



ANQA-2020/34

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE

DECISION N 34

01 February 2020

ON ACCREDITATION OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES OF ARMENIAN STATE PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY AFTER KH. ABOVYAN

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

Full name of the Institution: Armenian State Pedagogical University after Kh. Abovyan

Official address: 17 Tigran Mets str., Yerevan, Armenia

Previous accreditation decree and date: In 2015 was accredited for 4 years

Guided by the Regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs” approved by the RA Government Decree N 978-N as of 30 June, 2011; by RA Government Decree N 959-N as of 30 June 2011 on “Approval of RA Standards for Professional Education Accreditation”; by the Procedure on “Formation and Functioning of Accreditation Committee of “National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance” foundation (ANQA) as well as by ANQA Regulation on “Formation of the Expert Panel”, in the open session held on 3 December 2019, the Accreditation Committee of “National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance” foundation (hereinafter referred to as the Committee) discussed the issue of institutional accreditation of Armenian State Pedagogical University after Kh. Abovyan (hereinafter: ASPU or the University) with the presence of ASPU representatives, Chair of the expert panel and ANQA coordinator of the accreditation procedure.

Having examined ASPU's self-evaluation, the University's remarks and suggestions on the draft report of the expert panel, the expert panel report, ASPU action plan on the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel report as well as ANQA conclusion, the Committee stated the following:

The main phases of the accreditation process were carried out within the following periods:

Submission of the application:	16 October 2018
Submission of self-evaluation of the University:	14 March 2019
Site-visit:	20-24 May 2019
Submission of the expert panel report:	11 October 2019
Submission of action plan on elimination of shortcomings:	25 October 2019

The expertise was carried out by the independent expert panel formed in compliance with the requirements set by the ANQA "Regulation on the Formation of Expert Panel". The evaluation was carried

out according to the 10 criteria of institutional accreditation approved by the RA Government Decree N 959-N as of 30 June 2011.

ASPU went accreditation process in 2015 in accordance with the 10 criteria approved by the RA Government Decree N 959-N as of 30 June 2011 as a result of which the University was accredited for 4 years. According to the expertise results, three criteria were evaluated as unsatisfactory (Governance and Administration, Research and Development, Internal Quality Assurance System).

In the evaluation the expert panel has taken into consideration that ASPU is an “educational, scientific-research and cultural higher education institution which aims to prepare high quality specialists in the spheres of Education, Sociology, Humanities, Natural Sciences and Art in compliance with national and international practice, to create knowledge and form skills by providing higher and postgraduate academic programs as well as to disseminate pedagogical values in the society”.

The mission and goals of the University are formulated in the ASPU Strategic Development Plan (SP) 2016-2020. It should be highlighted that under the direction of “Modern Research and Innovation” the University defines the development of its scientific-research activity, formation of competitive scientific and innovative potential and gradual transition to the research status as a separate goal.

The expert panel finds that in general the activity of the University is in compliance with the defined mission. In particular, the academic programs implemented by ASPU cover the spheres defined by its mission and through the academic programs the University prepares specialists in different qualifications, currently - mainly the qualification of Pedagogue though it should be stated that the University has the licenses to also award other qualifications not related to the field of Pedagogy. However, both external and internal stakeholders consider ASPU as an education institution which provides pedagogical education rather than a classic or “scientific-research university”.

The mission of the University which has been re-formulated after the previous accreditation does not primarily emphasize the pedagogical direction of the University. The expert panel finds that this results in formation of a gap between current public apprehension of the University and the main emphasis of the University’s name. Besides, pedagogy which is the traditional orientation of ASPU and it has a strategic significance for the country in terms of preparing specialists in the field of pedagogy, tends to be pushed to the background. This approach is not beneficial for ASPU taking into consideration the fact that the significant change of profile will require recruitment of new teaching staff and creation of new content. As a classic university, ASPU doesn't take suchlike steps directed to the development yet which is also conditioned by the limitation of new staff, material-technical base and financial resources which are required for the re-orientation.

As a result of the previous accreditation ASPU was provided a number of recommendations relating to the governance and administration which the University reflected partially or in a formal way in its further activities. Although the goals presented in the ASPU SP 2016-2020 are linked with the mission, the meetings with the stakeholders showed that the strategic goals are linked with the mission, the meetings with the stakeholders showed that the mission and strategic goals of the University poorly reflect internal and external stakeholders' opinions. The absence of clearly set and reliable mechanisms of evaluating the SP KPIs and their efficiency puts at risk the identification of omissions and the substantiation of made decisions on planning and budgeting.

After previous external review the University has expanded the scope of its activity by implementing 99 academic programs in the fields of Natural Sciences, Humanities, Social Sciences and Art by full-time and part-time forms of education for Bachelor's and Master's degrees. The University also implements a number

of programs at vocational and postgraduate levels of education. The academic programs have unified formats and unified approach to distribution of credits allocated to subjects of educational blocks which are based on the sum of credits of subjects of educational blocks and not on the load defined for the learning outcome (LO) of the given educational block. The academic programs are structured by the outcome-based approach. Based on the recommendations provided by the previous accreditation, the University has made mapping of LOs of academic programs which were presented for the accreditation, by mentioning (in the table) which result of the academic program relates to the specific descriptor of the NQF. Although the in-depth analysis of compliance is missing, the expert panel states that the LOs of academic programs, according to the table presented by ASPU, mainly reflect the requirement of the descriptor of the given NQF level. Nevertheless, in a number of cases the outcomes are repetitive in academic programs and also at course level. The LOs of BA programs are formulated in a generic way with no reflection to disciplinary content. There is a need to clarify the load underpinning the credits as well as to improve the measurability of LOs.

The University has numerated the possible teaching and learning methods in program descriptions/packages and syllabi, in accordance with LOs. No facts stating the application of widely diverse methods mentioned in program descriptions and syllabi have been registered in the review of documents (program descriptions, syllabi, distribution of topics of courses), in the information obtained in meetings with stakeholders and in class observations.

The University operates multifunctional assessment system, however, the expert panel finds that the determination of specific weight and changes of factors do not always derive from the requirement of implementing efficient education, thus hindering the objective and transparent assessment. The study of syllabi and assignments/tasks of separate courses states that the current/mid-term and final assessment is mainly applied, and the assignments directed to formative assessment are few. Besides, the factually applied assessment methods are few and are mainly directed to the assessment of knowledge. The main platform of assessing skills and competences is the process of professional (educational, pedagogical, scientific-research, pedagogical-research) internships in different phases (educational-cognitive, applied and analytical, summative-evaluative). Taking into consideration the fact that the tools of complying the LOs of academic programs with the NQF as well as with outcomes of separate courses reveal essential omissions, and the learning and assessment methods are not always in concordance with the LO and the content which is necessary for its formation, the expert panel finds that there is a necessity to ensure more tight vertical and horizontal compliance of anticipated LOs.

There are requirements and criteria set for preparation and assessment of final papers and MA theses according to separate components, as well as citation norms and a regulation on struggle against plagiarism. However, as the study of final papers and MA theses showed, in spite of the existence of set requirements, not all papers and theses meet the requirements, in particular, most of the final papers and MA theses are developed as essays, and the components of research and applicability are almost missing. Besides, the topics of research sometimes do not comply with the qualification of Pedagogue and they hardly relate to the problems of schools. Although there is a regulation supporting academic honesty, functional mechanisms for struggling against academic dishonesty are currently missing. No activities are taken for detection of cases of plagiarism in final papers and theses. In final papers and theses which were studied during the site-visit there were some elements of plagiarism, the individual analysis made by the student was sometimes missing but, however, suchlike papers were evaluated as positive, even - high grades.

The University carried out benchmarking of academic programs - comparisons with similar academic programs of other HEIs, however, the changes extracted from benchmarking are fragmental. The benchmarking was mainly limited by mechanical comparison of the lists of subjects taught by other national and international HEIs; the approaches of selecting HEIs as benchmarks do not reflect the provisions of the policy adopted by the University.

ASPU realizes the necessity of creating student-centered learning environment, however, currently applied teacher-centered teaching methods are predominant. At the same time the tendency of diversifying learning environments is visible; the top management of the University strives to ensure respective resources for ensuring wide-scale application of modern methods. The University has invested the platform of Google Classroom. Previously the application of the mentioned platform was viewed as an additional load both by teaching staff and students. Recently, in the background of decreasing the requirement of active application of the platform and revising the load, teachers and students are more tended to evaluate the values of the virtual platform. The expert panel finds that as a result of fulfillment of activities taken towards improvement of academic programs of the University in the direction of expert panel recommendations provided by the previous accreditation, the achievements haven't resulted in solution of majority of identified problems, nor in essential and content-related improvement of the situation.

Based on the results of the previous external review the University has developed documents specifying the functional framework of structural units, the job descriptions of support staff and descriptions of categories of teaching staff are existent. The recruitment of vacancies in ASPU is carried out on competitive basis and by applying the mechanism of inviting teachers. Although the University hasn't evaluated the efficiency of mechanisms of recruiting and selecting teaching staff yet, the stakeholders are mainly satisfied with the teaching staff, and students are more content with young teachers. The recruitment of teaching staff is carried out according to the requirements set by the chairs based on the courses. It should be mentioned that ASPU also involves teachers on double-jobbing basis – teachers with less load or with hourly rate teachers, and some of them are practitioners of the given field, and some others also teach in other HEIs. Based on the results of the previous accreditation process the University has involved requirements in the program descriptions set for the teachers but the requirements do not reflect the peculiarity of the specific academic program, are generic and repetitive.

The expert panel is concerned about the problem of teachers' load, in particular, the load norms are very high, not all types of activities are factually calculated, and not much time is left to carry out research activity. It is very common at ASPU to teach several subjects (even up to 17) by one teacher which can influence the quality of teaching on the one hand, and to endanger the smooth educational process, on the other hand, e.g. in case of lasting absence of the given teacher because of his/her disability or for any other reason. There are some mechanisms of analyzing and evaluating the quality and efficiency of teaching and support staff's activities – student surveys, class observations and discussions, however, the link among the mentioned evaluations, professional development, advancement and remuneration is missing. The University plans to fully invest the rating system which has been piloted once but the application of the mentioned system cannot be effective without the above mentioned systematization.

Although the University has been proposed by the previous expert panel to develop plan for professional development of its teaching staff, such plan is not developed yet; the professional development is mainly ensured by the personal initiative of teachers. There are mechanisms of promoting teaching and

support staff at ASPU (publication in ASPU scientific journal, financial compensation for publishing scientific works in international databases, insurance).

Currently the resource base of the University which is necessary for the implementation of academic programs is mainly sufficient; the physical depreciation and accident rate of one campus of the University require significant financial investment. There is a need to improve infrastructure and equip the material-technical base of non-emergency buildings. The expert panel positively evaluates the efforts taken by the University to ensure necessary resources base for the educational process and to provide power-effective solutions. Recently ASPU has equipped the classrooms with technical means and has established new labs. However, the classrooms are mainly not adapted to the application of interactive, collaborative and student-centered methods. The 60% of classrooms are equipped with projectors and Smart TVs which the University considers as an important condition for the application of interactive method. The wide-scale replenishment of resource base is mainly ensured within the framework of international or grant projects which are one-time activities and do not ensure the sustainability of the process. The University has also allocated its own resources to obtain a number of technical means.

The budget of ASPU is formed by state budget allocations, tuition fees, grants and other sources but the main part of financial resources are generated from tuition fees. The main source of income is considered to be tuition fees which in fact endangers the financial sustainability of the University, taking into consideration the quantitative variations of student numbers. The system of management of the University's financial resources and income diversification is not developed, in particular, the University does not consider the provision of additional services deriving from the directions of its profile (trainings, educational-methodical consultancy, etc.) as an additional source of income. The distribution of financial means is not carried out in accordance with the strategic goals yet, and although the University has formed budget estimate for 2019-2020 based on previous accreditation recommendations and towards current accreditation process, the budget estimate is not approved and has not put into process yet.

The recruitment, selection and admission of students to ASPU are carried out based on Republican and university regulations on admission. The University organizes activities on awareness for applicants and preparatory courses. The opportunities of consultancy for admitted students are limited by consultancies which are provided on supervision of course and final papers and for 1st-year part-time students in November, as well as by non-formal guidance provided upon need by students' personal initiative prior to examinations. International students are provided non-formal guidance. No additional courses are implemented. The University has Internship Center and University-Employer Collaboration (UEC) Center, however the activities of both units hardly lead to fostering the processes of ensuring students' employment and occupation. The activity of UEC Center is mainly limited by alumni data collection and investment of mechanisms of reinforcing feedback. However, the UEC Center does not yet apply any toolset which would ensure the track of and direct feedback with alumni as well as quantitative data relating the employability of alumni more than one year after graduation. The main structural unit which protects students' interests and rights is the Student Council which raises students' concerns through faculty bodies. ASPU has a *Student Guide* which contains information which clearly guides students relating the processes of the University.

The scientific-research activity is among the most important priorities of ASPU's activity, however, not reflecting the recommendation provided by the previous expert panel, the University hasn't yet clearly defined its research directions. Although the objectives directed to the reinforcement and stimulation of research are mentioned in the SP 2016-2020, the objectives are formulated in a generic way and are not based

on research potential and evaluation of outcome competences of the University. No specific directions are identified, and the University hasn't focused on its traditional main direction - Pedagogy and related disciplines. The financial allocations directed to the fulfillment, development and sustainability of scientific-research activity, in accordance with the budget, do not reach 5% in the reporting period. Although the University involves means from the State Scientific Committee, those means are provided by base and thematic research projects. ASPU hasn't developed clear policy and procedures directed to the implementation and development of research activities yet. The University hasn't generated income from commercialization of research outcomes; the approach to view the research (and its outcomes) as a sustainable source of income is not enrooted at ASPU. The adoption of such an approach would allow to actively commercialize ASPU's research process and its outcomes, to foster more applicable and modern (especially in compliance with current tendencies of scientific-research activity at international level) research works, thus considerably fostering the sustainability of the University's financial inflows. The inter-chair and interdisciplinary research activities are strictly limited while such research is important for such a HEI which has a pedagogical profile.

The research activities taken by students are not sufficiently related to school or education problems. The involvement of students in research activities is limited, and teachers' research activities are mainly carried out by their personal initiative. There is a need to take more active and practical steps in order to ensure balanced link between research and educational processes as well as to ensure their continuation. The University has significant achievement in terms of involving its "Wisdom" monthly journal in international databases such as Web of Science and SCOPUS, however, it should be stated that the indicator of ASPU teachers' publications in the mentioned monthly journal is low. The indicator of ASPU teachers' publications in journals with international impact factor is low. In spite of the citation norms and regulation on prevention of plagiarism which have been developed by the University, fictive clarification of citations in students' research works is sometimes observed, while students' individual analysis is strictly limited. There are no bases of investment of any research innovative outcome, i.e. educational process and content, generated by the University. The expert panel finds that as a result of fulfillment of activities taken towards improvement of academic programs of the University in the direction of expert panel recommendations provided by the previous accreditation, the achievements haven't resulted in solution of majority of specified problems, nor in essential improvement of the situation.

Giving importance to preparation of specialists at international level in its mission, ASPU tries to position itself in different actions of internationalization. However, there is a need to develop clear policy, strategy and concrete procedures of internationalization. Such an approach can help to clarify the actions directed to specific goals and objectives, to activate international cooperation and to foster mobility of students and teachers. The expert panel highlights that the University has a number of realized international cooperation projects in specialties which is considered to be the strong point of the University with many foreign countries and international organizations. Nevertheless, the good practice is not transferred to other structural units of the University yet. ASPU has already managed to reach Eastern Europe by establishing an academic program with double diploma. At the same time, after the previous accreditation ASPU has participated in TEMPUS and ERASMUS+ projects, acting as a coordinator of one of them. However, the experts highlight the necessity to disseminate best practice and success stories the University has reached within the scope of international projects and in activities of internationalization. The University carries out activities of internationalization within the framework of summer schools in ingoing and outgoing formats.

The geography of summer schools expands year by year; the aim of organizing summer school in Armenia is the proclaiming of Armenians' cultural heritage. The University has a number of contracts signed within the scope of ERASMUS+ exchange program in which it acts as a both home and host university (it both sends its students and hosts international students). The cooperation with local organizations is limited by the frame of internship organizations which are mainly schools. The lack of financial resources for fostering international cooperation as well as passive participation in international grant projects hinder the process of efficient collaboration with international institutions and structures.

There are a number of problems in the field of governance of the University. The disagreement on further development of the University among internal and external members of the ASPU Board of Trustees hinders the decisions directed to making changes. Besides, the governance of ASPU is highly centralized which impedes the participatory decision making at different levels.

There isn't any regulated process of evaluating the efficiency of activity of the University's governance system and its separate units. Besides, the University doesn't make any evaluation of its human, material and financial resources which are necessary for the fulfillment of its goals, thus endangering the purposefulness of its expenditure. The governance system of ASPU is ensured with human resources but in some cases it is necessary to recruit the staff of structural units and in some cases, even if there are staff members, the structural units don't function. The governance system of the University formally gives an opportunity to students and teachers to participate in decision-making processes but according to both the University's evaluation and the expert panel site-visit results, students' factual participation in decision making is passive, and the University doesn't apply any mechanism to identify the reasons and to foster their activeness. As far as the mechanisms and tools of fulfilling the strategic goals are not enrooted yet, and the link between short-term plans and the long-term development plan is unclear, the University's strategic plan isn't a document which provides conditions and guidance for ASPU's everyday activities. After the previous accreditation a number of procedures of the University have been revised, some of them have been developed only recently, some of them are drafts, and no clear mechanisms of revising and evaluating the efficiency of approved and in-use documents, regulations and procedures have been applied. The study on factors influencing the activity of the University is generic as far as it relates to the RA educational field in general and not specifically to ASPU, hence it does not foster the strategic planning activities of the University.

The internal quality assurance (IQA) of the University has a quite long history in the context of RA higher education system, however, it is not yet sufficiently integrated into processes and is not applied according to the set policy. Although there are policy and processes which involve principles and guidelines, the IQA system hasn't been realized. In spite of the fact that the University has developed IQA policy (it was approved in 2012, but in the background of current development and according to ASPU it needs to be revised and modernized) with the support of mainly international expertise, it hasn't clarified and generalized the mechanisms which would allow the University to evaluate the process of continuous improvement of all processes and formation of quality culture. Although ASPU has invested the institute of chair staff members responsible for quality assurance (hereinafter: QA responsible staff members), there is still incomplete apprehension among QA responsible staff members on QA mechanisms and processes, and they are not involved in activities of Quality Assurance Division, except for conduction of surveys. The functions and responsibilities of QA responsible staff members are not clarified. Hence, the steps taken towards efficient operation of the system are not coordinated, and the cooperation among structural units is poor. The imperfection of mechanisms, methodology and toolset of evaluation of efficiency of different processes, as

well as the absence and superficiality of data-based content analyses didn't allow the University to evaluate the impact of QA processes on improvement of academic process and the activity of the University. The logic of evidence-based planning and implementation is deteriorated. In spite of the efforts made towards investment of the PDCA cycle in different aspects of the University's activity, it is not enrooted yet. The existing mechanisms and processes are mainly in the first two phases of the PDCA cycle. In the period of expertise the University mostly didn't reach the “Check” phase.

The formation of quality culture in ASPU is among future challenges. As a result of absence of coordinated and efficient feedback by all stakeholders as well as their poor involvement the IQA system hasn't realized its full potential yet. The IQA is not linked with strategic goals and hasn't become a flexible system of identifying strong and weak points of the University yet. Taking into consideration the relative multipractice in the QA processes, ASPU could have better-structured and in-depth analyses based on quantitative data and qualitative evaluations in the process of external quality assurance.

ASPU has partially followed the recommendations provided in the previous accreditation, mainly focusing on the assurance of documentation base. The content aspect of improvement has conceded to the documentation and fragmental actions in different fields and directions. It would be beneficial for the University to make improvement having direct impact on efficiency of organization of education by full closing of the PDCA cycle.

ASPU is in the position of finding itself, striving to clarify its further role in Armenian and regional education systems. The base of developed documentation, some fragmental achievements and success stories can serve as a sufficient basis for further content-related improvement, enhancement of education quality and reinforcement of research capacities. The University has a significant potential to become an institution which formulates opinion in the fields of education and pedagogy, however, it doesn't fully capitalize its strengths.

Having examined the submitted package of documents, listening to the opinions of the Chair of the expert panel and representatives of the Universities as well as **taking into consideration** the fact that:

- a) the mission of ASPU is primarily perceived to be the preparation of pedagogies/specialists in the field of Pedagogy in the Republic of Armenia, aimed at solution of the problem relating to the assurance with respective specialists for pre-school and secondary schools;
- b) ASPU has created sufficient educational environment ensured with necessary material and technical resources and teaching staff with respective professional qualification;
- c) some shortcomings have been identified in the institutional capacities, particularly:
 1. some shortcomings in the field of “**Governance and Administration**”, i.e. uncertainties in distribution of functions and insufficient allocation of resources for the fulfillment of the strategic goals, do not have a significant impact on the efficiency of the governance system of the University;
 2. some shortcomings in the field of “**Academic Programs**” weaken the factual acquisition of professional competences by the students which are currently demanded and set by student-centered approaches,
 3. the University has obviously registered achievements in the field of “**Research and Development**”, and the weak points mentioned by the expert panel do not significantly impede the formulation of graduates' independent research and analytical skills;

4. the shortcomings in the field of “**Internal Quality Assurance System**” do not allow to ensure continuous and regular improvement of all processes at the University.
- d) the shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel do not influence the efficiency of organization of educational processes as well as the validity of qualifications awarded to graduates;
- e) the analysis of the University’s strengths, opportunities and current problems shows that in case of mobilization of ASPU’s efforts, the action plan on the elimination of shortcomings of the University is realistic.

As a result of close voting, the Accreditation Committee:

DECIDED

1. **To award institutional accreditation to “Armenian State Pedagogical University after Kh. Abovyan” Foundation for 4 /four/ years.**
2. After the publication of the decision on accreditation award, to submit the reviewed action plan on the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel report and respective time- schedule to ANQA within two months taking into account:
 - a) the urgent need to give solutions primarily to the problems existing in the fields of “**Governance and Administration**”, “**Academic Programs**”, “**Research and Development**” and “**Internal Quality Assurance System**”;
 - b) the requirement to ensure Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the evaluation of progress and efficiency of the University's ongoing processes;
 - c) the international expert's peer-review results and provided recommendations regarding ASPU's ambitions to be integrated into the European Higher Education Area.
3. To pay special attention to the modernization and improvement of professional academic programs, reinforcement of the link between learning and research, improvement of management system, modernization of necessary material-technical base, training of teaching staff, mobility of students and teaching staff, expansion and dissemination of fragmental leading practice of international cooperation as well as internal quality assurance.
4. To organize internal audit of academic programmes involving an external expert.
5. In accordance with the Clause 12 of the Regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Education Institutions and their Educational Programs”, every 6 months to submit a written report to ANQA on the results of the carried out activities by ensuring the evaluation of improvement of the University's activity, innovations and achievements.
6. To assign ANQA to carry out mandatory monitoring of efficiency of the University's activity in accordance with KPIs and internal audit of academic programs.

Chairman of the Accreditation Committee

S. Avetisyan

01 February 2020, Yerevan