LT-RO</b> 11.45-12.30	Meeting with <b>representatives from the Board of Trustees</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Sedrak Simonyan</b> (Deputy Head of Social department of RA Government staff) – <i>not present</i></li> <li>2. <b>Artak Poghosyan</b> (Executive Director at Business Armenia Foundation)</li> <li>3. <b>Armenak Darbinyan</b> (CEO of “Center for The Promotion of Economic Education and Research” foundation”)</li> <li>4. <b>Seyran Sargsyan</b> (Deputy Chairman of the Union of Banks of Armenia) – <i>not present</i></li> <li>5. <b>Eduard Kirakosyan</b> (Executive director of the Union of Manufacturers and Businessmen (Employers) of Armenia)</li> <li>6. <b>Nvard Amirbekyan</b> (Head of Internal Audit and Educational Reform Planning Department of NPUA) – <i>not present</i></li> <li>7. <b>Ara Amiryman</b> (Head of ANAU Quality Management Division)</li> <li>8. <b>Lilit Sahakyan</b> (Chairman of the Gladzor University Quality Assurance Faculty Committee)</li> <li>9. <b>Kristina Tsaturyan</b> (Head of Seroond Schools at Teach for Armenia)</li> <li>10. <b>Hayk Daveyan</b> (PHD student in ASPU)</li> </ol>	Almantas Šerpatauskas; Need for translation
	14.30-14.45 (15 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 11.30-11.45 <b>LT-RO</b> 12.30-12.45	Review panel's private discussion		Almantas Šerpatauskas
	5 min	Connection set-up		

8	14.50-15.35 (45 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 11.50-12.35 <b>LT-RO</b> 12.50-13.35	Meeting with <b>representatives of the Accreditation Committee</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Ashot Saghyan</b> (Head of Committee, President of National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia)</li> <li>2. <b>Susanna Karakhanyan</b> (Past president of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE))</li> <li>3. <b>Anna Yerzinkyan</b> (Honoured Art Worker of RA, Dean of faculty of Cinema, TV and Animation at YSITC)</li> <li>4. <b>Andreas Melikyan</b> (Head of Research Laboratory of Plant Genofond and Selection, Head of Plant growing chair at ANAU)</li> <li>5. <b>Gegham Karoyan</b> (Deputy Head of Institute of Information &amp; Communication Technologies and Electronics on Educational Affairs of Armenian National Polytechnic University)</li> <li>6. <b>Luiza Militosyan</b> (Head of the Chair of Pedagogy and Language Teaching Methodology at BSU)</li> <li>7. <b>Arevik Ohanyan</b> (Director of the Research Incubator, Eurasia International University)</li> <li>8. <b>Gagik Qtryan</b> (Deputy Chairman at Supreme Certifying Committee)</li> <li>9. <b>Vahagn Grigoryan</b> (Chief Advisor to the Governor of the Central Bank of the Republic of Armenia)</li> <li>10. <b>Anahit Utmazyan</b> (Secretary of the Accreditation Committee)</li> </ol>	Almantas Šerpatauskas; Need for translation
	15.35-16.25 (50 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 12.35-13.25 <b>LT-RO</b> 13.35-14.25	Lunch break Connection set-up		
	16.25-16.55 (30 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 13.25-13.55 <b>LT-RO</b> 14.25-14.55	Review panel's private discussion		Almantas Šerpatauskas
	5 min	Connection set-up		
9	17.00-17.50 (50 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 14.00-14.50 <b>LT-RO</b> 15.00-15.50	Meeting with 1)- <b>Policy and Development Implementation Division</b> and 2)- <b>Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Varduhi Gyulazyan</b> (Head of the Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division)</li> <li>2. <b>Lilit Pipoyan</b> (Senior specialist Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division)</li> <li>3. <b>Ani Mkrtchyan</b> (Senior Specialist Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division, responsible for IQA of the agency)</li> <li>4. <b>Anahit Terteryan</b> (Specialist at Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division, responsible for VET sector EQA)</li> <li>5. <b>Armine Mheryan</b> (Senior specialist at Policy Development and Implementation Division, responsible for communication)</li> <li>6. <b>Meri Barseghyan</b> (specialist at Policy Development and Implementation Division, responsible for monitoring of TLLs and Students Voice project)</li> <li>7. <b>Roza Babayan</b> (specialist at Policy Development and Implementation Division, assistant to ANQA IQA responsible)</li> <li>8. <b>Tatevik Hovhannsiyan</b> (specialist at Policy Development and Implementation Division, responsible for translation and editing of the English documents)</li> </ol>	Almantas Šerpatauskas, Francisco Jimenez, Need for translation

17.50-18.05 (15 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 14.50-15.05 <b>LT-RO</b> 15.50-16.05		Review panel's private discussion		Almantas Šerpatauskas
	5 min	Connection set-up		
10	18.10-18.50 (40 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 15.10-15.50 <b>LT-RO</b> 16.10-16.50	Meeting with <b>administrative staff</b> of the agency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Anahit Utmazyan</b> (Head of the Secretariat, responsible for HR)</li> <li>2. <b>Lilit Ghazaryan</b> (specialist at Secretariat, responsible for internal archive)</li> <li>3. <b>Ofelya Petrosyan</b> (Lawyer)</li> <li>4. <b>Yelena Harutyunyan</b> (Responsible for Public relations)</li> <li>5. <b>Alina Melkonyan</b> (IT, responsible for databases)</li> <li>6. <b>George Aleksandrayan</b> (IT, responsible for IT resources)</li> </ol>	Francisco Jimenez; Need for translation
20 min	<b>BE-ES</b> 15.50-16.10 <b>LT-RO</b> 16.50-17.10	Break		
11	60 min <b>BE-ES</b> 16.10-17.10 <b>LT-RO</b> 17.10-18.10		Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for day II	Almantas Šerpatauskas
<b>03.02.2022 – Day 2</b> <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86322641990?pwd=a3JlWm8vTVdUem5qK2RFaG5maXgwdz09">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86322641990?pwd=a3JlWm8vTVdUem5qK2RFaG5maXgwdz09</a>				
<b>SESSION No.</b>	<b>TIMING (CET+3)</b>	<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW</b>	<b>LEAD PANEL MEMBER; TRANSLATION; QUESTIONS</b>
	15 min	Connection set-up		
11.00-11.30 (30 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 08.00-08.30 <b>LT-RO</b> 09.00-09.30		Review panel private meeting		Almantas Šerpatauskas
	5 min	Connection set-up		
12	11.35-12.20 (45 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 08.35-09.20 <b>LT-RO</b> 09.35-10.20	Meeting with <b>ministry representatives</b>	<b>Karen Trchounyan</b> (Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of RA, responsible for higher education)	Almantas Šerpatauskas; No need translation
12.20-12.35 (15 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 09.20-09.35		Review panel's private discussion		Almantas Šerpatauskas

<b>LT-RO 10.20-10.35</b>				
	5 min	Connection set-up		
13	12.40-13.25 (45 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 09.40-10.25 <b>LT-RO</b> 10.40-11.25	Meeting with <b>heads of some reviewed HEIs/HEI</b> representatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Elina Asriyan</b> (Vice-Rector for Humanities and Social Sciences of Yerevan State University)</li> <li>2. <b>Vardan Urutyán</b> (Rector of Armenian National Agrarian University)</li> <li>3. <b>Srbuhi Gevorgyan</b> (Rector of Armenian State Pedagogical University)</li> <li>4. <b>Suren Ohanyan</b> (Rector of Eurasia International University, private university)</li> <li>5. <b>Hegine Bisharyan</b> (Rector of European University, transnational university)</li> <li>6. <b>Tehmina Marutyán</b> (Acting rector of Goris State University)</li> <li>7. <b>Vahe Babayan</b> (Director of Mehrabyan Medical college/private)</li> <li>8. <b>Robert Abrahamyan</b> (Rector of Yerevan State College of Informatics)</li> </ol>	Almantas Šerpatauskas; Need for translation
13.25-13.40 (15 min) <b>BE-ES 10.25-10.40</b> <b>LT-RO 11.25-11.40</b>		Review panel's private discussion		Almantas Šerpatauskas
	5 min	Connection set-up		
14	13.45-14.30 (45 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 10.45-11.30 <b>LT-RO</b> 11.45-12.30	Meeting with <b>quality assurance officers of HEIs/ HEIs</b> representatives involved in external QA activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Mariam Gevorgyan</b> (Head of the Department of Education Quality Assurance and Management at Armenian State Pedagogical University)</li> <li>2. <b>Lilit Zakaryan</b> (Director of Quality Assessment and Assurance Center of Armenian National Agrarian University)</li> <li>3. <b>Aram Hayrapetyan</b> (Chief of quality assessment and assurance centre at Yerevan State Medical University)</li> <li>4. <b>Karine Sargsyan</b> (Head of the Quality Assurance and Communications Department at European University of Armenia)</li> <li>5. <b>Armenuhi Sargsyan</b> (Head of the Scientific policy, quality assurance and management centre at Shirak State University)</li> <li>6. <b>Garri Asryan</b> (Head of the science and education quality assurance department at Vazgen Sargsyan Military University)</li> <li>7. <b>Irina Vanyan</b> (Chief specialist at quality assurance centre at National University Architecture and construction)</li> <li>8. <b>Lilit Abelyan</b> (Responsible for Quality assurance at Kotayk state regional college)</li> </ol>	Gohar Hovhannisyán; Need for translation
14.30-14.45 (15 min) <b>BE-ES 11.30-11.45</b> <b>LT-RO 12.30-12.45</b>		Review panel's private discussion		Almantas Šerpatauskas
	5 min	Connection set-up		
15	14.50-15.35 (45 min) <b>BE-ES</b>	Meeting with the <b>Advisory Board</b> members ( <b>International experts</b> )	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Stefan Delplace</b> (Honorary Secretary General of EURASHE)</li> <li>2. <b>Jean-Marc Lobacarro</b> (Dean Faculty of Biology in charge of Research, Clermont-Ferrand University, France)</li> </ol>	Gohar Hovhannisyán; No need for translation

	11.50-12.35 <b>LT-RO</b> 12.50-13.35		3. <b>Margaret Tabler</b> (Higher education and quality consultant, legal and education consultant, UK, Armenia, USA, Hungary etc.) 4. <b>Pieter Caris</b> (University of Antwerp in Belgium) 5. <b>Inna Pomorina</b> (Bath Spa University)	
15.35-16.25 (50 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 12.35-13.25 <b>LT-RO</b> 13.35-14.25		Lunch break Connection set-up		
16.25-16.40 (30 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 13.25-13.40 <b>LT-RO</b> 14.25-14.40		Meeting with the <b>resource person</b>	<b>Varduhi Gyulazyan</b> , Head of the Institutional and Programme Accreditation Division	Almantas Šerpatauskas
16.40-16.55 (30 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 13.40-13.55 <b>LT-RO</b> 14.40-14.55		Review panel's private discussion Connection set-up		Almantas Šerpatauskas
	5 min	Connection set-up		
16	17.00-17.50 (50 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 14.00-14.50 <b>LT-RO</b> 15.00-15.50	Meeting with <b>representatives from the reviewers' pool</b>	1. <b>Vache Gabrielyan</b> (Dean of Manoogian Simone College of Business and Economics at American State University). Was the head of the panel of YSU. 2. <b>Menua Soghomonyan</b> (Associate Professor at the Chair of Political Institutes and Processes at YSU). Was the head of the panel of International Scientific-Educational Centre of National Academy of Science. 3. <b>Robert Khachatryan</b> (Head of the Quality Assurance department at Brusov State University). Was the head of the panel of Armenian State Institute of Physical Culture. 4. <b>Lilit Badalyan</b> (Head of the Chair of Linguistics and Theory of Communication at Brusov State University). Was a panel member of Artsakh State University. 5. <b>Artem Grigoryan</b> (Associate Professor, Department of Pathophysiology, Yerevan State Medical University). Was panel member of Armenian medical institute. 6. <b>Asya Simonyan</b> (professor at the Chair of Theory of Physical education and methodology, Shirak State university). Was panel member of Armenian State Institute of Physical Culture. 7. <b>Mariam Momjyan</b> (Deputy Head of Department at Public Services Regulatory Commission of RA, associate professor at Russian-Armenian University. Was the head of the panel of ASUE) 8. <b>Qrstine Hakobyan</b> (Lecturer in Tourism, Kotayk regional state college. Was the head of the panel of Tavush State Regional college) 9. <b>Qristine Soghikyan</b> (Lecturer in the Chair of English communication and translation at Brusov satate university. Participated in the external review of Chernavtsi University linguistics academic programme)	Almantas Šerpatauskas; Need for translation
17.50-18.05 (15 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 14.50-15.05		Review panel's private discussion		Almantas Šerpatauskas

<b>LT-RO 15.50-16.05</b>				
	5 min	Connection set-up		
17	18.10-19.00 (50 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 15.10-16.00 <b>LT-RO</b> 16.10-17.00	Meeting with <b>students</b> involved in external QA activities (reviewers and representatives of HELs reviewed by ANQA)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Vache Gharibyan</b> (PhD student at Russian-Armenian University, Department of General Pharmaceutical Chemistry). Participated in the accreditation of YSU, Armenian Medical Institute.</li> <li>2. <b>Anahit Karapetyan</b> (MA student at YSU, Faculty of International Relations). Participated in the accreditation Gladzor University.</li> <li>3. <b>Alla Sargsyan</b> (MA student at Gavar State University, Faculty of Economics). Participated in the accreditation of European Regional University.</li> <li>4. <b>Srbuhi Michikyan</b> (PhD student at YSU Faculty of Sociology). Participated in the accreditation of Armenian State Pedagogical Institute.</li> <li>5. <b>Haykush Harutyunyan</b> (Former student at Armenian State Pedagogical University after Khachatour Abovyan, Faculty of Primary Education). Participated in the accreditation of Brusov State University.</li> <li>6. <b>Margarita Voskanyan</b> (Bachelor student at YSU, the Department of Social Pedagogy). Was recently involved in the training of students organized by Students Voice Project.</li> <li>7. <b>Mariam Gyurjyan</b> (Bachelor student at YSU, Faculty of Economics and Management, former student at Yerevan State 2<sup>nd</sup> Regional College). Participated in the accreditation of Ararat state college.</li> <li>8. <b>Avetiq Khosteghyan</b> (Student at Gavar State Agricultural College, accounting). Participated in the accreditation of Yerevan state Light Industry college.</li> </ol>	Francisco Jimenez; Need for translation
30 min <b>BE-ES</b> 16.00-16.30 <b>LT-RO</b> 17.00-17.30		Break		
18	60 min (or as necessary) <b>BE-ES</b> 16.30-17.30 <b>LT-RO</b> 17.30-18.30		Wrap-up meeting among panel members: preparation for day III and provisional conclusions	Almantas Šerpatauskas
<b>04.02.2022 – Day 3</b> <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86322641990?pwd=a3JlWm8vTVdUem5qK2RFaG5maXgwdz09">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86322641990?pwd=a3JlWm8vTVdUem5qK2RFaG5maXgwdz09</a>				
<b>SESSION No.</b>	<b>TIMING (CET+3)</b>	<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW</b>	<b>LEAD PANEL MEMBER; TRANSLATION; QUESTIONS</b>
	15 min	Connection set-up		

19	11.00-11.45 (45 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 08.00-08.45 <b>LT-RO</b> 09.00-09.45	Meeting with <b>stakeholders</b> , such as other education sector organisations, employers, local community, etc.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Lana Karlova</b> (the coordinator of National ERASMUS+ Office in Armenia)</li> <li>2. <b>Tatevik Gasparyan</b> (Director of National Center for Vocational Education and Training Development)</li> <li>3. <b>Sharistan Melkonyan</b> (Director of Assessment and Accreditation at American University of Armenia)</li> <li>4. <b>Raisa Avetyan</b> (Head of the division for distance learning at National Center of Educational Technologies)</li> <li>5. <b>Tigran Sargsyan</b> (Director of Engineering at Krisp)</li> <li>6. <b>Hovhannes Grigoryan</b> (Chief executive Director at Breavis)</li> </ol>	Gohar Hovhannisyany; Need for translation
20	11.45-12.45 (60 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 08.45-09.45 <b>LT-RO</b> 09.45-10.45	Meeting among panel members to agree on final issues to clarify		Almantas Šerpatauskas
	5 min	Connection set-up		
21	12.50-13.50 (60 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 09.50-10.50 <b>LT-RO</b> 10.50-11.50	Meeting with the <b>Director</b> to clarify any pending issues	<b>Ruben Topchayn</b> , ANQA Director	Almantas Šerpatauskas
22	13.50-15.20 (90 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 10.50-12.20 <b>LT-RO</b> 11.50-13.20		Private meeting among panel members to agree on the main findings	Almantas Šerpatauskas
	15.20-16.10 (50 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 12.20-13.10 <b>LT-RO</b> 13.20-14.10	Lunch break Connection set-up		
23	16.10-16.40 (30 min) <b>BE-ES</b> 13.10-13.40 <b>LT-RO</b> 14.10-14.40		Final de-briefing meeting with staff and Board members of the agency to inform about preliminary findings	Almantas Šerpatauskas; Need for translation
	30 min	Panel members and ENQA review coordinator		All Panel members & Anaïs Gourdin

## ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

### TRIPARTITE TERMS OF REFERENCE BETWEEN ANQA, ENQA AND EQAR

July 2021

#### 1. Background and context

The National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance, Foundation (ANQA) was established in November 2008 under the Government Decree (No. 1486) and started its functioning in March 2009 after the election of the Director by the ANQA Board of Trustees. ANQA's mission is to “foster the assurance of tertiary education quality standards and ongoing quality enhancement, supporting the autonomy and accountability of TLLs [Tertiary Level Institutions]”.

External quality assurance entails two types of accreditation: institutional and programme.

**Institutional accreditation** is a mandatory process both for private and state institutions operating in the territory of the Republic of Armenia (RA). The main purpose of the Institutional Accreditation is to evaluate the effectiveness of TLI operations, as well as to find out whether the TLI is in compliance with its mission, follows the policy of continuous improvement and enhances its academic programmes.

**Programme accreditation** is the recognition of academic programmes and the correspondence of their quality with state academic standards and programme accreditation criteria. Programme accreditation is targeted at separate academic programme. This procedure allows to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of each academic programme as well as to monitor whether it thoroughly ensures the achievement of intended learning outcomes.

ANQA has been a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) since February 2017 and is applying for ENQA renewal of membership.

ANQA has been registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since February 2017 and is applying for the renewal of EQAR registration.

#### 2. Purpose and scope of the review

This review will evaluate the extent to which ANQA (the agency) complies with each of the standards of Parts 2 and 3 of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) and support the agency in its efforts to continually review and enhance its work. Such an external review is a requirement for agencies wishing to apply for ENQA membership and/or for EQAR registration.

##### 2.1 Activities of the agency within the scope of the ESG

To apply for ENQA membership and EQAR registration, this review will analyse all of the agency's activities that fall within the scope of the ESG, e.g., reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditations of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). All activities are reviewed irrespective of geographic scope (within or outside the EHEA) or whether they are obligatory or voluntary in nature.

The following activities of the agency must be addressed in the external review:

- Institutional accreditation
- Programme accreditation

## 2.2 Other matters relevant to ANQA's application for Registration on EQAR

Considering the renewal of ANQA's application to EQAR, the self-evaluation report and the external review report is expected to cover specifically those issues where the Register Committee concluded in its last decision that the agency complied only partially with the ESG, namely 2.3, 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7 (see last [decision](#)).

Furthermore, the self-evaluation report and external review report should also consider how ANQA's recognition of external QA results and decisions follows the ESG in cases where the external QA activity is carried out by a non EQAR-registered agency.

Additionally the review should address how ANQA ensures the separation of activities that fall within and outside the scope of the ESG, in particular referring to the i.e. 'institutional accreditation of vocational education institutions (VET)' taking into account [Annex 5 of the Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG](#).

## 3. The review process

The review will be conducted following the methodology of ENQA Agency Reviews. The process is designed in line with the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and the requirements of the *EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The review procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of, and agreement on the Terms of Reference for the review between ANQA, ENQA and EQAR (including publishing of the Terms of Reference on ENQA's website<sup>2</sup>);
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel by ENQA;
- Notification of EQAR about the appointed panel;
- Self-assessment by the agency, including the preparation and publication of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit of the agency by the review panel;
- Preparation and completion of the final review report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final review report by ENQA's Agency Review Committee;
- Publication of the final review report;
- A decision from the EQAR Register Committee on the agency's registration on EQAR;
- A decision from the ENQA Board on ENQA membership;
- Follow-up on the panel's recommendations to the agency, including a voluntary progress visit.

### 3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review panel

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts (at least one of which is currently employed by an ENQA member agency), an academic employed by a higher education institution, a student member, and potentially a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members serves as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. For ENQA Agency Reviews at least one of the reviewers is an ENQA nominee (most often the QA professional[s]). At least one of the reviewers is appointed from the nominees of either the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the student member is always selected from among the ESU-nominated reviewers. If requested, the labour market representative may come from the Business Europe nominees or from ENQA. An additional panel member may be included in the panel at the request of the agency. In this case, an additional fee is charged to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses.

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<sup>2</sup> The agency is encouraged to publish the ToR on its website as well.

The panel will be supported by the ENQA Review Coordinator (an ENQA staff member) who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA's requirements are met throughout the process. The Review Coordinator will not be the secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide the agency with the proposed panel composition and the curricula vitarum of the panel members to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The reviewers will have to agree to a non-conflict of interest statement that is incorporated in their contract for the review of this agency.

### **3.2 Self-assessment by the agency, including the preparation of a self-assessment report**

The agency is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and must adhere to the following guidance:

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-assessment report is expected to contain:
  - a brief description of the HE and QA system;
  - the history, profile, and activities of the agency;
  - a presentation of how the agency addresses each individual standard of Parts 2 and 3 of the ESG for each of the agency's external QA activities, with a brief, critical reflection on the presented facts;
  - opinions of stakeholders;
  - the instances of partial compliance noted in the most recent EQAR Register Committee decision of inclusion/renewal and any other aspects that may have been raised by the EQAR Register Committee in subsequent change report decisions (if relevant);
  - reference to the recommendations provided in the previous review and actions taken to meet those recommendations;
  - a SWOT analysis;
  - reflections on the agency's key challenges and areas for future development.
- All the agency's external QA activities (as defined under section 2.1) are described and their compliance with the ESG is analysed in the SAR.
- The report is well-structured, concise, and comprehensive. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which the agency performs its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG.

The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat, which has two weeks to carry out a screening. The purpose of a screening is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but rather whether or not the necessary information, as outlined in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews*, is present. If the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to ask for a revised version within two weeks.

The final version of the agency's self-assessment report is then submitted to the review panel a minimum of eight weeks prior to the site visit. The agency publishes the completed SAR on its website and sends the link to ENQA. ENQA will publish this link on its website as well.

### **3.3 A site visit by the review panel**

The review panel will draft a proposal of the site visit schedule which must be submitted to the agency at least six weeks before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule is to include an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site

visit, the duration of which is usually 2,5 days. The approved schedule must be given to the agency at least one month before the site visit to properly organise the requested interviews.

In advance of the site visit (ideally at least two weeks before the site visit), the panel will organise an obligatory online meeting with the agency. This meeting is held to ensure that the panel reaches a sufficient understanding of:

The specific national/legal context in which the agency operates;

The specific quality assurance system to which the agency belongs;

The key characteristics of the agency's external QA activities.

The review panel will be assisted by the ENQA Review Coordinator during the site visit. The review coordinator will act as the panel's chief liaison with the agency, monitor the integrity of the review process and its consistency, and ensure that ENQA's overall expectations of the review are considered and met.

The site visit will close with a final debriefing meeting in which the panel outlines its general impressions and provides an overview of the judgement on the agency's ESG compliance. The panel will not comment on whether or not the agency would be granted/reconfirmed membership with ENQA or registration on EQAR.

### **3.4 Preparation and completion of the final review report**

Based on the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will follow the purpose and scope of the review as defined under sections 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for the panel's findings concerning each standard of Parts 2 and 3 of the ESG. When preparing the report, the review panel should also bear in mind EQAR's *Policy on Use and Interpretation of the ESG for the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies*<sup>3</sup> to ensure that the report contains sufficient information for the Register Committee to consider the agency's application for registration on EQAR.

A draft will first be submitted to the ENQA Review Coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity, and language, and it will then be submitted to the agency – usually within 10 weeks of the site visit – for comment on factual accuracy and grave misunderstandings only. The agency will be given two weeks to do this and should not submit any additional material or documentation at this stage. Thereafter, the review panel will take into account the agency's feedback on possible factual errors and finalise and submit the review report to ENQA.

The report should be finalised within three months of the site visit and will normally not exceed 40-50 pages in length.

### **3.5 Publication of the report and a follow-up process**

The agency will receive the review panel's report and publish it on its website once the Agency Review Committee has validated the report. The report will also be published on the ENQA website together with the statement of the Agency Review Committee validating external review reports by assessing the integrity of the review process and checking the quality and consistency of the reports. Importantly, during this process, and prior to final validation of the report, the Agency Review Committee has the option to request additional (documentary) evidence or clarification from the review panel, review coordinator or the agency if needed. The review report will be published on ENQA website regardless of the review outcome.

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<sup>3</sup> Available at: <https://www.eqar.eu/about/official-documents/#use-and-interpretation-of-the-esg>

As part of the review’s follow-up activities, the agency commits to react on the review recommendations and submit a follow-up report to ENQA within two years of the validation of the final external review report. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website.

The follow-up report may be complemented by an optional progress visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). The visit, which normally takes place 2-3 years after the verification of the final external review report (and after submission of the follow-up report), aims to offer an enhancement-oriented and strategically driven dialogue that ordinarily might be difficult to truly integrate in the compliance-focused site visit. The progress visit thus does not have the objective of checking the agency’s ESG compliance or how the agency has followed up on the recommendations, but rather provides an arena for strategic conversations that allow the agency to reflect on its key challenges, opportunities, and priorities. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

#### **4. Use of the report**

ENQA will retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the review panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, will be vested in ENQA.

The report is used as a basis for the Register Committee’s decision on the agency’s registration on EQAR. In the case of an unsuccessful application to EQAR, the report may also be used by the ENQA Board to reach a conclusion on whether the agency can be admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. The review process is thus designed to serve two purposes. In any case, the review report should only be considered final after validation by the Agency Review Committee. After submission to ENQA but before validation by the ARC, the report may not be used or relied upon by the agency, the panel, or any third party and may not be disclosed without ENQA’s prior written consent. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on EQAR registration or ENQA membership.

For the purposes of EQAR registration, the agency will submit the review report (once validated by the Agency Review Committee) to EQAR via email before expiry of the agency’s registration on EQAR. The agency should also include its self-assessment report (in a PDF format), a Declaration of Honour, and any other documents that may be relevant for the application (i.e., annexes, statement to the review report, updates). EQAR is expected to consider the review report and the agency’s application at its Register Committee meeting as stipulated in the indicative review schedule below and before the decision on ENQA membership by the ENQA Board.

To apply for ENQA membership, the agency is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation for applying for membership and the ways in which the agency expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be considered by the Board together with the confirmation of EQAR listing when deciding on the agency’s membership. Should the agency not be granted the registration in EQAR or the registration is not renewed, the decision on ENQA membership will be taken based on the final review report, the application letter, and the statement from the Agency Review Committee. The decision on membership will be published on ENQA’s website.

#### **5. Indicative schedule of the review**

Agreement on Terms of Reference	July 2021
Appointment of review panel members	July 2021

Self-assessment completed	By 31 October
Screening of SAR by ENQA Review Coordinator	November 2021
Preparation of the site visit schedule and indicative timetable	December 2021
Briefing of review panel members	December 2021
Review panel site visit	Week of 31 January 2022
Draft of review report and its submission to ENQA Review Coordinator for verification of its compliance with the Guidelines	March 2022
Draft of review report to be sent for a factual check to the agency	April 2022
Agency statement on the draft report to the review panel (if necessary)	April 2022
Submission of the final report to ENQA	Begin May 2022
Validation of the review report by the Agency Review Committee	June 2022
Publication of report	June 2022
EQAR Register Committee meeting and initial consideration	September 2022
Decision on ENQA membership by the ENQA Board	September 2022

## ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQA	external quality assurance
ESG	<i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015</i>
HE	higher education
HEI	higher education institution
IQA	internal quality assurance
MoESCS	Ministry on Education, Science Culture and Sports
QA	quality assurance
SAR	self-assessment report
VET	vocational education and training institution

## ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

### DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY ANQA

Self-assessment report (June 2021)

Annexes of the self-assessment report:

- ANQA Internal Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures
- ANQA Accreditation Manual 2015
- ANQA’s Strategic Plan 2016-2020
- ANQA’s Strategic Plan 2021-2025
- Charter of “National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance” Foundation
- Policy and Procedure of Monitoring Tertiary Level Institutions and their Academic Programmes of the “National Centre For Professional Education Quality Assurance” Foundation
- Approval of Decision-Making Policy on Awarding Institutional Accreditation by the Accreditation Committee of The “National Centre For Professional Education Quality Assurance” Foundation
- Procedure on Organization and Conduct of Accreditation in the State Emergency by the “National Center For Professional Quality Assurance” Foundation
- Statute on State Accreditation of Institutions and their Academic Programs in the Republic of Armenia

### ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY ANQA, BEFORE AND DURING THE VISIT, ON REQUEST OF THE REVIEW PANEL

- External review reports of IT and Linguistics in Chernovtsy University, Ukraine conducted within the framework of CEENQA QUERE project
- Review of doctoral programmes in Mongolia
- Review of 4 academic programmes of Education management in Georgia
- Review of doctoral programme in Kazakhstan
- Monitoring reports
- ANQA researched good practice examples regarding students’ assessment, progress planning, and academic programme review
- Examples of good practice by presented by HEIs during ANQA workshops
- Examples of good practices presented by international peers during ANQA conferences and forums
- Synthesis of changes proposed in the new Accreditation Manual
- Schedule of the site visits
- Expert training programmes
- Documents for international experts
- Students training programme and materials
- Expert training presentation
- Document for guidance for the expert training
- List of experts with statistics
- ASUE decision

- Minutes on the effect of pandemic on Arts and Sport HEIs
- Minutes on the effect of pandemic on medical education
- Impact of monitoring on HEIs development-minutes
- Minutes of the discussion with experts on the programme accreditation
- Effect of pandemic and online education-analysis by the students
- PPTs where ANQA discussed the effect of pandemic on the accreditation processes with HEIs, experts, AC members
- Example of the minutes of the discussions
- RA new draft Law: QA and accreditation parts – the main changes
- The discussed regulation on the formation and activities of Advisory Board
- Synthesis of the draft of new Statute on accreditation
- ANQA staff numbers per division
- Staff development plan and activities
- Expenditure of one accreditation procedure
- Diversification of finances
- Staff turnover
- Human Resources Policy
- Formation of income from workshops
- Planning of finances
- Site-visit evaluation sheet
- List of evaluation tools
- Comprehensive analysis of accreditation procedure 2018-2020
- Example of a survey analysis on expert training
- Protocols of IQA and I&P Accreditation
- Example of a Quality area annual report
- Action Plan for IQA
- IQA monitoring checklist
- I&P Accreditation Unit planning and monitoring
- Protocol of Secretariat and AC\_2021-2025
- Annual report of the quality Area Secretariat and AC\_2020
- Template for the Scrutiny report provided by the Accreditation Committee members on the Accreditation report (frequency: before each decision-making process)
- Regular meetings with stakeholders: Examples:
- Minutes of the meeting with ANQA staff to discuss the principles of decision making by AC
- A presentation from to discuss the development of a new principles for decision making:
- Satisfaction survey filled by the ANQA staff on the performance and cooperation with the Secretariat
- Translated content of Annual Report

#### OTHER SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL

- ANQA's website <http://anqa.am/>, <http://www.anqa.am/en/>

## ENQA AGENCY REVIEW 2022

THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (ANQA), undertaken in 2022.

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European Association for  
Quality Assurance in Higher Education