

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



**EXPERT PANEL REPORT ON  
INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION OF  
ARMENIAN STATE PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY AFTER KH. ABOVYAN**

**Yerevan 2019**

## INTRODUCTION

The institutional accreditation of Armenian State Pedagogical University after KH. Abovyan (hereinafter referred to as ASPU) is carried out based on the application presented by the University. The process of institutional accreditation is organized and coordinated by the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (ANQA).

ANQA is guided by the regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs” set by the RA Government on 30 June, 2011 in N978 decree as well as by N 959-N (30 June, 2011) decree on approving RA Standards for Professional Education Accreditation.

The expertise was carried out by the expert panel formed according to the requirements of ANQA Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel. The expert panel consisted of 4 local experts and 1 international expert from the Netherlands.

The institutional accreditation is aimed not only at the external evaluation of quality assurance but also the continuous improvement of quality of the University’s governance and academic programs. Hence, two issues were put forward to the European and local experts:

- 1) to carry out an expertise of institutional capacities in accordance with the RA standards for state accreditation;
- 2) to carry out expert evaluation from the perspectives of compliance with international standards and the University's ambitions to integrate into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA),
- 3) to state the implementation of institutional reforms in accordance with the recommendations provided in the previous institutional accreditation of the University.

This report reflects on the results of the expertise of ASPU's institutional capacities in accordance with the RA state accreditation criteria and with the international expert's peer-review observations from the perspective of the University's integration into EHEA.

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## SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION

### EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

The expertise of GSU's institutional capacities is carried out by the independent expert panel<sup>1</sup> which was compiled according to the demands set by the ANQA Regulation on "Formation of the Expert Panel". The evaluation was carried out according to the 10 criteria for state accreditation, approved by the RA Government Decree N 959-N (30 June 2011).

According to the current state accreditation criteria and respective regulation (2011), the University underwent accreditation in 2015. The University is involved in the current process based on its application.

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 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 which provides merely 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 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 which 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 and financial base which are required by the re-orientation.

As a result of the previous accreditation ASPU was provided a number of recommendations relating governance and administration which the University followed partially or in a formal way in its

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<sup>1</sup>APPENDIX 1. CVs OF EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS

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 mission and strategic goals<sup>2</sup> 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 under 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 middle-level 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 related to the specific descriptor of the NQF. Although the in-depth analysis of compliance hasn't been carried out, the expert panel states that the LOs of academic programs, according to the schedule 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 at subject level. The Los of BA programs are formulated in a generic way and without reflection to disciplinary content. There is a need to improve the clarification of load underpinning the credits as well as the measurability of LOs.

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

The University functions multifactor 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 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 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

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<sup>2</sup> This part was re-formulated as a result of ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "...showed that the current mission and strategic goals of the University poorly reflect internal and external stakeholders' opinions."

content which is necessary for the formation of the LO, the expert panel finds that there is a necessity to ensure more tight vertical and horizontal compliance of expected LOs.

There are requirements and criteria set for the preparation and assessment of final papers and MA theses according to separate components, 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 absent. Besides, the topics selected for research sometimes do not comply with the qualification of Pedagogue and they hardly relate the problems of schools. Although there is a regulation supporting academic honesty, currently used mechanisms for struggling against academic dishonesty are missing. No activities are taken for detection of cases of plagiarism in final papers and theses. In final papers and theses which were reviewed during the site-visit there were some elements of plagiarism, the individual analysis made by the student was sometimes missing while suchlike papers were evaluated as positive, even high grades were given.

The University carried out benchmarking of academic programs - comparisons with similar academic programs of other HEIs, however, the changes made as a result of benchmarking are fragmental. The benchmarking was mainly limited by mechanical comparison of list of subjects of 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<sup>3</sup> 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, having the background of decreasing the requirement of active application of the platform and revision of 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**<sup>4</sup>, nor in essential and content-related improvement of the situation.

Based on the results of 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

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<sup>3</sup> This part was re-formulated by the expert panel's initiative. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "Although ASPU is a pedagogical HEI and it realizes the necessity of creating student-centered learning environment, currently applied teacher-centered teaching methods are predominant."

<sup>4</sup> This part was re-formulated by the expert panel's initiative. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "...haven't resulted in solution of majority of separated problems,..."

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 due to 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 make full investment of 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 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, compensation of payment in case of 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<sup>5</sup>. 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-efficient solutions. Recently ASPU has equipped the classrooms with technical means<sup>6</sup>, 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<sup>7</sup>. The wide-scale enrichment of resource base is mainly ensured within the framework of

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<sup>5</sup> This part was re-formulated as a result of ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "there are a number of academic programs the implementation of which is carried out in campuses/buildings the physical depreciation and accident rate of which require significant financial investment."

<sup>6</sup> This part was re-formulated as a result of ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "...with technologies..."

<sup>7</sup> This part was re-formulated as a result of ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "A number of classrooms have projectors and Smart TVs which the University considers as a sufficient condition for the application of interactive method."

international or grant projects which are one-time activities and do not ensure the sustainability of the process<sup>8</sup>. 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 ensured by tuition fees. The fact that the main source of income is tuition fees 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 prior to the current accreditation process, the budget estimate is not approved and 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 1<sup>st</sup>-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 concentrated on its traditional main direction, i.e. 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

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<sup>8</sup> This part was re-formulated by the expert panel's initiative. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "The wide-scale enrichment of resource base is mainly ensured within the framework of international or grant projects."



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 the 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 greatly fostering the sustainability of financial inflows. The inter-chair and interdisciplinary research activities are strictly limited while such research is important for a HEI which has a pedagogical profile<sup>9</sup>. The research activities taken by students are not sufficiently related to<sup>10</sup> 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 are 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 separated 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 are 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**<sup>11</sup>. The geography of summer schools

<sup>9</sup> This part was re-formulated as a result of ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "...which has a pedagogical profile. This fact also indirectly states that ASPU doesn't emphasize pedagogical research."

<sup>10</sup> This part was re-formulated as a result of ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "The research activities taken by students have little relatedness with school or education problems."

<sup>11</sup> <sup>11</sup> This part was re-formulated as a result of ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "...in ingoing and outgoing formats, covering some costs."

expands year by year; the aim of organizing summer school in Armenia is the public proclamation 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.

The expert panel is concerned about the problems which exist 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 strictly 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 for and guides 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 lately, 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 do not 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**<sup>12</sup>. Taking into consideration the relative multi-practice in the QA processes, ASPU could have better-established and in-depth analyses based on quantitative data and qualitative evaluations in the process of external quality assurance.

The expert panel emphasizes that ASPU has partially followed the recommendations provided in the previous accreditation, mainly concentrating 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 completion of the PDCA cycle.

The expert panel finds that 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, instead of capitalizing its strength ASPU follows other direction.

#### **STRENGTHS OF THE INSTITUTION:**

1. Existence of documentation base regulating the University's educational and other processes.
2. Formal structural completeness and publicity of academic programs.
3. Operation of the electronic platform of ASPU Google Classroom.
4. Motivated and devoted teaching staff.
5. Existence of opportunities created for advancement of freshman teachers.
6. Commitment of the University to provide support to staff for publishing scientific-research works in international indexed journals.
7. Existence of internal electronic documentation circulation system.
8. Active application of means of information publication and publicity.
9. Existence of valuable experience of tight cooperation with schools.

<sup>12</sup> This part was re-formulated by the expert panel's initiative. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "hasn't become a flexible system of detecting problems of the University yet."

10. Expanding scope of international cooperation with leading HEIs and other structures of CIS countries, Asia, Europe and the USA.
11. Existence of advanced experience in implementation of academic programs in Preschool and Elementary Education, Psychology and Special Education.
12. Relatively stable number of students having the background of decrease of number of students in RA.
13. Existence of big potential of transferring knowledge to the society.

#### **WEAKNESSES OF THE INSTITUTION:**

1. Absence of vision unifying and guiding the actions and development.
2. Generality of the mission, at the same time isolating and subordinating the main and traditional inseparable description of the institution – the fact of being a pedagogical university.
3. Absence of tools identifying the strategic priorities as well as poor involvement of stakeholders in determining the strategic goals<sup>13</sup> of the University.
4. Centralization of the governance system in terms of both decision making and financial management, as well as absence of substantiations grounding the cost effectiveness of financial resources and distribution of resources.
5. Poor vertical and horizontal alignment of academic programs, the necessity to modernize the content and methods of the academic programs.
6. Absence of tight link of students' research with awarded qualification.
7. Limited application of mechanisms of monitoring the strategic goals and other<sup>14</sup> processes of the University and evaluating their efficiency.
8. Imperfection of policy on objective and transparent assessment of academic progress, respective assessment forms and methods,
9. Absence of clear and institutional mechanisms and procedural rules on struggle against academic dishonesty, lack of students' individual research and analytical results in their final papers and MA theses.
10. Incomplete implementation of separate phases of HRM process, in particular, the absence of interconnection between planning-evaluation-promotion-trainings-advancement.
11. Underestimation of importance of commercialization of research outcomes and lack of respective flexible mechanisms.
12. Lack of international joint research projects and cooperation with international scientific centers.
13. Necessity of refreshment of classroom funds and scientific labs and continuous<sup>15</sup> improvement of infrastructural resources.
14. Lack of exchange/mobility of students and teachers with international HEIs.
15. Absence of mechanisms validating the reliability and validity of QA mechanisms and tools.

<sup>13</sup> This part was re-formulated by the expert panel's initiative. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "...determining the mission of the University."

<sup>14</sup> This part was re-formulated by the expert panel's initiative. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "...monitoring the processes of the University and evaluating their efficiency."

<sup>15</sup> This part was re-formulated by the expert panel's initiative. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "...and improvement of infrastructural resources."

16. Incomplete involvement of external stakeholders in processes of governance, strategic development, development/revision of academic programs and QA, as well as absence of University-alumnus factual link.
17. Non-complete application of the PDCA cycle in different processes of the University, absence of interconnection of improvement processes with assessment results as well as absence of steps reflecting identified problems.
18. Absence of flexible mechanisms of identifying and disseminating best practice.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Mission and Goals**

1. To ensure the clear formulation of the University's long-term vision and mission as a guide for the activity of the University by ensuring the development of the new Strategic Plan (SP) which will be in compliance with the mentioned vision and mission and will clarify the omissions and shortcomings identified in the fulfillment of the previous SP.
2. To revise the mission of the University by specifying the profile direction of ASPU, reflecting the University's clear position in the RA higher education, as well as making realistic planning of necessary improvements and development of capacities in the SP.
3. To define more realistic, measurable ambitions which are agreed upon the stakeholders of the University and are apprehensible in terms of the spheres of the University's activities by predominantly emphasizing the important role of ASPU in the sphere of pedagogical education.
4. To ensure the fulfillment of the goals and objectives defined in the SP and to analyze the KPIs stipulated in the SP by evaluating not only quantitative but also qualitative/content-related aspects of fulfillment of the strategic goals.
5. To foster more active involvement of all stakeholders in the process of development/revision of the SP, giving importance to continuous and regular link particularly with external stakeholders.

### **Governance and Administration**

6. To clarify and optimize the organizational structure of the University, based on its main directions of development and priorities of its goals and functions.
7. To decentralize the governance of the University by ensuring more autonomy to faculties and chairs, as well as investing other, less hierarchical models of governance.
8. To ensure regulated process of evaluating the efficiency of governance system and activities of its separate units.
9. To complete the frame of regulating the activity of the University by investing documents which regulate the gaps or which are still in the drafting process. To ensure the factual and practical application of regulatory base for the benefit of content design, monitoring and revisions of academic programs and other processes.
10. To establish ethical norms of governance, to invest mechanisms which will ensure the transparency and efficiency of decision-making processes, to analyze the efficacy of the governance based on qualitative and quantitative data.

11. To invest complete system, respective mechanisms and toolset of studying internal and external factors influencing the University, to make content analyses of previous SP results and labor market which will serve as a base for the development of the new SP. To invest risk management system.
12. To ensure the link between the SP and factually used short-term plans. To invest flexible mechanisms and toolset of monitoring, evaluation and follow-up improvement<sup>16</sup> of mid-term and short-term plans.
13. To activate and motivate the factual participation of external stakeholders in decision-making processes by making the decisions more targeted to the needs of stakeholders.
14. To carry out regulated process in the direction of collection and analysis of information on efficiency of academic programs and other processes.
15. To invest mechanisms in order to evaluate the published updated, objective and unbiased quantitative and qualitative information on the quality of academic programs and awarded qualifications.

#### **Academic Programs**

16. With the aim to increase the resource saving and usefulness, to optimize repetitive academic programs even if they have been developed based on the requirements set by the school curricula but they cannot ensure alumni's employability at schools because of limited hours of those subjects.
17. To define the respective body responsible for academic programs - at the level of chair or program supervisor who will be responsible for the content design of the given academic program and for the actions of evidence-based revision made as a result of operation of the PDCA cycle.
18. To ensure the measurability of expected LOs. To ensure the link among expected LO - teaching and learning methods - assessment method.
19. To clarify the policy on distribution and calculation of credits by interconnecting them with LOs, to revise the load of MA and part-time students and the distribution of credits, by grounding the made changes based on the needs identified for assuring education quality and fostering the efficiency and not on the resource saving.
20. To clarify the form of use of the Google Classroom platform, level of activation, methodology and regularity of application, based on the peculiarities of the subject, substantiation of learning added value, omissions detected as a result of evaluation of class efficiency as well as level of availability of technical means for students, viewing it as an additional tool which can also be very useful particularly in part-time education system.
21. To foster the reconsideration and prioritization of student-centered approach at ASPU by emphasizing the importance of students' individual and research activities.
22. To diversity the applied teaching and learning methods and to invest clear policy on their selection, ensuring the acquisition of LOs and enrooting the student-centered approach.

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<sup>16</sup> This part was re-formulated by the expert panel's initiative. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "...of monitoring and evaluation of mid-term and short-term plans."

23. To clarify assessment methods in order to ensure the measurability of concrete learning outcomes, to foster formative assessment and to determine the specific weights of separate components of multicomponent assessment system.
24. To invest flexible mechanisms ensuring academic honesty, excluding the narration of research works as essays and ensuring the fulfillment of original<sup>17</sup> studies and activities according to topics having direct relation to the given qualification.
25. To carry out content benchmarking of academic programs by grounding the selection of HEIs as benchmarks, reflecting LOs, teaching and learning methods which will allow to approximate the content of ASPU academic programs and their methodology to comparable academic programs of other HEIs.
26. To enroot the processes of regular monitoring of academic programs, evaluation of their efficiency and improvement by expanding the scope of stakeholders' involvement. To ensure the QA process of academic programs by full operation of the PDCA cycle.

#### **Students**

27. To revise the mechanisms directed to the identification of students' educational, consultancy, learning and other needs in order to ensure their validity, targetedness and purposefulness which will foster the evidence-based planning and improvement based on clear picture of students' needs.
28. To reconsider the role and significance of services promoting students' career by defining more flexible mechanisms of ensuring the University-alumnus link which (the mechanisms) will ensure improved indicators of students' and alumni's employment and will provide clear statistic data on ASPU alumni and the labor market.
29. To take clear steps in order to foster students' involvement in research activities by investing formats of team research and clear policy on promotion, by supporting the coordination of activity of the Student Scientific Association as well as by formulating research skills and competences among learners.
30. To create equal opportunities of participation of professional internship for local and international students involved in full-time and part-time studies.

#### **Teaching and Support staff**

31. To improve the criteria of selection of teaching staff and to develop clear requirements set for professional qualities of teaching staff for each academic program which (the requirements) will take into account the peculiarities of academic programs and will be aimed at evaluation of teachers' professional and pedagogical competences.
32. To improve the mechanisms and toolset of evaluation of teaching staff by fostering teachers' professional development and enhancement of teaching quality.
33. To invest system of regular identification of teachers' needs. Respectively, to carry out activities directed to the improvement of teaching staff by investing a coordinated and regular training

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<sup>17</sup> This part was re-formulated by the expert panel's initiative. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "...the fulfillment of factually carried out studies and activities..."

program for teachers which will derive from the strategic objectives of the University and will be based on evaluation of teaching staff's professional needs.

34. To develop and invest clear and regulated mechanisms of teachers' professional development and promotion in order to ensure teachers' retention/sustainability and to increase their motivation.
35. To clarify the policy on selection of support staff, taking into consideration the direction and peculiarities of academic programs.
36. To invest clear policy on HRM, directed to the merit-based recruitment and rejuvenation of staff, prevention of outflow of young specialists as well as satisfaction of professional and social needs.

### **Research and Development**

37. To invest policy on research activity of the University which will reflect the prioritized scientific directions, ambitions and interests of the University, and which will emphasize the importance of commercialization of research outcomes.
38. To clearly plan, differentiate and make content-related improvement of short-term, mid-term and long-term aspects of the University's research activity, to ensure their logical and time-related coherence.
39. Based on the factual mission of the University, to expand the scope of the University's research activities which relate to different problems of secondary education, in particular, management of secondary education, educational-methodical, psychological-pedagogical issues, right of education, social justice, etc.
40. To increase financial allocations directed to the research activity of the University, giving preference to prioritized directions set by the University as well as concentrating on establishment of excellence centers.
41. To foster the development of interdisciplinary research at inter-chair, inter-faculty and inter-university levels, aimed at innovation and establishment of interdisciplinary academic programs.
42. To foster teachers' research capacities, paying attention to the investment of respective modules in trainings, reflection of research component in their workload, establishment of internal grants, application of co-financing of external programs directed to professional development.
43. To adopt policy on internationalization of scientific-research activity by expanding the scope of impact of collaboration contracts signed with international organizations and institutions on the research activity of the University.
44. To reinforce the capacity of scientific thinking as an outcome of the academic program by application of respective teaching and learning methods, investment of modules which develop research skills especially in MA programs, as well as development and investment of requirements set for students' research and other individual works (course and final papers, MA theses) and criteria of their evaluation.
45. To invest mechanisms in the direction of reinforcing the link between scientific research and learning process. To adopt clear policy according to which the research will become a learning method, ensuring the application of current and final outcomes of research in educational process.

### **Infrastructure and Resources**



46. To adopt such a financial management policy which will ensure the fulfillment of goals of academic programs and the equipment of the University with necessary means and facilities.
47. To align the financial resource management with strategic directions and priorities in order to ensure the attainment of KPIs defined by directions prioritized for the given time period of the program.
48. To activate the activities directed to diversification of financial resources, emphasizing the result of academic activity and provision of services linked to it.
49. To regularly make evaluation of cost effectiveness and purposefulness and efficacy of use of material-technical resources, by ensuring that the results serve for further more realistic planning.
50. To make more active efforts in the direction of solution of problems relating the emergency buildings, the infrastructure and dormitory ensuring general inclusiveness by guaranteeing safe, secure, attractive and inclusive educational environment. **To continue re-equipping the classrooms<sup>18</sup>** and replenish the labs with necessary material-technical base.
51. To modernize library resources by ensuring memberships with international digital library funds and depositories.
52. To ensure the electronic documentation circulation system and to complete its investment with the aim to increase the efficiency of management of informational flows.

#### **Social Responsibility**

53. To ensure analytical accountability mechanisms at all units by application of indicators of evaluation of results, ensuring the operation of the PDCA cycle.
54. To improve and enhance the mechanisms of ensuring feedback with wide layers of the society, receiving feedback on all parties of the activity through consistent and continuous communication with the society.
55. To invest clear mechanisms of evaluating and analyzing the efficiency of feedback.
56. To invest system of public good of supplementary/continuous education in the profile and thematic directions of the University, applying the professional and organizational potential of teaching staff and students.

#### **External Relations and Internationalization**

57. To evaluate the initial/basic capacities of the University by ensuring strategic planning with feasible indicators aimed at vision of internationalization.
58. To review the activity aimed at internationalization by directing the efforts to the targets which can bring systemic benefit to the University.
59. To ensure opportunities of education in foreign languages to students, teaching and administrative staff members which will be the prerequisite for fulfillment of facultative courses,

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<sup>18</sup> This part was re-formulated by the expert panel's initiative. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "To re-equip and replenish classrooms..."

mobility within the framework of professional development program as well as international opportunities.

60. To expand the opportunities of mobility of students and teachers by using the mobility as an opportunity for additional content and methodological modernization, aimed at strategic goals.
61. To enroot the concept of internationalization at home by using the international agreements, internal mobility opportunities and foreign language courses.
62. To activate local and international collaboration, signed contracts/agreements by making evaluation of efficiency of current collaborations.

#### **Internal Quality Assurance System**

63. To revise the IQA system of the University by putting into practice the adapted and approved regulations, and to integrate developed regulatory framework and toolset in one general IQA system.
64. To ensure the purposefulness of evaluation of efficiency of processes carried out within the scope of IQA, as well as the validity of toolset and the definition of quantitative and qualitative data.
65. Based on data generated as a result of application of QA mechanisms, to serve the carried out content analyses and conclusions as a basis for improvement of academic programs and institutional processes.
66. To establish unified system of internal evaluation of efficiency of processes which will generalize all the QA mechanisms and procedures, making them more purposeful.
67. By means of professional trainings to improve the collaboration among QA Division, QA responsible staff members and structural units by fostering the increase of general apprehension and awareness on QA processes.
68. To activate the involvement of external and internal stakeholders in QA processes by transferring from passive role to involvement as partners.
69. To clarify and improve the accumulation, analysis and dissemination of data.
70. To invest flexible mechanisms of identifying and dissemination best practice.

### **PEER-REVIEW FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EDUCATION INSTITUTION'S INTEGRATION INTO EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA**

#### **Observations**

As an educational institution, ASPU has rich traditions and it gradually expands the scope of its investment in the spheres of research and social services. The current SP is the second strategic plan of the University. Unfortunately there isn't any analysis of the previous SP. Instead, there are analyses of micro- and macro- factors, full of general ideas which, however, are not applicable to the University. Although the new SP mentions 7 clearly set strategic goals, the KPIs are still very vague and are often not defined as specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) indicators. There are

neither clear targeted quantitative indicators, nor clearly set deadlines which would enable the monitoring of progress. The budget is not made in alignment with the goals and priorities.

ASPU suggests vast diversity of academic programs and the aim of many of them is to prepare specialists who have theoretical knowledge, practical skills and have dealt with any kind of research (mainly pedagogical research). Students' load is measured by the application of ECTS. However, the changes made in courses, operation of Google Classroom or revision of internship haven't influenced the number of already allocated credits. It is hard to imagine that such considerable changes haven't had any impact on students' load; this brings out illogical situations.

In recent years LOs have been defined for all academic programs. However, everyday activities and work style are not always in line with written documents. Consequently, LOs are not consistently applied which would be the basis for selection of respective teaching and learning forms and objective assessment, thus giving an opportunity to check if the LOs are attained or not. In case of internship the LOs are checked more generically which is a very narrow approach.

The student-centered learning is mainly focused on student participation, good relations and reduction of social distance between teachers and students. In different governing bodies student representativeness forms about 25%. In practice few students participate in meetings according to sign-up sheets though the opportunity of participation is provided. Students' voice is heard and they have mentioned teachers' willingness to support and help students as a strong point. The learning and teaching strategies and methods are still teacher-centered.

On the other hand, the University is ready to get adjusted with each student and it takes into consideration students' individual needs. ASPU creates respective conditions for students to get adapted with the context and environment of the University.

Great attention is paid to the processes of attracting, recruiting and selecting students. The initiatives of orientation in RA schools are efficient but they mainly depend on teachers' personal initiatives and links.

ASPU also carries out significant activities in the direction of providing information and support to students for their employment and vacancies. It is quite weird that academic progress is not given much importance to. The dismissal from the University is often conditioned by the non-payment of tuition fees and not by poor academic performance.

The University has established tight links with foreign HEIs among which the most significant one is the collaboration with Pázmány Péter Catholic University (Hungary). Besides, ASPU also cooperates with HEIs of Belarus, China, Czech Republic, Finland, Lithuania, Russia, Switzerland. The University organizes master classes and summer schools to attract leading foreign specialists from abroad. Student exchange programs still have potential to expand. The same can be said about staff mobility.

The University works in the direction of internationalization but it can increase the impact of its actions through clearly set policy on internationalization which will cover different aspects of internationalization, including partnership with universities, awarding joint and double diplomas, mobility of students and staff, implementation of processes of "internationalization at home".

The teaching staff is very motivated and makes efforts to fulfill all the functions involved in the scope of their responsibilities. Teachers' load is very high and some of them teach up to 17 subjects. The financial situation as well as the fact that it is very difficult to provide remuneration in compliance with international standards hinder the University to invite specialists from abroad.

The University has developed rating system of teachers through which teachers are individually evaluated based on peer-reviewed class observations. Although the idea itself is worth to be appreciated, teachers don't apply it fully. They don't criticize each other and the opinion received through feedback is almost always positive. That is why teacher training can also be not linked with evaluation results.

It is necessary to ensure the link of evaluation-rating-training-promotion of teachers in order to ensure their professional development.

Since 2015 the University makes investment in the direction of technical re-equipment of classrooms and labs as well as investment and operation of Google Classroom in all courses.

The support provided to students mainly depends of teachers and guides, and teachers' load is already very high.

Student selection is not based on quality; ASPU is dependent on students mainly because of the financial resources which students allocate to the University. Theoretically the University can organize admission and not admit students but this will result in decrease of number of students and reduction of financial means which are generated from students' tuition fees. Hence, it is difficult to prepare high quality alumni with rational scientific and research skills. This is a problem not only for ASPU but also for all other HEIs of RA.

The University makes great investment in providing information to wide layers of the society; ASPU has a website, "Pedagogical University" official newspaper, "Success Formula" TV show and "Phama" radio. However, the involvement of external stakeholders is still limited and mainly conditioned by links established with schools and other institutions acting in the spheres of art and culture.

The University conducts different surveys with the aim to reveal opinions of both internal (staff, students) and external (alumni, employers) stakeholders. The survey results are taken into account in the development of action plans. At the same time ASPU could present/discuss with stakeholders the information received through feedback about how survey results can be applied.

Although all the academic programs have been revised, benchmarking processes have been limited by comparison of list of subjects without analysis of the context and content. Besides, different programs are sometimes implemented in the same sphere and some of them are organized for big and some of them – for few number of students.

The external cyclic quality assurance is carried out by ANQA. The IQA is in the stage of development. A number of activities are still in the stages of planning and implementation.

The quality is evaluated by conduction of surveys, e.g. through "Teacher in the Eyes of Students" survey which is conducted among students to evaluate teachers. Changes are made but their impact is not monitored. QA policies have been developed which, however, are not implemented in a coordinated way. When a question on QA actions was asked, the main answer was that the University has made changes in the direction of quality improvement but it is not often clear on which bases the changes have been made and how their impact will be monitored.

### **Recommendations**

- It is necessary to define clear KPIs for the fulfillment of strategic goals, to organize monitoring and follow-up actions, to analyze the results and ensure their transparency.

- It is necessary to focus more on the definition of strategic goals and to be more realistic in terms of attaining short-term goals.
- It is necessary to make attempts to be positioned as a higher education institution taking into consideration the current development tendencies in the field of RA education. The University can have its own role in public discussions and influence economic, social and cultural development. Besides, paying attention to the development of capacities relating the European community can help students to become leaders for coming generations.
- With respect to governance, horizontal and vertical communication lines within the institution could be made more structural and the decision-making process could be more explicitly described as either top-down or bottom-up or as a combination of both.
- It is necessary to continue the activities directed to the maintenance of academic honesty, to take steps towards prevention of plagiarism and to create an environment ensuring academic freedom and autonomy both for the whole University and all of its staff members.
- Although the students really participate in governance of the University, it is desirable to further stimulate more their participation. It is desirable to actively involve students in all governing bodies of the University and to ensure their factual presence in meetings. By providing opportunities to students (e.g. non-attendance of classes for reasonable excuses with the aim to fulfill the responsibilities set by student representativeness, provision of additional hours to fulfill assignments, opportunity to change time-schedule of examinations, etc.), the University can facilitate the activity of student representativeness.
- A valuable exercise has been carried out to define LOs. The next step would be to use them as a basis to redesign actual courses and align them with learning and teaching methodologies and forms of assessment.
- The University should be aware that education and science are inseparable. Research should accompany the educational process and should be in line with teaching activity. The University should keep this connection in the center of attention and secure the sequence of generations of teachers and researchers.
- It is highly recommended to ensure teaching staff's professional development, to stimulate to try out new innovative and student-centered learning and teaching methods.
- Google Classroom could be used even more to differentiate learning and teaching for different types of students, and so dealing with diversity in the student population.
- The University should try to invest in (extra-curricular, online,...) modules that enable applicants to reach the desired starting level. In this way, the heterogeneity of the group can be lowered and teaching will become more effective.
- The University should focus on international contacts, instead of quantity, with well-chosen and highly qualitative collaborations. More is not necessarily better.
- The University should invest in language proficiency of students and staff so that the offer of courses provided in English or Russian can be extended, thus increasing the inflow of students to ASPU.
- It is necessary to make investment in direction of assurance of students' international mobility by efficiently selecting some international partners, as well as to develop mobility windows and curricula which will be attractive to foreign students.

- It is necessary to promote teaching staff to participate in international exchange program by proposing stimulation means, e.g. lessened/decreased load, higher rate, higher salary or higher position.
- Language classes organized by the University can help outgoing students to better prepare for their stay/study abroad.
- It is necessary to verify whether it would be possible to reduce the number of programs by merging them into one with a more wide scale, possibly with a number of majors in the Master. It could help to reallocate teaching staff and make lower the workload of teachers.
- It is necessary to add some modern skills and specialist methodologies of teaching to programs because internships in public schools don't prepare for that (more conservative approach is applied).
- It is necessary to continue to involve external stakeholders in the processes of elaboration, development and evaluation of academic programs and curricula in order to certify that ASPU alumni will be directly involved in/employed in the labor market.
- The University should take into consideration that quality assurance is much more than making changes from time to time.
- The University should provide systematic feedback on what has been done with the outcomes of surveys, monitoring initiatives and action plans, i.e. on the internal quality assurance process to all stakeholders.

**11 October 2019**

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Christine Soghikyan

**Signature of Chair of Expert Panel**

## DESCRIPTION EXTERNAL REVIEW

### COMPOSITION OF EXPERT PANEL

The external evaluation of the ASPU's self-evaluation and internal quality assurance processes was carried out by the following members of the expert panel (see the Appendix 1 - CVs of expert panel members):

- **Christine Soghikyan** - Head of Chair of English Communication and Translation of Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences, Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor
- **Narine Khachatryan** - Head of Chair of Personality Psychology of Yerevan State University, Candidate of Psychological Sciences, Associate Professor
- **Gagik Ktryan** - Deputy Head of Information and Public Relations Department of the Ministry of Defence, Candidate of Physical and Mathematical Sciences
- **Pieter Luis Jozef Caris** - Senior Policy Adviser of the Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), Doctor of Natural Sciences
- **Srbuhi Michikyan** - 4<sup>th</sup>-year student, Faculty of Sociology, Yerevan State University

The activities of the expert panel were coordinated by Ani Mkrtchyan, Senior Specialist of Institutional and Program Accreditation Division, responsible for ANQA Internal Quality Assurance.

The translation was provided by Ani Shahinyan, Specialist of Center for Quality Assurance and Reforms of Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences.

The composition of the expert panel was agreed upon with the University and was appointed by the ANQA Director.

All the members of the expert panel, including the translator and the coordinator, signed agreements of confidentiality and independence.

### PROCESS OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW

#### Application of State Accreditation

ASPU applied to ANQA for institutional accreditation by submitting the application form, the copies of the license and respective appendices.

The ANQA Secretariat examined the data presented in the application form, the attached documents and the ANQA electronic questionnaire completed by the University.

After making decision on submission of application request (15.11.2018) a bilateral agreement between ANQA and the University was signed (10.12.2018). The time-schedule of activities was compiled and approved.

In accordance with the format set by ANQA, the University presented the Armenian and English versions of its self-evaluation report and the package of attached documents within the deadlines set by the time-schedule.

The self-evaluation was carried out by the team formed by the order of ASPU Rector.

### **Preparatory Phase**

The ANQA coordinator examined the report with the aim to check its correspondence with the technical requirements set by ANQA. Afterwards the ANQA Secretariat sent the self-evaluation report to the expert panel the composition of which was agreed upon with the University in advance and was approved by the order of ANQA Director.

In order to prepare the expert panel for the upcoming activities and to ensure the efficiency of processes, the ANQA conducted trainings in the following topics:

1. the RA Regulation on Accreditation, criteria and standards,
2. main functions of expert panel members,
3. preliminary evaluation as a preparatory phase for the expert panel report, main requirements set for preparation of the report,
4. methodology of review of documents and examination of resources,
5. ethics and techniques of conducting meetings and setting questions.

Having observed the self-evaluation and the attached documents of the University, the expert panel made a preliminary evaluation according to the set form. The lists of additional documents for further observation as well as questions and issues for further clarification by mentioning respective structural units and target groups were formed.

Within the scheduled time the expert panel summarized the results of the preliminary evaluation and formed a time-schedule of the site-visit<sup>19</sup>. In accordance with the ANQA manual on expertise, the time-schedule comprised the planned meetings with all the groups, close and open meetings, review of documents, visits to structural units of the University, etc.

### **ASPU Self-evaluation**

In accordance with the format set by ANQA, the University presented the Armenian and English versions of its self-evaluation report and the package of attached documents in 14.03.2019. The self-evaluation mostly comprised general and descriptive information, was not based on analyses and did not emphasize the achievements of the University.

### **Preliminary Visit**

The preliminary visit was made two weeks prior to the site-visit by the expert panel (08.05.2019) by participation of the Chair of the expert panel, Head of Institutional and Program Accreditation Division and Coordinator of the expertise process. During the preliminary visit the time-schedule of the expert panel site-visit was agreed upon with the University. The list of additional documents for further observation and the list of participants were presented. The expert panel discussed a number of organizational, technical and informational issues relating them and those concerning the conduct and ethical norms of participants of meetings, and respective decisions were made. The rooms for the activity of the expert group and focus group meetings were observed, and the issues on furniture and technical equipment of the rooms were clarified.

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<sup>19</sup>APPENDIX 2. Agenda of expert panel site-visit for ASPU institutional accreditation



### Site-visit by Expert Panel

The site-visit took place from 20-24 May 2019. The site-visit started and was closed with the meetings with the Rector with the aim to discuss, agree upon and clarify the frame of expertise, the issues to be examined during the site-visit, the strong and weak points of the University according to the criteria and the procedure of meetings with focus groups with the international expert.

All the members of the expert panel, ANQA coordinator and the translator were present at the site-visit.

The site-visit was started and closed with the meetings with the Rector. In order to clarify some issues, the representatives of the teaching staff, students, deans, heads of chairs, employers and alumni who participated in organized focus group meetings were selected from the list provided beforehand by the University on a random basis. According to the planning, all the meetings and observations of classes and defenses of final papers and theses set by the time-schedule were carried out. During the site-visit the expert panel carried out review of documents<sup>20</sup>, observation of resources<sup>21</sup> and conducted focus group meetings in different structural units.

The information obtained during different meetings as well as the main results of observations and documentation review were summed at the end of each day and in the final meeting organized upon the end of the site-visit. The expert panel discussed the main results and came into agreement on meeting the requirements of the standards and afterwards the criteria of accreditation. In the closed final session of the expert panel the summaries and final conclusions on satisfaction or dissatisfaction of criteria were agreed upon among all members of the expert panel through open discussion based on consensus.

### Expert Panel Report

The expert panel prepared the draft of the expert panel report which was based on the self-evaluation of the University, attached documents and observations of the expert-panel, as a result of regularly organized discussions. Based on the observations of discussions, the Chair of the expert panel and ANQA coordinator prepared the draft report which was agreed with the expert panel members. The international expert prepared his conclusion and a separate document on peer-review opinion. The mentioned documents were translated and provided to the Chair of the expert panel. The responsibility to involve the international expert's opinion and approaches in the expert panel report lied on the Chair of the expert panel and the Coordinator. The opinion of the peer-review was fully involved in the content of the report. **The draft version of the generalized report which was agreed upon among all local members of the expert panel was translated and sent to the international expert. Based on his comments, the draft report was re-edited and it presents the main outcomes, considerations and recommendations.**

**The draft report was presented to the University on 24 July 2019.**

The University sent its feedback on the draft report to ANQA on 13 September 2019. The University presented its remarks and comments in Armenian which were provided to the local experts and were discussed with the international expert. On 4 October 2019 ANQA organized a meeting for the representatives of the University and the expert panel during which the expert panel's response was presented. Taking into consideration the University's remarks and comments, the expert panel prepared the final version of the report which was approved by the panel on 11 October 2019. The footnotes relating to the changes made in the draft report by the expert panel are presented on respective pages.

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<sup>20</sup> Appendix 3. List of observed documents

<sup>21</sup> Appendix 4. Resources observed by the expert panel

11 October 2019

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Ani Mkrtchyan  
Signature of the Coordinator

## EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

### BRIEF INFORMATION ABOUT THE EDUCATION INSTITUTION

**HISTORY** – GSPU was established in 1922 and since 1948 it carries the name of the great illuminator and pedagogue Khachatur Abovyan. Based on the RA Government Decree N 138 as of 4 February 2016, "Armenian State Pedagogical University after Khachatur Abovyan" state non-profit organization was re-structured into "Armenian State Pedagogical University after Khachatur Abovyan".

The teaching staff of ASPU is recruited with academicians from the RA National Academic of Sciences, over 400 Doctors and Candidates of Sciences, Professors and Associate Professors teach at ASPU.

The main structural units of the University are faculties, chairs, departments, educational-scientific centers, institutes, services, scientific library and 3D museum. There are newly established scientific-research institute of Chess and institute after A. Pushkin, "Diaspora" scientific-educational center, scientific-research laboratories of Psychology, new materials of Quantum Electronics and Integral Optics and "Nayiri" Engineering, the international institute of Metaphilosophy and Argumentation Theory and other research structural units. The basic school N 57 and high school-college are parts of ASPU.

The mission of ASPU is as follows: "Armenian State Pedagogical University 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".

While carrying out its activities, ASPU is led by Strategic Development Plan 2016-2020 (hereinafter referred to as SP). The aspirations and ambitions of the University are defined in the self-evaluation report and in the SP.

**EDUCATION** – Since 2004-2005 the University implements 99 academic programs in the fields of Natural Sciences, Humanities, Social Sciences and Art in full-time and part-time forms of education for BA (44), MA (55) and postgraduate (5) degrees. There are over 9000 students studying at ASPU. Currently there are 10 faculties with 43 professional chairs among 7 of which are pan-university chairs.

In its mission, among other highlights relating the sphere of education, the University emphasizes the followings:

- to provide academic programs equipped with modern technology and methodology, in compliance with students' academic needs and labor market requirements,
- to invest innovative educational process by ensuring the preparation of specialists with high qualification in the field of Pedagogy based on wide-scale application of technologies of online, electronic education, by using the educational information technologies in all academic programs and forms of education at ASPU.

The following formulated objectives derive from the goal:

- to make transformation of professional academic programs in compliance with the National and European Qualifications Frameworks and current requirements of the labor market,
- to ensure the unit of educational process, research and creative activities,
- to establish professional development schools and to invest unified mechanisms of internship, career and learning orientation and quality assurance.

**RESEARCH** – In the field of research the University has set the following strategic goal:

- to develop the scientific-research activity of the University, to create competitive scientific and innovative potential, to gradually make a transition to the research status of the University.

The following objectives have been formulated for the fulfillment of the goal:

- to foster the increase of efficiency of scientific-research activities of the University,
- to foster the increase of efficiency of scientific-publication activity,
- to contribute to the preparation and training of scientific staff/researchers in the University,
- to support the transition of intellectual outcomes and dissemination of leading practice of education.

**INTERNATIONALIZATION** – The expansion of international activity is considered to be the 7<sup>th</sup> strategic direction. The latter aims to ensure the comprehensive development of ASPU's external relations and to foster internationalization. The following objective are formulated:

- to expand and diversify the external relations of the University, to foster continuous processes of internationalization in collaboration with European universities and higher education international institutions at institutional and program levels,
- to expand the scope of international scientific collaboration, to strive for integration of the University into European research area,
- to foster the increase of number of foreign students at ASPU.

**QUALITY ASSURANCE** – In this sphere ASPU hasn't defined a strategic direction as such while it has reflected upon it as an objective under the direction of "Newest Approaches of Higher Education", in particular, to increase the efficiency of structures and processes of internal QA system. The goals and objectives of ASPU's QA system are defined in the policy on ASPU internal quality assurance.

The formulated objectives are as follows:

- to provide instructions to the ASPU's administrative staff and other representatives of structural units of the University with the aim to develop and invest internal quality assurance procedures,
- to provide instructions with the aim to develop internal quality assurance criteria in compliance with international criteria,
- to ensure prerequisites for creation of quality culture,
- to maintain the achievements reached in the sphere of pedagogical education, national peculiarities and basic knowledge, i.e. to provide contemporary high quality education for the state, society and individuals in all three levels of professional higher education,
- to ensure the integration of ASPU into the European Higher Education Area by means of flexible procedures and mechanisms of education quality assurance and to increase the University's attraction,

- to foster and contribute to the integration of research into teaching and learning processes, to ensure students' involvement in them,
- to foster and promote the investment of culture of continuous quality improvement,
- to elaborate criteria with universities implementing similar academic programs, aimed at making comparisons and disseminating best practice.

While making evaluation, the expert panel has been led by the principle on "**Compliance with Goals**" and has observed the above mentioned information as the main ambitions and goals of the University.

## CRITERION I. MISSION AND GOALS

**CRITERION: The policies and procedures of the institution are in accordance with the institution's mission which is in line with ANQF.**

### FINDINGS

#### **1.1 The institution has a clear, well-articulated mission that represents the Institution's purposes and goals and is in accordance with National Qualifications Framework (hereafter NQF).**

ASPU has revised its previous mission in the Strategic Plan 2016-2020 by setting the following formulation: "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 mentioned mission of the University involves a wide scope of activities and it goes out of the function framework of preparing pedagogues. However, the expertise states that irrespective of the change made in the mission, the University continues to be led by the previous mission- the provision which states that ASPU is a pedagogical university. The studied academic programs contain psychological-pedagogical educational component, the main form of internship is the pedagogical internship, and there is a pedagogical-research component in the research educational block. The main teaching staff is unchangeable. In meetings with the expert panel the students and teachers as well as other stakeholders identified ASPU with a pedagogical university, and the majority of the University's external stakeholders, especially employers, are the schools. In fact, the content of education, teaching staff and profile of external stakeholders, i.e. employers, have remain unchanged.

According to the new SP, ASPU has an ambition to be developed in the new direction – to become a research university which was also re-stated by the ASPU rector in the site visit. Within the scope of the new mission and the mentioned strategic goal the University strives to develop its scientific potential, to establish additional leading scientific institutes and to make investment for assurance of the link between learning and teaching.

In the SP 2016-2020 7 prioritized strategic directions are mentioned and some of which indirectly relate to the implementation of BA and MA academic programs which meet the requirements set by the descriptors of the NQF 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> levels, in particular, "High Quality Innovative Approaches", "Modern Research and Innovation", "Human Resource Management", "Oriented Applicants and Learners",

“Efficient Governance, Financial Sustainability, Modern Infrastructure”, etc. These prioritized directions put forward the ambitions of the University – to solve educational problems set for the new generation by means of investment of modern educational technologies, innovation, student-centered learning and modern teaching methods. In the previous accreditation period the University was recommended to be more specific in defining the SP goals and quantitative and qualitative indicators, however, the study of the SP and action plan showed the non-measurable, and in some cases the unrealistic character of a number of goals and objectives deriving from them especially under conditions of lack of grounds for quantitative KPIs and unplanned resources for implementation of specific strategic objectives. The University takes steps towards ensuring available education to all social groups and providing professional orientation to applicants and learners. According to the SP, it has been planned to revise all the academic programs so that their compliance with the NQF and the requirements of labor market be certified.

## **1.2. The mission statement, goals and objectives of the Institution reflects the needs of the internal and external stakeholders.**

The University has a separate document - “Involvement and Evaluation of Needs of ASPU external and Internal Stakeholders” which defines students, teaching and support staff, applicants, alumni, employers, society and governing bodies as ASPU stakeholders. The University makes evaluation of needs of internal and external stakeholders by means of different surveys, sometimes – by personal initiatives of stakeholders and raised questions as well.

In discussions among different groups of stakeholders and collegial bodies of the University questions are sometimes raised which to some extent ensure that the University takes into consideration its stakeholders’ needs. Surveys are considered to be another mechanism of stakeholders’ needs assessment. The internal stakeholders are involved in the process of development of action plans set by the SP in mediated ways and in different formats. Although the mechanisms of involving external stakeholders are numerated in the regulation on “Involvement and Evaluation of Needs of ASPU external and Internal Stakeholders”, in the site-visit it was clear that they are not applied, and the University hasn’t factually ensured external stakeholders’ active participation in the development of the mission and the SP, and the actions of needs assessment have been formal.

In the site-visit the internal stakeholders mainly stated that they are satisfied with the reflection of their needs in the SP. They are also satisfied with the fact that the University hasn’t increased the amount of tuition fees, taking into consideration the affordability of the wide layers of the society and target groups. However, the current level of tuition fees ensures the survival/assurance of resources and it doesn’t generate means directed to the development.

The identification of students’ needs is also promoted by the Student Council of the University which regularly organizes discussions and meetings with the aim to receive and transfer information about students’ concerns.

During the site-visit the external stakeholders stated that their link with ASPU is poor, and even in some governing bodies there are difficulties concerning the investment of vision and needs of wide layers of the society in the mission or governance processes of ASPU, as well as the fact that their needs are not always clearly reflected.

It should be highlighted that in the analyses/studies of external stakeholders' needs the alumni's needs are not presented. As the site-visit showed, that the primary employers of ASPU – schools, are motivated to activate their collaboration with the University. The external stakeholders state that there is a gap between the education which the University currently implements and the factual requirements as far as in fact the academic programs transfer more theoretical knowledge rather than formulate practical skills.

### **1.3 The Institution has set mechanisms and procedures to evaluate the achievement of its mission and goals and further improve them.**

The currently implemented SP is not based on the analysis of results of the SP 2010-2015. Such analysis is not available; instead, the document on “Analysis of Micro- and Macro- Factors Influencing RA Higher Education, 2010-2015” sets general issues which do not reflect the SP of the University's previous phase and especially its factual performance.

The SP 2016-2020 contains predetermined objectives directed to the implementation of goals which (the objectives) are summed by KPIs. The University has developed an Action Plan of the SP 2016-2020 by defining the steps, deadlines, responsible staff members, necessary resources, outcomes and KPIs. In this plan the KPIs are not concrete either and have too generic formulation and they do not always involve the scopes of the implementation of the given objective. The processes carried out in ASPU are not always aimed at the efficiency quantitative indicator of the goal set by the SP. For example, the measurable criteria and indicators fostering research, especially scientific potential and capacities are missing.

The deadline set for the implementation of the SP 2016-2020 comes to its end. For the period of 2017-2018 the University has taken the initiative to compile a report on the process of SP action plan which serves as a clarifying intermediate mechanism. However, there isn't any analysis clarifying the indicators and indices in the mentioned report.

The main mechanism of evaluating the efficiency of fulfillment of the mission and strategic goals is the system of accountability, according to the hierarchy presented in the organigram. However, it should be noted that these reports are informative and descriptive, they register carried out activities and facts, and references to SP goals and progress indicators are mainly missing.

In the upcoming year – 2020, the deadline of the ASPU SP will be completed. In the meetings organized within the framework of the site-visit the top management of the University stated that “the SP goals are almost achieved”.

### **CONSIDERATIONS**

The expert panel positively evaluates the characterization of the University's mission, development of strategic goals based on the mission, some prioritized directions, spheres and orientations. However, it should be emphasized that the newly re-formulated mission is generic and it includes almost all fields of activities, at the same time isolating and subordinating the main and traditional inseparable description of the institution – the fact of being a pedagogical university which is reflected in the name of the University. That is to say, ASPU doesn't position itself in the RA higher education system, doesn't specify itself as an institution which implements pedagogical education, speaks about pedagogical values which form only some little aspect of the pedagogue's capacities. Such a disagreement of the University's

mission, name and traditional public apprehension can lead to the neglect of its own characteristic which is the traditional strength of the University as well as the deterioration of ASPU profile to become more attractive to applicants as a result of the pursuit of immediate economic interest. The expert panel especially gives importance to this point taking into consideration the fact that education, related disciplines and pedagogy are essential disciplines for today's society and in this very field the University can claim to be a pioneer and role player which shapes opinion in the whole Republic of Armenia. Unfortunately, for the current period the expert panel registers that the University's orientation and vision are not directed to undertaking the leading role.

Nevertheless, such a change in direction can also be worrisome in a sense that irrespective of re-formulation of the mission both the content of education and the staff have eventually remained unchanged. Although the employers and alumni highlight the importance of pedagogical experience and point out the imperative of application of students' pedagogical knowledge and development of their practical skills, and the external stakeholders apprehend the University as an education institution which prepares pedagogues, the ASPU top management is more inclined to make investment in the direction of research. As the site-visit showed, the visions of external representatives of the ASPU Board of Trustees (which in fact is a body which approves the development policy of the University) and the representatives of the top management diverge which endangers the clearly proclaimed development of the University. The President of the Board of Trustees emphasized the steps taken towards enhancement of education quality – to upgrade the threshold under existing conditions, to avoid recruiting students for ensuring income.

In addition, with the new mission and the SP the University becomes too ambitious – to become a research university. Such a development ambition is risky in a sense that the discrepancies emerged under conditions of limited achievements of staff in the field of research, imperfection of staff promotion mechanisms, limited financial and technological resources and stakeholders' needs will lead to insurmountable obstacles, thus endangering the fulfillment of the SP.

Taking into consideration the fact that the majority of ASPU alumni are employed as teachers, especially in elementary schools and in the sphere of special education, the University can have a very beneficial position by becoming a monopolist. At the same time, the expert panel highlights that currently the University doesn't comprise a number of main spheres of education and pedagogy. By covering the whole aspect of education, related disciplines and pedagogy in its mission, the University can ensure its sustainable and continuous activity in the sphere in which it has traditionally had competitive advantage. Besides, the fundamental change of priorities and values would foster the sustainable and continuous activity of the University by means of refusing part-time education system, defining higher threshold for admission and academic performance as well as **defining more realistic load for teaching staff**<sup>22</sup> as a result of which ASPU would ensure higher level of quality, thus creating higher (including economic) value.

The expert panel positively evaluates the initiatives which the University has taken towards the SP, its implementation and development of actions. However, the fact that the new SP hasn't been

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<sup>22</sup> This part was re-formulated by the expert panel's initiative. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "...as well as defining higher threshold for admission and academic performance as a result of which..."



developed based on the performance results of the previous strategic plan, states about the fact that the continuity of ASPU's long-term vision and steps directed to the vision is deteriorated.

The overgeneralization of the University's mission, the comprehensiveness of strategic direction, the defined goals and objectives not based on SMART as well as the distribution of current resources which are not linked to the SP goals reduce the probability of fulfillment of the goals and impede the addressability/targetedness of the mentioned activities. Besides, it must be mentioned that the SP goals are not reflected in programs of all structural units of the University and are not either linked with the units' activities which endangers the undertaking of responsibility to fulfill the defined goals at all levels.

It is commendable that with the aim to develop and fulfill strategic goals, the University gives importance to the collaboration with internal and external stakeholders. The stakeholders have mainly had an indirect participation in processes of their needs assessment and SP development. In spite of the conducted surveys, it is necessary to improve the flexible involvement of both internal and external stakeholders in the mentioned processes. The opportunities of participation are especially poor because of inefficient feedback with external stakeholders which endangers the cooperation with external stakeholders, particularly with the labor market, thus decreasing the efficiency of processes relating meeting and responding labor market requirements, selecting of in-use academic programs, defining economic demand and improving academic programs.

The expert panel finds that the accountability mechanism of evaluating the results of fulfillment of the University's current mission and goals needs to be improved. The hierarchical bottom-top accountability which registers facts should not be the only way of evaluation. The University's experience in investing the mechanism of interim evaluation of the SP performance needs to be improved and disseminated. Besides, the descriptive and immeasurable character of progress indicators which serve as an evidence base for the SP provisions, descriptive/documentary character of reports, lack of their (including interim report 2017-2018) further analyses, immeasurability of outcomes of the structural units' activities as well as absence of clear indicators for evaluating qualitative results hinder the evaluation of efficiency of activities carried out by the University and its structural units.

The expert panel positively evaluates the program budget experience which, however, hasn't been put into practice yet. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that the financial planning is clearly linked with the SP, the absence of quantitative and qualitative analyses impedes the substantiation of efficacy of resource use directed to the fulfillment of the goals, thus putting under risk the further improvement of the SP and efficiency of long-term development.

Nonetheless, the expert panel emphasizes that ASPU didn't manage to fulfill the major part of its SP especially in terms of defined KPIs relating the involvement of stakeholders, research and directions of internationalization.

**SUMMARY.** Taking into consideration the existence of the formulated mission, strategic directions which are in compliance with the mission, objectives and "necessary steps" which derive from the SP goals, the general compliance of the mission with the NQF, activity which is in alignment with the mission, the existence of some evaluation mechanisms as well as partial actions taken by the University directed to the involvement of stakeholders, the expert panel finds that the University **meets** the requirements of the Criterion 1.

**CONCLUSION.** The expert panel evaluates the compliance of ASPU institutional capacities with the requirements of the Criterion 1 as *satisfactory*.

## CRITERION II. GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

**CRITERION:** The institution's system of governance, administrative structures and their activities are efficient and are aimed at the accomplishment of mission and goals of the institution preserving ethical norms of governance.

### FINDINGS

**2.1. The Institution's system of governance ensures structured decision-making process, in accordance with defined ethical rules and has efficient provision of human, material and financial resources to accomplish its educational and other purposes.**

The combination of principles of autonomy, solitary and collegial governance, approved by the Charter serves as a basis for the governance of ASPU. The highest bodies of the University are the Board of Trustees (24 members) and the Scientific Council (up to 70 members) who are selected for the 5-year term. Currently, taking into consideration the national changes relatively made in recent times, the President of the Board of Trustees states that the mentioned governing body doesn't act efficiently which is conditioned by the fact that the discussions on the development of ASPU in the Board of Trustees don't give any results as far as the ASPU representatives, as a rule, vote against the proposed changes, and the opinions **often** diverge<sup>23</sup>. The current governance is carried out by the Rector, and the Rectorate attached to the Rector acts as an advisory body. The governing bodies and structural units act based on approved regulations and charters. Apart from the Scientific Council and the Rectorate there are Faculty Councils which make decisions relating administrative and educational-scientific spheres.

The ASPU organizational structure and its changes are approved by the Board of Trustees. In the site-visit it turned out that sometimes one and the same staff member or the unit is responsible for a number of processes. In the governance system there are structural units the functional significance of which is not clarified, or the functions overlap (e.g. University-Employer Center and Internship Division), or the factually acting structure is not reflected in the organizational structure (e.g. Student Scientific Association). In the organization structure there are some units which do not carry out activity (e.g. Internal Audit Division). According to the organizational structure, the subordinations and autonomous levels are not differentiated. The horizontal links are not visible in the organizational structure; the horizontal links and frame of interaction among different structural units are not defined. It is notable that the faculties are under immediate supervision of the Rector.

Prior to the site-visit, the University made analysis of efficiency of its organizational structure which is a descriptive document based on other documents and reflecting the structure of the University, but it doesn't put forward the problems of the organizational structure, the repetitions of functions and doesn't elaborate on the ways of their solution or the problems emerged as a result of omitted functions.

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<sup>23</sup> This part was re-formulated as a result of ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "...and the opinions always diverge."

It should be mentioned that the organizational structure has recently been revised as it was recommended in the previous accreditation. However, the analysis of its efficiency wasn't considered as a basis for the revision. In particular, as a result of termination of activities of structural units the functions were transferred to other units without taking into consideration their workload, the opportunities and their capacities to efficiently fulfill those functions. For instance, the functions of the structural unit which is responsible for strategic planning, analysis and reporting, have been put onto the Department of Management and Improvement of Educational Processes. The need for division of functions aimed at their efficient fulfillment is also stated by the mentioned Department. In the site-visit it was difficult for the top management of the University to bring any substantiation about why the Internal Audit Division was closed, meanwhile the Division is still presented in the list of positions.

There are documents which regulate the different processes and activities of different structural units. In particular, while fulfilling their functions, the governing bodies are led by regulations and procedures which relate to administration, educational services, research, international relations, quality assurance and partnership with stakeholders.

The ASPU governance system mainly ensures regulated process of decision making, however, as it was turned out in the site-visit, the main stakeholders are passive in participating in decision-making processes. There are no separate ethical rules developed for the coordinated organization of decision-making processes. Nonetheless, the regulations and procedures are mainly available online.

ASPU has developed job descriptions which specify the functions of the support staff.

With the aim to fulfill educational and other goals, ASPU allocated material and human resources. The HR planning is carried out according to the list of positions but the University doesn't make analyses of sufficiency of HR, compliance of goals and functions as well as efficiency of HR performance. The structural units are provided with material resources in accordance with applications and budget allowance. The analyses of sufficiency of existing human, material and financial resources are not coordinated. No internal audit on financial-economic activity is carried out, only external financial audit is made in ASPU. The financial planning in accordance with strategic directions is missing though in advance of the accreditation the University tried to compile suchlike draft based on recommendations provided in the previous accreditation. However, the estimate draft linked with the SP directions is not approved yet. The University considers the lack of financial means as one of the essential challenges and points out that the scarce of financial resources also hinders the fulfillment of some strategic goals.

## **2.2. The Institution's system of governance gives an opportunity to students and the teaching staff to take part in decision making procedures.**

The regulatory base of ASPU gives an opportunity to teachers and students (25%) to be involved in the governing collegial bodies – in Board of Trustees, Scientific Council, Faculty Councils and Rectorate. This way internal stakeholders are directly or indirectly provided an opportunity to participate in the process of the University's governance, discussion of issues and related decision making. The Student Council, as a self-governing student body, proposes and selects representatives of students to be involved in ASPU collegial governing bodies. But no studies on efficiency of mechanisms through which stakeholders are involved in the above mentioned governing bodies are carried out. Representatives of teachers and students have been involved in working groups established for the

development and revision of the SP and academic programs. But as the meetings with students showed, their initiative and interest towards processes of making decisions by the governing bodies is poor. Students don't take much initiative to make changes or proposals on improvement of the University (although some changes have been made based on students' proposals). The meetings with the stakeholders also showed that students who have participated in the meetings do not realize their role in the decision-making process. The self-evaluation report of the University also points out that although there are mechanisms which give teachers and students an opportunity to participate in processes of making decisions which relate to them, those mechanisms don't fully function yet and they still have formal character influenced by the tradition or other factors.

The decisions made by the governing bodies are available to ASPU stakeholders through the website of the University. The satisfaction of teachers and students with the process of making decisions relating to them is not studied yet.

### **2.3. The Institution formulates and carries out short-term, mid-term and long term planning consistent with its mission and goals as well as has appropriate mechanisms for the implementation and monitoring of those plans.**

ASPU makes planning at two levels. As a long-term planning, the University has developed the SP and its action plan, and the short-term plan is set for one calendar and/or academic year and it is implemented in all directions of the ASPU's activity. The mid-term planning as such is not carried out. The SP is not divided into mid-term and short-term actions. The University doesn't make clarification of long-term planning based on mid-term planning and evaluation of risks. Some faculties have compiled their own strategic plans by separating the part (from the general ASPU SP) which relates to their activity, however, these documents haven't been put into practice. The reports of faculties are not compiled on the basis of developed plans. In the self-evaluation report the University also mentions that there is a need to bring into compliance the implementation of strategic and operational plans. The gradual reflection of the ASPU's mission and goals in the strategic and work plans of other structural units is not always visible. Moreover, the five-year strategic plans of a number of faculties repeat both the SP provisions and other faculties' plans, and without any adaptation they replicate the ASPU SP provisions which relate to them and they don't link their activity with the SP goals and objectives.

The formats of work plans and reports of different structural units fundamentally differ from each other. At chair level there were some differences in the format of work plans and not all of them were approved by the chair session. There isn't any institutional approach to the compilation of work plans of structural units. Besides, no outcomes and indicators deriving from the SP are defined. ASPU doesn't yet make evaluation to identify to what extent the planning process fosters the efficient fulfillment of the University's mission.

The ASPU budget planning is made for the short-term period, i.e. by formation of estimate for one year which reflects financial inflows and costs according to separate articles for the whole University. From the perspective of efficient achievement of strategic goals the University has made attempts to link the budget with the SP directions and goals in advance to the current accreditation, however, the currently developed estimate draft is not approved yet, and no coordinated financial budget planning in accordance with the strategic goals is made by the University.

The University applies the mechanism of reporting for evaluation and monitoring of results of action plans. All the structural units provide current and annual reports in accordance with the respective hierarchy. The reports are not compiled according to strategic goals although it should be highlighted that the University had adopted a new format of reporting by replicating the format of self-evaluation made by ANQA with some adjustments. The change in format hasn't led to the promotion of analyses, and the reports numerate the factually fulfilled activities. The SP annual reports merely represent the performance of carried out processes. The KPIs haven't been analyzed. There aren't clearly set flexible mechanisms of monitoring the action plans of faculties' development strategic plans and the ASPU SP though it was recommended in the recommendations of the previous accreditation.

#### **2.4. The Institution carried out examination of facts affecting its activities and draws on reliable findings during the decision-making process.**

In the regulation on development and adoption of its SP the University gives importance to the analysis of the current situation among previous phases of the SP development. According to the mentioned regulation, "the Head of the Educational Reforms and QA Department prepares the draft of the order on analysis of evaluation of external and internal environments of the University's current situation, the main threats and opportunities are pointed out, diverse frames of activities are analyzed and the strong and weak points of the University are defined (SWOT analysis and other analytic methods)".

As a result of recommendations provided in the previous accreditation in 2016 the University developed an analysis of micro- and macro- factors influencing the RA higher education, based on the RA National Competitiveness Reports 2010-2015. It describes the general problems of higher education and does not separate concrete problems which relate to ASPU, the possible impacts on its activity and respective options of solution. In fact, the document is descriptive. The analysis results didn't serve as a basis for the selection of strategy or for strategic planning. No in-depth analyses of environmental factors by application of any common toolset of macro-environment scanning are put as a basis for the development of the SP. The process of study of external factors and collection of information has a situational character and it is not regulated by pre-developed procedure or clear methodology. There isn't any analysis of microenvironment by the application of any clear toolset.

There are no other analyses of internal and external factors extracted from data collection specifically influencing the University. The University doesn't carry out regular, coordinated and comprehensive study of factors having impact on its activity yet. Data collection is not carried out in a coordinated way either, and decision making is not based on reliable data. The process of data collection is not interlinked with the processes of development and revision of strategic plans. The efficiency of data collection process is not evaluated.

The University hasn't made full analysis on achievement of results of the previous strategic plan (SP 2011-2015) either. ASPU has also tried to conduct survey among internal and external stakeholders with the aim to identify the factors influencing the quality of learning. In fact, the survey results haven't been taken into account for the basis of the SP development. There are no grounds of further improvement based on the survey results.

## **2.5. The management of the policies and the processes is based on the quality management principle (plan-do-check-act /PDCA/).**

ASPU gives importance to the fulfillment of administration/management based on the quality management principles and in the QA guide it has defined the following stages: a) strategic planning, b) planning according to processes, c) documentation of processes, d) monitoring of education quality, e) internal audit of processes, f) development of criteria set for staff development. However, as the site-visit showed, the PDCA cycle is not completed in main processes. Different management processes are at different stages of PDCA. The administration of a number of processes hasn't reached the last two stages of PDCA – evaluation and improvement which is conditioned by the fact that after the previous accreditation the major part of documents have been developed which have been put into practice only lately. Hence, no respective grounds relating the achievements and evaluations of their efficiency have been presented to the expert panel. After the stages of planning and implementation the evaluation and improvement phases are not carried out based on clear procedure. The structural units don't apply developed indicators of evaluating their activity, deriving from the indicators of evaluation of the SP advancement. Some educational processes are evaluated but they are not carried out based on clear methodology, are not coordinated and purposeful, and the evaluation results do not always serve as a basis for improvement. The improvement actions are not always grounded with valid data. The administration is mainly at the stage of implementation and it is not always in alignment with planning. The University also mentions that the governance processes of different spheres are at different levels of the PDCA cycle.

## **2.6. The Institution has evaluation mechanisms in place ensuring data collection, analyses and application of the data on the effectiveness of the academic programs and other processes.**

Since 2012 the "Procedure of Current Monitoring and Revision of Academic Programs" and evaluation tools have been approved according to which the regular monitoring of academic programs assumes systematic self-study and self-evaluation. The same regulation mentions that "The monitoring is carried out by means of class observations, consultancies with students and teachers and study of information received from questionnaires conducted among teachers and students". However, as a result of study of the ASPU self-evaluation and the site-visit it was clear that the mechanisms which evaluate the accumulation, analysis and application of information on efficiency of factual processes of ASPU are considered to be the discussions on educational and other processes, held in Scientific and Faculty Councils, Rectorate, the class observations, the meetings which are regularly organized with Final Attestation Committees and internship supervisors in organizations (as external stakeholders) as well as the discussions of their reports. Surveys have also been conducted among students and teachers to get feedback on academic programs. However, the methodology of conduction of the mentioned surveys and data analysis is not clear, the representativeness of participants is not always ensured, and the efficiency of the mechanism and toolset is not evaluated. Besides, no comprehensive analysis on efficiency of academic programs with quantitative and qualitative data was presented. After the meetings with the ASPU employers and alumni it was clear that the mechanisms of ensuring feedback with

external stakeholders are **mainly limited by participation in final attestation and internship defence**<sup>24</sup>, and the data on academic programs are mainly provided to external stakeholders in non-formal ways, by personal communication. And not all of them participate in surveys.

Commented [PC1]: mainly

Commented [PC2]: limited to

There are no analyses on validity of the process of data collection. The analyses on made decisions based on collected data are missing either. Currently the University is investing electronic (automated) management system of processes which is also directed to the fulfillment of recommendations provided in the previous accreditation. In 2015-2018 the activities directed to design, development, investment and operation of automatic management system of educational processes were carried out. Currently the development and investment activities are still continuing. Apart from educational processes, the processes of evaluation of efficiency of other processes are not carried out on a regular basis and in a coordinated way, and the QA processes of current mechanisms evaluating the data collection, analysis and application are not defined. The University also mentions that current mechanisms of data collection are not operated in a coordinated way, and in this respect the institutional approach is missing.

## **2.7. There are objective mechanisms in place evaluating the quality of quantitative and qualitative information on the academic programs and qualification awarded.**

Although the clear policy and procedure of disseminating information is missing at ASPU, a number of mechanisms providing information on academic programs and awarded qualifications are applied, in particular, the official website of ASPU, "Pedagogical University" official newspaper, "Success Formula" TV show, Student Guide, booklets and brochures. In order to publicize information, the Rector's reports are published on the website. There are no reliable and objective mechanisms and tools of evaluating published quantitative and qualitative information on the quality of academic programs and awarded qualifications. No comprehensive evaluation of efficiency of publication mechanisms is carried out. The provision of information which is not subject to publication, is prohibited or is for internal use, is not regulated.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

In general, the ASPU governance system is typical to the environment of higher education institutions which is based on the principles of division of structural units and coordination of their activities. The existence of documents clarifying the functions of governing bodies, structural units and separate positions as well as sphere-related regulations and procedures ensures the operation of the University's governance system. The existence of collegial bodies ensures the participatory process of decision making by maintaining the principle of collegiality. However, the expert panel finds it worrisome that the collaborative atmosphere is not formulated in the activity of the Board of Trustees which is the highest body of governance of ASPU, as well as non-constructive approach to proposals made by the members of the mentioned body. The role of the Board of Trustees in everyday activity of the University is passive. The limited involvement of external stakeholders can lead to the decrease of awareness on external needs and development as well as to the one-sided apprehension.

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<sup>24</sup> This part was re-formulated as a result of ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "...it was clear that the flexible mechanisms of ensuring feedback with external stakeholders are missing, and the data on..."

The expert panel positively evaluates the existence of hierarchy of the governance system. At the same time the organizational structure of the University is not flexible; the strict hierarchical links are obvious while the horizontal links are poor and fragmental. The expert panel finds it necessary to more clarify the organizational structure based on the importance of prioritized directions, fulfillment of strategic goals and functions. As far as no coordinated process of evaluating the efficiency of separate units' activities is carried out, the University doesn't either evaluate the equipment with human, material and financial resources for the fulfillment of its goals, thus endangering the targetedness of expenses. However, the fact the structural units are provided with necessary material resources based on their applications and budget allowance, it can be stated that the University to some extent ensures the existence of necessary material resources but does not guarantee their stability. The absence of defined ethical norms and/or respective committee, the mechanisms ensuring the transparency and efficiency of the processes of decision making as well as the lack of qualitative and quantitative data put in risk the efficiency of the governance system and targeted implementation of strategic goals.

The absence of financial planning in compliance with the SP has broken the link with the financial policy and strategic development which influences the efficiency of the University's development and endangers the fulfillment of strategic goals.

The expert panel positively evaluates the fact that ASPU's approved regulations formally provide opportunities to internal and external stakeholders to be involved in making decisions relating to them but the absence of evaluation of efficiency of mechanisms which enable stakeholders' involvement does not allow to clarify if the mechanisms serve for the fulfillment of the set goals or not. Such a situation may lead to the involvement of specialists who do not have respective competences, thus endangering the reliability and validity of made decisions. As the meetings of the site-visit showed, both internal and external stakeholders passively use provided opportunities in terms of involvement in making decisions and proposals, and in many cases their participation has a formal character. ASPU doesn't apply any mechanism to identify the reasons to stimulate their activeness. The incomplete expression of students' voice in decision making process considerably endangers those decisions directed to students' needs and the student-centered approach in general.

The mechanisms and tools of fulfillment of strategic goals are not enrooted yet and the link between short-term plans and the SP of the University is not clear as a result of which the SP doesn't serve as a document which conditions and guides everyday activities which puts into risk the acquisition and implementation of set goals. In order to evaluate the activity, ASPU applies the mechanism of reporting but even the KPIs stipulated in the SP are not analyzed, without evaluating the content of implementation of strategic goals which leads to qualitative changes and to the neglect of their comprehensive, coordinated impact.

The fact that ASPU hasn't made content analyses in the direction of identifying and taking into consideration the factors which have an impact on its activity, limits the top management's opportunities to visualize the holistic picture of external environment, to differentiate the factors which are more influential and respectively to orientate in selection of strategy and in positioning in the labor market. The University hasn't analyzed the results of the previous SP, hasn't evaluated the risks and hasn't taken into account the external and internal factors which have hindered the development of a realistic strategic plan.



In general, the incompleteness of evaluations of different processes and monitoring mechanisms, the absence of transparent results of evaluations of efficiency of the governance system can reduce the level of stakeholders' trust towards substantiation of made decisions and current system. ASPU hasn't made analysis of efficiency of internal processes before, that is why the culture of making analyses hasn't been formulated in the University yet. This is stated by the more descriptive and non-analytic character of ASPU's self-evaluation report.

The phases of planning and implementation of quality management cycle are visible which is conditioned by the fact that structural units don't apply developed indicators to evaluate their activity yet, and partially because the documents are newly developed or have been invested recently. And the applied mechanism of accountability does not ensure any basis for further improvement. The policies have been revised based on the recommendations provided by the previous accreditation but it has been made without any regular evaluation of efficiency and analytical base. As a result, the administration of policies and procedures is not carried out by the PDCA cycle of quality management yet.

Although the University hasn't made comprehensive evaluation of efficiency of mechanisms for disseminating information, namely, paper and electronic mass media and the ASPU website, their diversity already ensures some level of accountability which is appreciated by the expert panel. Meanwhile, the absence of mechanisms through which the publication of quantitative and qualitative updated, objective and impartial information on academic programs and awarded qualifications is evaluated, states about the imperfection of quality assurance and/or control process as far as the University doesn't set the objective to evaluate their efficiency yet.

**SUMMARY.** Taking into consideration the fact that the actions defined by the improvement plan in compliance with the recommendations on the previous expert panel report are mainly implemented imperfectly or not implemented, the short-term action plans are not developed in alignment with strategic objectives, the regulated process of evaluation of efficiency of the governance system and the activity of its separate units is missing, the teachers and students have passive investment in the process of making decisions relating to them, the defined ethical norms are missing, the PDCA cycle is not enrooted in administration, it can be concluded that the ASPU governance system, administrative units and their functioning are not sufficiently aimed at fulfillment of the goals and assurance of efficiency, hence, the expert panel finds that ASPU **does not meet** the requirements of the Criterion 2.

**CONCLUSION.** The expert panel evaluates the compliance of ASPU institutional capacities with the requirements of the Criterion 2 as *unsatisfactory*.

### CRITERION III. ADACEMIC PROGRAMS

**CRITERION:** The programs are in concord with the Institution's mission, form part of institutional planning and promote mobility and internationalization.

#### FINDINGS

**3.1 The academic programs are in line with Institution's mission, they correspond to the state academic standards and are thoroughly described according to the intended learning outcomes of the qualification awarded.**

ASPU implements 99 academic programs in part-time and full-time modes of study in the spheres of Natural and Social Sciences, Humanities and Art both in Bachelor and Master levels. In terms of the definition of academic program goal, all the academic programs in ASPU are in line with the first part of ASPU mission, i.e. the list of the spheres of activity and the specification of being an education institution as the content of education which is implemented during the education process is defined according to the ASPU mission and goals.

The University tries to address new tendencies in social-economic and education spheres, e.g. BA and MA programs in "Chess", "Natural Sciences", "Environmental Sciences", "Jurisprudence", "Social Sciences", "Clothing Design", "Management", "Landscape Planning" were introduced at ASPU. However, there are no studies on the necessity for the investment of new academic programs, their justification from economic point of view as well as on the opportunities of employability of the graduates.

**In 2014-2015 within the framework of international cooperation the University developed a methodical framework on academic programs<sup>25</sup>.** Besides, the University has developed a regulation for carrying out benchmarking.

Following the recommendation from the previous expert panel of the accreditation process on activation of involvement of external stakeholders, respective working groups for the revision and improvement of the academic programs were established and the list of the members stands for the practice of involvement of a wide representativeness of potential stakeholders. Nevertheless, during the meeting with the groups of internal and external stakeholders during the site-visit it turned out that the stakeholders didn't have active participation in the revision of the academic programs.

Referring to the previous accreditation and the recommendation on benchmarking, an attempt has been made to review the academic programs based on the benchmarking. Based on the international practice a unified format for the program description was developed which was used for all the 99 academic programs.

It should be noted that the same approach was used for the allocation of credits and definition of generic and professional skills for the professions, e.g. descriptions of different languages in the profession "Foreign Language and Literature", descriptions of "Special Pedagogy", etc. As a result of such a generalization, the main content of the description is repeated with or sometimes without modifications.

The policy on the allocation of credits per academic program on the institutional level, especially allocation within the general, pedagogical and other education blocks of curricula (in BA programs modules of the block of general humanities and socio-economics, block of general natural sciences and mathematics, block of general profession and others, in MA programs modules of the block of general scientific and psychopedagogy, general and special professional block and research block) is not based on specific principles, though in the recommendations of the previous accreditation process there was a concrete reference to the necessity of clarification of calculation, allocation and accumulation of credits. There is no justified cause-and-effect link among the knowledge, skills and competences of specific

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<sup>25</sup> This part was re-formulated as a result of ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "In 2015 within the framework of international cooperation the University developed a methodical framework on academic programs, e.g. "Quality Assurance Manual"."

education blocks of the academic programs and the necessary workload and allocated credits. The current allocation is the total of the credits allocated to the courses of the given education block in the curriculum.

From the previous accreditation process ASPU was given a recommendation to clarify the intended outcomes of the academic programs and to align it with the NQF. Thus, academic program LOs were divided into professional knowledge and understanding, as well as professional and generic skills. The University made and presented a mapping of the alignment of academic programs and NQF descriptors, however, the mapping was not presented in the program descriptions and the methodology beyond the mapping is not visual. The study of the 5 academic programs presented for the accreditation as well as more than 10 academic programs randomly chosen by the expert panel showed that the LOs are not always tangible. In MA programs in contrary to the BA programs, LOs are more generic and the disciplinary content is more stressed.

In the self-evaluation the University mentioned that the LOs of the academic programs were aligned with the school content. However, there are no analyses on this. At the same time, a number of pedagogical professions at the University are adapted to the subjects involved in the school program, e.g. “Natural Sciences”, “Chess”. However, the expert analysis of the student number as well as the meetings and discussions with the internal stakeholders during the site-visit revealed that as a result of such divisions the recruitment of students in those academic programs is problematic especially when for example along with the “Natural Sciences” academic program the University implements also “Physics”, “Chemistry”, “Biology”, “Geography”, “Environmental Sciences” academic programs.

During the discussion with the teaching staff and the students it turned out that the University has adopted the approach of introducing elective courses for the narrow specialization in separate spheres but there is no list of elective courses attached to the program descriptors (especially in MA programs). During the site-visit it turned out that the elective courses are decided a month before the launch of the academic year. The study of the MA and BA programs chosen by the expert panel showed that proposed elective courses are mainly generic, which, as it was mentioned during the meetings, fill the gap that the MA students without basic education have.

In BA programs there is a requirement for 2 course papers, however, in the description not in all cases the LOs of the course paper are mapped with the LOs of the academic program, though the justification for developing course papers, the description of the approaches for the development of course papers, LOs of course papers and the development process are defined in the Regulation on Organization, Implementation and Assessment of Course Paper in BA Programs which was approved in 2018.

The course papers observed during the site-visit were formulated as essays and mainly didn't contain the result of the student's own analysis and were not directed to the acquisition of a particular LO.

During the observation of documents presented by the University and during the site-visit it turned out that the curricular hours in cases of part-time mode of education were half reduced without any justification; the only justification was that this way it was more suitable for the working students. However, during the discussions with both internal and external stakeholders the latter were against such a change, mentioning that the insufficient hours for practical hours and especially internship in

part-time mode of study decreases the opportunity of formation of practical skills and competences among the students.

During the observation and discussion of MA theses it turned out that the selection of the topics for theses are not linked to the qualification which should be awarded after the completion of the academic program, in particular the qualification of pedagogy. MA theses are supervised by the chairs adjacent to a particular discipline, MA theses are developed around the problems of the discipline of the chair. Besides, sometimes the course plan of a narrow specialization or materials of a topic of the same discipline is attached to the thesis which is not a logical or structural inseparable part of the thesis, and is rather an attachment or supplement and the separation of the latter from the thesis does not disrupt the content wise or logical unity of the MA thesis.

This part is sometimes not reflected in the contents of the MA theses. There is no link between the content of the MA thesis and this component. The alignment of academic program LOs and the content is not ensured in MA level especially in terms of research component.

**The load of third and forth semesters of MA programs is distributed among General Scientific and Psycho-pedagogical, General and Special Major Block (courses) and Research Block which involves preparation of MA thesis, research in semester and pedagogical-research and research internships fostering it. In the last semester the distribution of the load among in-class activities, internship and research does not ensure the attainment of learning outcomes of courses before the launch of the research which, by the way, are subject courses of scientific and psycho-pedagogical and major block<sup>26</sup>.** It should also be noted that during the meeting with the internal stakeholders it turned out that MA students have some difficulties in combining attendance with research activities and internship in the 4<sup>th</sup> semester of MA study.

The University has introduced the electronic portal of Google Classroom which has brought a lot of development as it was found out during the meeting with the internal stakeholders. It ensures electronic transfer of content to the student at the same time it was an additional workload both for the students and the teaching staff during the period of self-evaluation. This workload was not involved in the workload of either students or lecturers.

### **3.2 The Institution has a policy that promotes alignment between teaching and learning approaches and the intended learning outcomes of academic programs, which ensures student-centered learning.**

Following the recommendation from the previous accreditation, ASPU has developed a manual on the selection of teaching and learning methods and the matrixes of alignment of teaching and learning methods with LOs are involved in the program descriptions. Besides, in thematic separation of each course teaching and learning methods are mentioned. The observation by the expert panel showed that the methods are repeated both in program descriptions and in thematic separations of courses without any differentiation and link with LOs. The picture is the same in the cases of different courses as well, especially if they are courses of general education block and are taught through lecturing. There is no

**Commented [PC3]:** scientific

**Commented [PC4]:** Is this not repeating the information from the previous sentence?

**Commented [PC5]:** and

<sup>26</sup> This part was re-formulated as a result of discussion among the ASPU representatives and expert panel members. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "There is a lack of workload of students of MA programs in 3rd and 4th semesters (14 and 12 hours of workload per week accordingly), the workload equal to 30 credits for the overall two-day attendance in one semester of the second year of MA study according to the class-schedule is not justified, neither is the allocation of curricular hours, internship and research in the last semester."

separate methodical framework for the bigger components of the academic program: internship, course and final papers.

The class observations carried out during the site-visit revealed that some lessons were interactive and others – not, during some lessons the teacher-centered approach was dominant. The methods used during the class observations were mainly directed to the acquisition of knowledge or understanding, assignments for the formation of professional skills or curricular activities were not observed by the expert panel.

Some of the described and applied **methods belong to student-centered forms of teaching, and the others – to teacher-centered ones**<sup>27</sup>; this was also stated by the class observations. During the class observations it also turned out that some lessons were carried out in an open participatory atmosphere, elements of team work were applied, however, in some cases they were not directed to the topic of the lesson. Sometimes proper feedback is not provided by the teaching staff. Some classrooms have opportunities for interactive education: projector, screen.

In the methods mentioned in the academic programs there is no much diversity, general approaches towards teaching and learning are mentioned, besides, identical methods are mentioned for the LOs of education blocks A (professional knowledge and understanding), B (Practical professional skills) and C (generic (transferable) skills).

The specific weight of the individual study and methods promoting individual study is low, methods and ways of individual or group work as well as curricular and extra-curricular assignments are not defined. Along with the individual assignments papers, essays and course papers are mentioned, however, the list of the final papers and MA theses that were presented for the expert panel observation as well as during the meeting with students and teaching staff it turned out that the topics are presented by the teachers or the chair and the students rarely choose a topic for their individual work or research.

The Google Classroom is viewed as a means of enriching the methodology and according to the University it makes the education process more interactive and innovative. Nevertheless, the observation of the usage of the Google Classroom as well as during the meetings with the teaching staff and students it was found out that this platform is mainly used as a virtual means of communication with students where the previously dictated lectures are put. There is no differentiation between the usage of the Google Classroom in part-time and full-time modes of study.

Besides, the investment of this platform the University tried to technically enrich the classrooms by installing projectors that can be used during the lessons. Means of evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching and learning methods are class observations by the Head of the chair and the peer-class observations as well as surveys “The Teacher and the Subject from the Perspective of a Student” carried out by the Division of Education Quality Management and Assurance. However, nearly all the stakeholders whom the expert panel met mentioned about the necessity of improving teaching and learning methods.

As a methodical solution promoting formation of practical skills and competences among the students the University initiated the 3-phase approach of implementation of pedagogical internship. According to the new approach, besides the investment of an early and differentiated internship there

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<sup>27</sup> This part was re-formulated as a result of discussion among the ASPU representatives and expert panel members. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: “Some methods which were described or applied were student-centered, others were teacher-centered...”

was also a change in the workload of students. As a result of the change in the mode of implementation of internship the approach to the calculation of the workload of student is not seen, neither is seen the interconnection between the content taught at the University during the given semester and the internship. Nevertheless, in the programs after the completion of which the qualification of pedagogue is not awarded, changes were not made in the process of organization of internship. During the site-visit and the discussion with internal and external stakeholders it was found out that the goal and activities of internship in different phases are not based on the knowledge and skills obtained at the University. During the internship the student is expected to teach something the methodology for the teaching of which the student has not studied at the University yet. The link between theory and practice is broken.

Though during the site-visit the internal stakeholders mentioned that the evaluation of the effectiveness of the internship is carried out through the KPIs in the SP, there is no such an evaluation or analysis of effectiveness available. During the site-visit it was found out that according to the external stakeholders - the employers, the period, duration and selection of places of both pedagogical and non-pedagogical internships are sometimes not optimal; without any justification the cooperations are terminated e.g. with colleges, schools, the duration of internship is especially short-term for part-time students and it does not ensure acquisition of necessary practical skills.

Though there is a manual for the selection of learning methods, the University does not have a policy on upgrading the methods regularly, in spite of the fact that ASPU is considered to be a primarily pedagogical institution and a guide in the sphere of education, pedagogy and teaching methodology for other universities.

During the site-visit after the discussion with internal stakeholders it turned out that methodical innovations are mainly invested by the young teaching staff members. Besides, the discussion with different internal stakeholders revealed that the University realizes the necessity of being methodically improved in different directions.

### **3.3 The Institution has policy on students' assessment according to the learning outcomes and promotes academic integrity.**

Assessment of students at ASPU is regulated by the Regulation on the Assessment of Students' Knowledge at ASPU, as well as by the regulation on the presentation and assessment of papers, course papers and final papers. The mentioned regulation defines multi-component assessment and each component is decided by the chairs. The mark is formed according to the calculation formula. Assessment scale is also involved in the regulation. There is also a procedure for appeal.

In case of teaching and learning methods, referring to the recommendation from previous accreditation on the alignment of assessment methods and ways with LOs, some attempt was made in the program descriptions to align assessment methods with LOs. However, as it was already mentioned above, here also the methods are identical for all the LOs mentioned in A, B, C blocks. The methods are just listed, without any clear, direct and logical link with LO, teaching and learning methods. The selected assessment methods mainly check knowledge sometimes also skills.

Course descriptions and thematic divisions of subjects, questionnaire of mid-term and final examinations and the assessment criteria are available in the Google Classroom electronic platform of ASPU. In this platform teachers sometimes upload checked assignments, remind the students about the upcoming assignments to be assessed.

The existing assessment system differentiates the subjects according to their mode of assessment: examination, checking and other, however, the justification for such a differentiation is not available. There is no data on cases when the student terminated the education because of not acquiring the course LO or not ensuring the threshold for other course. Academic progress is not mentioned as a cause of dismissal from the University.

Reallocation of the components of multi-component assessment system was carried out in 2018 when the component for attendance was reduced up to 5% and the rest 5% was allocated to the component of current or individual work.

Assessment at ASPU is carried out the system of automatic management and is confirmed in the electronic registers. There is a regulation on registration and maintenance of the mark for internship or volunteer work and its reapplication during the final attestation. The student is twice assessed for the implementation and quality of internship: besides the final mark for internship, the same mark is also calculated in the mark of final attestation with 20% weight. Besides, the additional mark got by the student for volunteering is also a component for the mark of final attestation.

The Regulation on Citation Norms and Plagiarism was developed and applied at the University. Moreover, in the self-evaluation the University mentions that in some faculties online and software tools for plagiarism detection are applied. There is no depository for course papers, final papers and MA theses of previous years. During the site-visit the internal stakeholders of ASPU mentioned that one of the mechanisms against plagiarism is the exclusion of repetition of topics. However, there were some repetitions in the topics of final papers and MA theses presented to the expert panel even for the same year and supervised by the same supervisor, and the course papers, final papers and MA theses observed by the expert panel during the site-visit contained large amount of information from other sources sometimes even without reference and sometimes with references. Even in the latter case when plagiarism was obviously prevented, the papers were presented as reproduction of others' content which is also defined as plagiarism.

The mentioned cases were not taken into account during the assessment procedure as the observed works were highly assessed: 70 and more marks. In most reports of attestation committees for 2017-2018 it is mentioned that the research component should be strengthened. In fact the University has presented draft documents for the development and assessment mechanisms of final papers which are not dated and approved yet.

In 2014 requirements and criteria for the assessment of MA theses according to separate components were developed however, the study of MA theses showed that in spite of the existence of the criteria not all the MA theses meet the requirements, in particular, some MA theses contain components of research and application and others not. The latter are like papers where most part of the work is ensured through materials taken from different sources.

The expert panel's observation of the procedures of defense of final papers and MA theses showed that during the assessment of students a precise scale is not applied, the marks for internship and "volunteer work" are added to relatively low marks, thus distorting the real picture of the final attestation.

#### **3.4 The programs of the Institution are contextually coherent with other relevant programs and promote mobility of students and staff.**

In 2015 the University developed and introduced the Procedure on Selection of Professional Education Institutions for Benchmarking and Methodical Guide for Benchmarking outlining the goals, objectives and methods of benchmarking. It should be noted that the documents presented on benchmarking only give information for some academic programs. According to self-evaluation in “Surdo-Pedagogy” and “Foreign Language and Literature” based on the benchmarking a number of changes have been taken place. Though the University has a policy on the selection of universities for benchmarking, the list of selected universities is different from academic program to academic program. In some cases the universities from only CIS countries were selected, in other cases there are also international universities, there are also cases when benchmarking was conducted only with national universities while the policy developed by the University defines that the selection should be based on the mission, strategic goals and objectives, compatibility of teaching staff and student numbers, recourses, progress in the target field, etc. Moreover, no document on benchmarking that was presented to the expert panel was dated; neither the regulatory documents, nor the manual and reports on benchmarking analysis.

In the benchmarking documents curricula were compared with the list of subjects and workload. Analysis on the benchmarks and strong and weak points of ASPU academic programs, points to be improved and improvement ways are missing. As a result of comparative analysis no substantial changes were made in the academic programs, in the analysis of benchmarking it is not mentioned which components were borrowed or how teaching and assessment methods were adapted.

Due to its involvement in international projects the University was given the opportunity to get acquainted with a number of professions, in particular basic and special education academic programs in the leading universities of the USA, UK, Russia and Finland. As a result of these projects the content of the academic programs was aligned with current requirements.

Though the academic programs of the University does not hinder the mobility of teaching staff and students, however, the indicators are low. According to the data presented by ASPU incoming mobility was recorded only for the last two years of the reporting period of self-evaluation: 5 and 248 students accordingly. During the site-visit it was found out that the University was hosting two students of incoming mobility from Pázmány Péter Catholic University within the framework of double degree program with that university. Concerning outgoing mobility it should be mentioned that it is mainly implemented **through the ERASMUS project and other projects that ASPU has**<sup>28</sup>. During the site-visit it was found out that after coming back the mobility students, upon necessity and opportunity, take exams of the differences of courses and in cases of similar courses the credits are transferred.

### **3.5 The Institution adopts policies in place ensuring academic program monitoring, evaluation of effectiveness and enhancement.**

Based on the expert panel report for the accreditation in 2015, the University has reviewed LOs of the academic programs, has reallocated credits, has conducted comparison and alignment of ASPU list of academic programs and names with the similar academic programs in national and international universities and school subject standards. In spite of these activities, the University does not have a

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<sup>28</sup> This part was re-formulated as a result of ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: “... through the ERASMUS project and other projects that ASPU has, though during the reporting period the number didn't exceed 11.”



document defining clear methodology of allocation of credits which will explain the allocation of credits per different education blocks as an innovation based on the previous accreditation practice.

In 2012 the University approved the Procedure on Current Monitoring and Review of the Academic Programs. Besides, in 2016 the Regulation on Discovery and Assessment of Students' Educational Needs and Involvement of Internal and External Stakeholders and Needs Assessment was developed. The University has feedback mechanisms from internal and external stakeholders in place: surveys, class observations and external opinions. It should be noted that surveys are conducted among the students and teaching staff, feedback and opinions are received from employers with non-formal ways **but the grounds stating the involvement of alumni in the revision of content of academic programs are missing<sup>29</sup>**.

In its SWOT analysis ASPU outlines the insufficiency of assessment mechanisms of the effectiveness of the academic programs. Analysis on the academic programs, their implementation, effectiveness as well as review or changes and results of evaluation are not available.

The existing analysis are made on the evaluation of different components of the academic programs, satisfaction of students, situation of macro-level environment, non formal feedback from employers, but there is no comprehensive analysis on the level of academic programs that would involve all the aspects of development and implementation of academic program.

The carried out improvements refer to the changes in the format of academic program description, revision of the content of course descriptions, reinforcement of the link between the program LOs and courses as well as changes in the weight of the component of attendance. The current results of the implementation of academic programs are regularly discussed in different levels, in the sessions of the scientific council and chairs.

## CONSIDERATIONS

In spite of the large diversity of profile of academic programs implemented at ASPU, they are in line with the mission of the University, as the reformulated mission of the University is too large and generic. Instead of stressing pedagogical professions the mission defines "dissemination of pedagogical values" which is only one component of pedagogical profession and professional competences. In this respect it appears that, for instance, the student of academic program on Art - ASPU graduate, who gets the qualification of a pedagogue, graduates from the University where the student has been prepared not a pedagogue but a specialist who is the disseminator of pedagogical value. The university has repeated academic programs with small number of students that waste resources, do not meet the requirements of the labor market and are subject to revision as they not always meet the requirements of schools or cultural life.

A number of structural units of ASPU within the framework of cooperation with different foreign partners obtained new and up-to-date knowledge and skills for the implementation of university activities. But still the obtained knowledge and skills have not been transferred to all those structural units that are responsible for the development and monitoring of the academic programs. As a result of

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<sup>29</sup> This part was re-formulated based on ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "...but alumni do not have any opportunity of participating, e.g., in the revision of the content of academic programs."

borrowing different up-to-date regulations existing in the field of universities ASPU managed to develop documents that reflect modern tendencies and meet the requirements of development and revision of academic programs. However, the fact that some of those documents are drafts and not approved yet, states that they are not currently being applied and cannot foster implementation of academic programs according to the modern international standards mentioned in the regulations that are borrowed and developed from the international partners.

The date of development or approval is not mentioned on the documents (as the University presents them as operating documents) which does not give an opportunity to see the link among different activities and can hinder the understanding of revision and dynamic changes of the academic programs. The regulatory documents existing at ASPU for the development, implementation, monitoring and revision of academic programs are not used as everyday tools by ASPU, they are in the phase of investment.

In terms of changes made in the existing documents the steps taken by the University concerning the unification of the format of the program description and the assurance of participation in working groups are praiseworthy. However, involvement of a great number of students in the working groups for the revision of academic programs as compared to the number of the teaching staff is not justified and it seems that there is a matter of ensuring fictive participation.

The absence of clear and developed regulation on credit calculation and allocation according to the education blocks can hinder the alignment of LOs with workload, reliability and trust of stakeholders. This is especially important taking into account the fact that there is no “issuing chair” but all are supporting/service chairs that would guarantee the immediate responsibility and coordination of content wise issues concerning the academic program.

The University still has a lot to do in terms of reformulation of program LOs, their alignment with the NQF, application of active verbs of taxonomies, thus ensuring the tangibility of LOs. The number of LOs in BA programs is manageable but their formulations sometimes are over-generic and do not give an opportunity to understand what sphere the specialist is being prepared for as the reference to the main discipline is small. This especially refers to the academic programs awarding the qualification of the pedagogue. The lack of tangibility of LOs with current formulations, their over-generic nature result in non proper understanding of the profile of the graduate among both internal and external stakeholders and make it complicated to develop assessment methodology. Besides, in BA and MA levels the differences in the formulation of LOs make a gap in the continuation of education. Such usage of descriptors of knowledge, skills and competences hinders the understanding of Bachelor as a base and precondition for the formation of MA skills. The absence of clear LOs defined for elective courses, internship, course papers, final papers/ MA theses and their link with the LOs of the academic program hinders application of an academic program as one unit the components of which serve for the preparation of a specialist with specific knowledge, skills and competences.

The components of individual work and research is weak in both BA and MA programs, the individual contribution of students is very small. The nature of paper and the absence of the link with the qualification (in case of a pedagogue, for instance, the literary analysis) hinder the implementation of research component by the MA students envisaged in NQF, the acquisition of research skills and formation of critical thinking.

The changes made in the organization and implementation of internship are praiseworthy, however, the fact that multi-phase internship is not applied for the students of non-pedagogical professions hinders the students from getting familiarized with their professional activity through internship during the very early phases of their education.

The issues on the reduction of the number of lessons with full-time students during the semester are problematic. Resource saving which is mentioned in the self-evaluation as a reason for the transition to 15-week mode cannot be justified with the need of education QA. Two-day attendance in MA programs and implementation of the lecture hours with one phase (each course has 8 lecture hours during the year) in the part-time mode of education put the sufficient teaching of the education content at a risk and the workload that is expressed in credits is violated.

The introduction of the Google Classroom electronic platform at ASPU is commendable, however, during the site-visit it turned out that instead of using this platform step by step and upon necessity, ASPU applied top-down obligatory method that resulted in a number of problems raised by the stakeholders. The application of the mentioned tool currently does not foster application of methods such as cooperative learning, project methods, problem solving methods, peer assessment, etc. The absence of analysis on the effectiveness of this platform and ways of solving the problems derived from the usage of the platform put the further purposeful usage of this platform at a risk. Besides, the University should review the requirement of using any tool as there is no resource assurance for the application of the particular tool. Otherwise there is no opportunity to use the tool equally like an educational resource.

The efforts of ASPU in terms of mapping of teaching and learning methods are visible, however, the selected methods are not applied in class. The link between the learning methods and intended outcomes is weak, a precondition for the interactive lesson is PPT (slide) used during the lesson which stands for the fact that there is a misunderstanding about interactive lessons among the internal stakeholders of ASPU. It is surprising that there is a lack of laboratory, practical, group, cooperation and project methods in plans and teaching process. This way the formation of practical skills and competences among the students is put at a risk.

During the site-visit it turned out that there is no clear and unified understanding of student-centered education among teaching staff and students. The application of student-centered methods is limited, so is the initiative of students in research activities which has a negative effect on both the content and performance of such assignments and formation of responsibility among the students. It should be mentioned that student-centered education is not a culture in ASPU yet.

During the site-visit the students were pleased with the new, student-centered approaches invested by the young teaching staff members, while innovation and new methodology is quite limited among the aged and experienced teachers.

The University understands the necessity of upgrading teaching methods, however, practical steps taken in this respect that will also reflect implementation of PDCA are limited.

The University has a developed policy that successfully adopted modern international concepts and tendencies. However, as other regulatory frameworks, this is also not an everyday tool.

The University made efforts in aligning assessment methods with LOs, however, the alignment didn't result in differentiated selection of assessment methods. The enumeration of possible assessments

modes and methods of separate components of knowledge, skills and competences does not show the method of assessment used for the assessment of particular LO and how the tangibility should be ensured.

The changes made by ASPU in the component of attendance are not based on concrete analysis. Especially in BA programs such changes can reduce the importance of attendance of lessons among the BA students.

Lack of usage of formative assessment as well as existence of two final assessments along with the current assessment put the effectiveness of the learning and the feedback to student at a risk.

The principle of one-time assessment of a concrete content is disrupted by the double calculation of the mark for internship during the final attestation. Besides, the mark for volunteering which is also calculated in the final attestation mark also disrupts the objectiveness of assessment of professional skills. The level of research is a serious problem in academic programs. The observed individual and research works contained little analysis personally made by students. The studies not related to the main pedagogical-psychological and teaching methodology in specialties awarding the qualification of a pedagogue again disrupt the logic of assessment of professional LOs.

Though the University has citation norms and in some structural units there is a serious struggle against plagiarism and violation of the principles of academic honesty, plagiarism forms considerable amount in the presented works, defined as “usage of a considerable part of other’s thoughts in the work regardless of reference”. The absence of more precise mechanisms preventing plagiarism and the weakness of research component put the validity of the knowledge created at the University at danger.

It is praiseworthy that the University gives much importance to benchmarking, it has a policy in the implementation of benchmarking, there is also a methodology, however, the results of the conducted benchmarking state that the University didn’t prioritize the role of benchmarking as a base for the revision of the content of academic programs. In fact, content wise benchmarking of academic programs has not been carried out at ASPU. The presented documents showed only mechanical comparison of the names of subjects which is not a comparative analysis and cannot serve as a base for content wise revision.

Benchmarking has not been carried out on the level of LOs, teaching, learning and assessment methods. It is obvious that mechanical comparisons cannot be a base for content wise improvements and cannot foster mobility. The University gives importance to the mobility of students and teaching staff, however, as compared to the total number of students, the indicators of incoming and outgoing mobility is rather low.

It is praiseworthy that ASPU has introduced the Procedure on Current Monitoring and Review of the Academic Programs as well as in the QA manual it referred to the academic programs as well. Nevertheless, from the absence of a valid data on the needs assessment at the level of academic programs it becomes clear that revisions of the academic programs just before the accreditation were institutional rather than oriented in the revealed needs.

The absence of the clear policy on monitoring, responsible people and indicators for the evaluation of the effectiveness of ASPU activities, absence of needs assessment of internal and external stakeholders, comprehensive analysis of labor market demand puts the process of preparing quality specialists at a risk.

The changes made as a result of revisions (changes in assessment system, reduction of the number of attendance in part-time mode of study, etc.) are not justified with the University analyses. It shows that there is a gap between the monitoring and revision processes while implementing different stages

of PDCA cycle. In fact, though the University somehow referred to the recommendations given from the previous accreditation process, the changes made as a result of initiated activities have not yet led to serious contextual and quality improvements. The University hasn't managed to enlarge the real participation of external stakeholders in the revision process of academic programs. Comprehensive monitoring activity of academic programs is not carried out, tools for the evaluation of effectiveness are not valid, data of a number of surveys are not credible. The credits were reallocated but policy on the calculation, accumulation and allocation has not been developed yet. The University has developed a unified methodology for the implementation of benchmarking but the full application of this methodology is not ensured while conducting benchmarking, there are no mechanisms for the effective application of benchmarking results. The University has introduced a number of tools for needs assessment among the stakeholders, however, there is no methodical base for the development of those tools, thus their ability to reveal different issues is problematic. There is no valid information about the sample representation. The LOs for BA and MA levels are mostly generic and they do not always reflect NQF descriptors, sometimes they need to be clarified in order to be tangible. The University has mapped the courses and program LOs, however, LOs of some bigger components like course paper, internship, final paper/MA thesis are mainly not mapped. Though the interconnection and logic of courses are mainly ensured in academic programs, such logic is not always ensured for the internship. The alignment among the LO, teaching and assessment methods is mainly not concrete in course descriptions and thematic separations. The University has not yet managed to disseminate the leading practice in the development, revision, upgrading and improvement to other academic programs of ASPU.

**SUMMARY.** Taking into consideration the fact that though the actions towards improvement envisaged according to the recommendations of the previous accreditation process have been partly implemented, the academic programs need to be optimized, the current methodical documents regulating the development, assessment, improvement and benchmarking of the academic programs are not applied in fact, the LOs of the academic programs are not tangible, the clear methodology for the calculation and allocation of credits, as well as the precise mechanisms for the definition and selection of elective courses are not in place, the transition to student-centered education is not completed, the absence of mechanisms ensuring academic integrity makes the reliability of qualification award risky, and the revision of the academic programs is not carried out based on the reliable data, the expert panel finds that the University **does not meet** the requirements of the Criterion 3.

**CONCLUSION.** The expert panel evaluates the compliance of ASPU institutional capacities with the requirements of the Criterion 3 as *unsatisfactory*.

## CRITERION IV. STUDENTS

**CRITERION:** The Institution provides support services to students ensuring productive learning environment.

### FINDINGS

#### **4.1. The Institution has set mechanisms for promoting students' recruitment, selection and admission procedures.**

The mechanisms of recruitment, selection and admission of students of ASPU are mainly regulated by the RA Legislation and normative documents set by the University. The admission for Master is carried out through internal interviews. ASPU also implements preliminary short-term and long-term courses for applicants by defining up to 20% quota of places approved by the RA Government based on final examination results. According to the regulation approved by the order of the RA Minister of Education and Science, the graduates of middle-level vocational education institutions who have registered high academic performance, also have an opportunity to continue their education in the University. The admission of foreign students is carried out according to the "Regulation on Admission of Foreign Citizens to RA Higher Education Institutions". However, ASPU hasn't yet invested clear mechanisms ensuring the transparency of student recruitment and admission particularly in case of admission to part-time education and in specialties of art.

In the SP 2016-2020 ASPU has planned to take steps towards orientation of applicants and students. Under this strategic goal the University makes different visits and carries out professional orientation activities both in the capital and in regions of Armenia, mainly focusing on high schools, preliminary vocational, middle-level professional and vocational colleges of regions in order to present ASPU as an attractive educational institution.

In addition, ASPU organizes open-door days, functions its official website, official newspaper, TV show, radio station, faculties' webpages which are the main means of providing information on the University and they also serve for the recruitment of applicants. However, the University doesn't make studies to identify how these mechanisms serve for the goals of applicants' recruitment or which percent of applicants has chosen ASPU due to the activities organized by the University. At the same time it should be highlighted that as compared with the decreased indicator of admission which has been observed in case of other RA HEIs in recent years, no drastic fluctuations of admission indicators have been registered in case of ASPU.

#### **4.2. The Institution has policies and procedures for assessing student educational needs.**

In ASPU there are some mechanisms directed to the identification of students' academic needs which (the mechanisms) are mainly manifested by participation of students as collegial governing bodies. In particular, students are involved in the Scientific and Faculty Councils. ASPU students have a self-governing autonomous body – Student Council which is a platform for putting forward and discussing the problems and needs of students. However, in the site-visit the meetings with students showed that students' involvement in the above mentioned bodies doesn't foster the consciousness of their own rights yet; students do not consider that they are authorized to put forward and discuss a number of problems. The problems are mainly raised in classrooms by means of communication and talks among student-student and student-teacher.

Besides, a number of tools of implementation of academic programs and monitoring of classes contain issues directed to the identification of students' needs; they are mostly considered to be sociological surveys, e.g. "Teacher in the Eyes of Students". ASPU has made a number of analyses – analysis of opinions of "Full-time Students on Satisfaction with Resources", analysis of opinions of "Part-time Students on Satisfaction with Resources", study directed to the identification of students' satisfaction

with the academic program, study directed to the identification of needs of students with low academic performance, but the necessary methodology of basic data, sampling and analysis is not clarified in the research report or in other form. Moreover, ASPU hasn't defined the research sampling, and in the site-visit the meetings pointed out that the participation in surveys is not massive, some group of students didn't even hear about the conduction of surveys. Neither activities nor surveys directed to the identification of students were held among part-time students.

In one of the faculties, by the initiative of the Dean of the given faculty, the "Shadowing" – the method of anonymous identification of problems, was applied to identify students' needs. No other cases of application of this method have been registered.

There are exceptional cases when follow-up activities have been taken after the identification of students' needs, however, students mentioned some cases when based on identified needs some improvement processes were carried out, in particular, relating the operation of Google Classroom, by using the mentioned electronic platform the load of teaching and learning has been reduced.

It should be mentioned that the efficiency of mechanisms and procedures of identifying students' academic needs is not evaluated yet although such recommendation was provided to the University in the previous accreditation expert panel report.

#### **4.3. The Institution provides opportunities for extra-curricular activities and advising services aimed at supporting student effective learning.**

The consultancies organized for ASPU students relate to the pre-examination preparation, supervision of course and final papers, MA theses as well as the process of internship. There are no other formulated formal mechanisms of guidance and consultancy except for the organization of facultative courses for students and the aforementioned official consultancy. The facultative courses have mainly been limited by English language courses. The University carries out preliminary support and orientation activities for international students. In regard to part-time students, it should be mentioned that November is considered to be the period for provision of consultancy to 1<sup>st</sup>-year students on processes relating the University and their studies after which the phase of studies launches.

Following the recommendation provided by the expert panel in the previous accreditation, in order to guide and support students, ASPU has developed "Student Guide" which comprises information about all the activities relating students. However, as the study of the documents and the site-visit have shown, the University doesn't have any mechanism through which it could provide individual consultancy, to select educational path, selective courses or provide supporting consultancy.

There are no mechanisms or respective analyses of evaluation of students' satisfaction with provided consultancies.

#### **4.4. There are precise regulation and schedule set for students to turn to the administrative staff for additional support and guidance.**

The University doesn't have clearly set regulation and time-schedule for applying to the administration. However, it should be mentioned that there are a number of practical means which allow to apply to the administrative staff by means of direct applications, feedback of the website, by mediation of the Student Council and directly addressing the chair. The description of necessary procedure for applying to the administrative staff and respective application form are available in the Student Guide

which, however, was developed in 2018, in advance to the new phase of accreditation, and respectively the University hasn't managed to disseminate it among students yet. In spite of the previous expert panel recommendation which related to the regulation of processes directed to the provision of student guidance and support, the University hasn't developed any mechanisms of student guidance and support yet.

The meetings with students organized within the scope of the site-visit state that students have an opportunity to freely apply to the administration and they are generally satisfied with the process. However, students' motivation and activeness to apply to the administration for identification of problems or discussion of their concerns are not at high level. The students can address their concerns to the chair and the Dean's offices any time. The University in its turn gives importance to the regular implementation and improvement of the mentioned services but the analyses of efficiency of their planning and provision are still missing.

#### **4.5. The Institution has student career support services.**

In order to take actions directed to the promotion of career, the University functions the University-Employer Collaboration (UEC) Center and Internship Center.

The evidences of the UEC Center's activity are limited by the experience in analysis of potential employers and compilation of depository containing information on ASPU alumni which is still in the process and the information covers the time period of one year after graduation. ASPU doesn't have an Alumni Union. The UEC Center's activity directed to students' professional orientation is not so active. A number of activities on writing CV, motivation letters, etc. have been taken. As the meetings of the site-visit showed, some of the employers are not aware of this unit at all; they keep in touch with the University due to their personal networking or with communication with chairs. Besides, the meetings with stakeholders revealed that students don't value the role of the mentioned center in fostering their employment either.

The Internship Center is active in fulfilling its activities directed to the organization of students' internship at employers. In some cases as a result of internship students are involved in the employers' banks of potential specialists or are invited to work.

The University uses its website for dissemination of information about different conferences, scholarships, national and international projects which ASPU considers as an activity which promotes students' career. Sometimes announcements on vacancies are also published. The information is also posted on Facebook page and through Google Classroom is sent to internal stakeholders. However, the efficiency of the mentioned Center's activity hasn't been evaluated; quantitative or qualitative analyses and statistic data are missing.

It should be highlighted that the factual data relating evaluations made by the University-Employer and Internship Centers are not precise. As it is mentioned in the self-evaluation report, only 20% of students who graduated from ASPU work as pedagogues. The ASPU representatives were given a question to clarify the mentioned issue during the site-visit to which they replied that the mentioned 20% relates only to those who have been employed in the first year. The Center doesn't have wider-scale information about ASPU alumni's employment.

#### **4.6. The Institution promotes student involvement in research activities.**



The University organizes scientific conferences, seminars and other scientific activities in which students have an opportunity to participate. ASPU cooperates with scientific-research institutes, and in some faculties the research for MA theses are carried out due to students' visits to the institutes and labs. However, it must be mentioned that the distribution of published articles co-authored by students strictly differs from faculty to faculty. The University has its own scientific collections in which students' articles are also published but students' motivation to participate in publication of articles and in scientific conferences is not high.

Following the recommendation on expanding the scope of students' involvement in the University's scientific-research activities provided by the previous accreditation expert panel, ASPU has taken some steps, including the activity of the Student Scientific Association and the opportunity for students to publish their research works in journals. But the ASPU Student Scientific Association has only recently become active and it doesn't have a clearly developed frame of rights and obligations, hence, it doesn't foster the application of students' scientific-research potential and increase of their motivation. Besides, in the site-visit the students mentioned that there is need to focus more on practical activities in their studies which will further also promote the formulation of research skills.

#### **4.7. The Institution has a special body, which is responsible for the protection of students' rights.**

The University has Student Council which in parallel with fulfilling the functions of student community management gives importance to the function of protection of student rights. The representatives of the Student Council are members of the Scientific and Faculty Councils. By the initiative of the Student Council students' concerns are also raised in some student groups. Besides the discussions which are organized upon necessity, the Student Council regularly organizes planned meetings and discussions. The students have opportunities to present their suggestions and appeals both to the Student Council and to different structural units. For example, the issue concerning students' discontent with the load of the Google Classroom, which has been recently raised, has been solved and by the use of the electronic platform the study load has been reduced.

It is worth to mention that the meetings with students organized within the frame of the site-visit showed that the apprehensions on the Student Council are not precise and students often consider the Student Council as a unit which organizes events.

In the site-visit it turned out that the main actions directed to the protection of students' interests relate to their appeals on their grades for which the University has set a regulatory framework. The appeals relating other issues are mainly solved or regulated in classes. Students' rights are defined in the ASPU Charter, Student Council's Charter and the document which regulates the activity of the infrastructure which deals with students' rights and appeals.

As a result of the previous accreditation the expert panel recommended the University to create an educational environment for students with special needs. In this respect the University tries to ensure equal opportunities and available academic environment, however, the University is not equipped with necessary infrastructural resources yet.

ASPU is a member of the Armenian National Students' Association (ANSA) which gives ASPU an opportunity to more actively participate with student councils of other HEIs.

#### **4.8. The Institution has set mechanisms for the evaluating and ensuring the quality of educational, consultancy and other services provided to students.**

The mechanisms of assuring and evaluating the quality of educational, consultancy and other services provided to ASPU students are mainly surveys and sometimes – focus groups interviews. Based on the extracted results, the overall picture shows sufficient level of satisfaction with the mentioned services. In spite of the recommendation on improvement of procedures and mechanisms of revealing and evaluating students' needs provided by the previous accreditation expert panel, the University hasn't developed mechanisms of evaluating the efficiency of conducted surveys and interviews yet. Besides, there aren't any adopted approaches of validating the reliability and validity of used tools and received information.

#### **CONSIDERATIONS**

ASPU has developed and implements different formal procedures which are aimed at efficient coordination of processes relating applicants' orientation and students recruitment. It is praiseworthy that the University has carried out study of social base of students and applicant as a result of which it has targeted the applicants from regions. But such an approach can be risky taking into consideration the pedagogical profile of the University, the further lack of human resources in Yerevan schools due to the decrease of number of applicants living in the capital, as well as the decrease of number of ASPU students (2016/2017 – 9683 students, 2017/2018 - 8941). The fact that ASPU hasn't yet invested clear mechanisms of ensuring the transparency of mechanisms of student recruitment and admission, can be risky from the perspective of increase of corruption risks and assurance of objectiveness.

The expert panel appreciates the University's initiatives and carried out activities directed to the development of procedures and mechanisms of identifying students' needs, as well as current faculty procedures, but the panel finds that the developed tools need to be revised. In some cases the applied tools don't enable to identify and clarify the problems in a comprehensive way, and the questions are not clearly formulated or don't provide guidance. Besides, the procedures don't ensure the involvement of all students in the process yet. The fragmental involvement of stakeholders, the scarce of valid tools and the lack of attention directed to the revision of institutional procedures and those relating coordination of information put at risk the factual identification of ASPU problems and evidence-based decision making. There are no other forms of consultancy except for traditional and mandatory consultancies, and the facultative courses have mainly been limited by English language courses, and the grounds validating their modernity and continuity are missing. The lack of diversity of student consultancy forms endangers targeted and purposeful implementation of student-centered education in ASPU.

Although there isn't any set time-schedule for applying to the administration of the University, according to students ASPU gives them an opportunity to freely address their concerns to the administrative staff. It is commendable that the University has such an environment which allows to raise and discuss teacher-student relations; in fact, this is the main mechanism of identifying problems in ASPU. The Google Classroom also gives an opportunity to discuss subject related issues with teachers. However, students' motivation to raise and discuss issues relating improvement is low which is also due to the fact that the role of their own participation in improvement activities is not given importance to. Such a passive approach by students, non-regulated discussions of problems (including those discussed

with administrative staff) hinder the coordinated recognition of existing problems, their documentation, further analysis as well as their targeted and addressed solution.

The support provided to students for their employment issues is mainly ensured due to students' notable competences which they express in communication with teachers and during internships. The link between the UEC Center and both internal and external stakeholders is weak and it doesn't directly promote students' employment; it only provides information about vacancies. The absence of clear and precise statistics relating the mechanisms of evaluating the activity of the UEC Center, the active link among alumni and employers as well as alumni's employment deteriorates the apprehension of the real picture on efficiency of ASPU academic programs and alumni's employment, neither it fosters content-based changes in the University. In spite of the recommendation provided by the previous accreditation expert panel, the University hasn't registered any results of activities directed to the improvement of ASPU-employer-alumnus link. The role of the UEC Center needs to be reviewed from the perspective of making students' learning and career orientation process more purposeful and guided.

ASPU applies a number of indirect means to ensure students' involvement in scientific-research activities, however, students' motivation to be involved in such activities is low. Currently the mechanisms of students involvement don't ensure the attainment of goals set by the University yet. Moreover, ASPU doesn't study the efficiency of the mentioned mechanisms. The efficiency of the ASPU Student Council Association's activity is also problematic, and its more coordinated and content activity can lead to the expansion of scope of students involvement.

**SUMMARY.** Taking into consideration the existence of mechanisms of student recruitment and admission, the implementation of policy on studying students' academic needs, the existence of the Student Guide with high quality content, the existence of the body responsible for protection of students' rights, the conduction of surveys directed to the identification of diverse needs of students as well as steps taken by the University derived from the recommendations provided by the previous accreditation expert panel, the current expert panel finds that ASPU **meets** the requirements of the Criterion 4.

**CONCLUSION.** The expert panel evaluates the compliance of ASPU institutional capacities with the requirements of the Criterion 4 as *satisfactory*.

## CRITERION V. TEACHING AND SUPPORT STAFF

**CRITERION:** The Institution has a highly qualified teaching and support staff to achieve the set goals for academic programs and institution's mission.

### FINDINGS

**5.1. The Institution has policies and procedures promoting recruitment of a highly qualified teaching and supporting staff for the provision of academic programs.**

The selection of ASPU teaching and support staff is made based on the regulations on "Types of ASPU Structural Units, Categories of Positions and Ways of their Occupation" and "Formation of Teaching Staff". The mentioned regulations define the categories of teaching and support staff and

descriptions of teaching staff categories by defining educational, research and methodical-organizational performance indicators, requirements set for transfer from one category to another for teachers as well as describing procedures of organization and conduction of competitions.

According to the regulatory basis, the recruitment of ASPU teaching staff is made on a competitive basis (mid-term – 3 years, long-term – 5 years) and/or by invitation (short-term – up to 1 year). The site-visit showed that ASPU more often applies the mechanism of invitation; the Rector and heads of chairs invite specialists having respective qualifications. ASPU has created preconditions for ensuring transparency of the process of teaching staff selection, however, the efficiency of recruitment mechanisms is not evaluated yet. Moreover, together with the competition principle, the Rector's preference is more weighty as compared with the Competition Committee when competition for occupation of categories of teaching staff is held. The planning of teaching staff deriving from the imperative to ensure outcomes of academic programs, hasn't been enrooted in the University either. The planning is mostly short-term and it is more linked with the load rather than quality assurance of academic programs.

The labor relations of ASPU teaching staff are regulated based on contracts which define the rights and obligations of parties. Different types of labor contracts are set – main/full-time, internal and external double-jobbing, hourly rate. No competitive selection of internal and external double-jobbing staff is conducted.

The criteria of selection of ASPU support staff are still missing but there is a normative base of formulation of support staff positions/vacancies. The quantitative ratio of student-teacher and student-support staff member is calculated, respectively – 11:1 and 8:1. At the same time the necessity and efficiency of this decision are not substantiated.

The policy on dismissal of teaching and support staff is regulated by the regulation set by the RA Labor Code as well as by internal disciplinary rules of the University. There are no sufficiently transparent mechanisms of making decisions on changes of teaching staff.

## **5.2 The requirements for qualifications of teaching staff per academic program are comprehensively stated.**

The University has defined criteria of positioning of teaching staff, and the requirements set in the program descriptions serve as a base in the selection of teaching staff for each academic program. The requirements were formulated based on the recommendation mentioned in the expert panel report in 2015. They are as follows: a) qualification which complies with the basic outcomes of the academic program, b) teachers should dominate other courses which form part of the given academic program, c) teachers have pedagogical qualities. However, the study of the program descriptions have stated that the mentioned requirements are very generic and can be similarly applied to almost all academic programs, and they don't define the professional competences which are necessary for teaching the modules of academic programs, and in fact they don't reflect the peculiarities of the given professional sphere. Moreover, they are the same both for BA and MA academic programs. The University doesn't take steps to evaluate the compliance of teachers' competences with the qualifications awarded within the framework of academic programs.

It should be mentioned that although the percentage of teachers holding scientific degrees complies with the license conditions, teachers who have scientific degrees are not equally distributed according to separate professional academic programs. Besides, the involvement of teachers holding

scientific degrees in some MA academic programs is not sufficient (e.g. teachers having 2 PhD are involved in the academic program on Decorative Applied Art), meanwhile the University sets a requirement according to which teachers who teach MA academic programs must have scientific degree.

### **5.3 The Institution has well established policies and procedures for the periodic evaluation of the teaching staff.**

In 2015 ASPU developed a procedure of self-evaluation and expertise of teachers which describes the evaluation process, principles, conditions, tools and criteria but it is not visible how the results will be analyzed and respectively applied. As the meetings with the stakeholders stated, student surveys and class observations are factually used to evaluate teachers. Student surveys have been invested in ASPU since 2012, while in the site-visit the expert panel found out that the surveys are not conducted in a coordinated way and on a regular basis, and within the scope of some specialties stakeholders haven't been involved in surveys at all. And the survey results are not discussed in all chairs, are not always discussed and are not taken into consideration in signing contracts with teachers though it is set by the Regulation on Formation of Teaching Staff. No respective steps are taken towards solution of identified problems. In some cases teachers are not aware of survey results and they come to conclusion on evaluation results judging by the attitude of the head of chair or students.

Another mechanisms of evaluating teachers is class observations which are traditionally carried out by heads of chairs and leading teachers but not all chairs have time-schedule of class observations. Not all chairs plan class observations for one-year period; sometimes it is up to the head of chair who decides whose class will be observed and with what frequency. The results of class observations are recorded in respective registers, and a minute is taken for which the University has developed a special format in which the observations are filled in according to elaborated components (knowledge in subject field, teaching methods, classroom management), strong points and ways of improvement are specified. However, the visits to chairs showed that the records of class observations are conducted by applying different approaches and they do not reflect the developed format. Sometimes the process is formal, in particular, there weren't any identified problems and the formulations were repetitive in almost all records. There weren't any shortcomings mentioned in the studied register of class observations but the methodical problems were mentioned in the report of the chair. Practical steps taken towards elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the reports of chairs are not always taken. The documents evidencing the recommendations provided by the head of the chair and peers and respective minutes of the chairs are missing. However, the meetings with the teaching staff showed that this process is informally carried out.

In 2016 ASPU developed a regulation on rating of teaching staff which was approved by the Scientific Council which aims to evaluate the efficiency of educational-methodical, scientific-research and public activity.

In 2017 the rating of teaching staff was first piloted according to some components of the regulation. In accordance with the regulation on rating of teaching staff, the following data relating the teaching staff are taken into consideration: qualification indicators, educational-methodical work, scientific activity, institutional and public services, activities with students for the given year. The rating is carried out once every two years. But there are no preliminary analyses on efficiency of the rating process, neither there are sufficient grounds to understand how the rating results are used for teachers'

promotion and advancement, development and implementation of training programs. The stakeholders don't consider the system is efficient either.

In general, coordinated analyses of reliability, efficiency and objectiveness of mechanisms evaluating the teaching staff of ASPU haven't been made. The in-depth (cause-and-effect) analyses of carried out evaluations are missing either. Besides, the evaluation results don't serve as a basis for teachers' promotion and advancement as well as improvement of teaching approaches and applied methods.

#### **5.4 The Institution promotes professional development for the teaching staff in accordance to the needs outlined during regular evaluations (both internal and external).**

ASPU hasn't adopted and invested clear policy on teacher training and professional development while there was a recommendation mentioned in the previous expert panel report (2015) which related to the development of teacher training and professional development program and regulation which would be directed to the identification of necessary qualifications for the implementation of academic programs.

The University takes some steps directed to teacher training, in particular, time-schedule of teacher training has been compiled in chairs. In order to more efficiently coordinate the training process in recent years, this has been assigned to the Research Center. The trainings for ASPU teaching staff have been carried out in the following directions: training in ASPU directed to the development of teachers' professional skills and competences; trainings for teaching and support staff within the framework of grant projects; trainings aimed at development and revision of ASPU academic programs within the framework of TEMPUS ARMENQA project as well as trainings directed to the development of research activity and internationalization in the scope of TEMPUS BOOST project. A row of trainings have been also organized aimed at development of skills of using the Google Classroom. Although teacher trainings have been carried out, the goals and objectives are not grounded, and trainings do not derive from the objectives and requirement to increase the efficiency of academic programs.

As it turned out in the site-visit, ASPU teachers have an opportunity to participate in external, including international trainings without any limitation. The information on trainings is published on the website of the University and is sent by means of the Google Classroom. Some cases were mentioned according to which ASPU has created opportunities for teachers to visit language courses free of charge so that the language barrier wouldn't hinder them to apply to international projects. The financial resources for teacher training and their professional development are mainly limited or are not allocated.

However, the actions aimed at improvement of teachers' professional qualities and teaching methodology are not regularly taken by the University. Teacher trainings are often carried out by teachers' personal initiative. The cases of exchange and adaption of international practice gained due to ASPU's and other trainings are limited. The major part of trainings is carried out by ASPU teachers who act as carriers of the best practice, while there are no teachers invited from other HEIs. The analyses of evaluation of efficiency and purposefulness of trainings are missing. The carried out trainings mainly don't derive from the evaluation of teachers' professional needs, hence, no necessary activities directed to the improvement of trainings are organized. The clear mechanisms of identifying and analyzing teachers' professional needs are missing and they are not linked with the results of teacher evaluation.

The participation in conferences, seminars and workshops is another mechanism of improvement of teachers' professional development.

#### **5.5 The Institution ensures that there is a permanent staff for the stable provision of the academic programs.**

In order to implement academic programs, ASPU gives importance to the involvement of teaching staff with high qualification. There are 747 (as of 01.09.2019) teachers teaching in ASPU among who 79,5% are main/full-time teachers. 19% of full-time and double-jobbing teachers are professors, 39,2% - Associate Professors, 35,1% - teachers and 6,7% - Assistants. It is notable that as of 2017 the number of teachers having scientific titles, in particular, the number of Associate Professors, has been increased.

There are teachers invited from other HEIs as well as employers. The University also invites practitioners with external double-jobbing status with the aim to invest practical component in academic programs; the involvement of teaching employers has its positive impact as far as they stand closer to and are well aware of labor market requirements.

In ASPU the clear policy on assurance of teaching staff sustainability/retention is still missing. There isn't any analysis on activities carried out in research, teaching and administrative fields and on teaching staff's load though the load of teachers is very high and it doesn't always reflect the full workload of teachers. The teachers' load is determined according to categories. The load of teachers has formed 1080 hours for years. In the site-visit it turned out that this academic year, as a result of appeals, the load has to some extent been decreased. However, the difference is not essential, and except for class hours and activities with students, there are no other forms of professional activities, e.g. no time is factually left to make high quality research.

It should be mentioned that the vast majority of teachers teach 10 subjects, and there are cases in which the number of subjects reaches 16. For a long period of time teachers have carried out working activities in the Google Classroom but they haven't been remunerated. The work in the mentioned electronic platform has formed considerable hours as far as some courses assume assigning tasks and evaluation of each student. The requirement of activeness of the Google Classroom has been reduced, and the time allocated to the platform has partially been reflected in teachers' load.

The procedures on mechanisms of substituting teachers in case of their short-term disability are missing either. In the self-evaluation report the dynamics of data on dismissal and admission of teachers are presented but analyses on dismissal are lacking. There is no differentiated analysis of teaching staff dynamics in accordance with faculties which would allow to identify the aspect where the problem of flow exists and what the University plans to do in this direction.

The average age of ASPU teaching staff in accordance with faculties fluctuates from 44 to 58, and 30 chairs among 51 are in the highest risk zone (the average age is 46-50), and only in 7 chairs the average age of teachers is 38-45. ASPU gives importance to and has taken steps to be consistent in the process of generation sequence, to guide promising students at the early stage of their study to get postgraduate education by involving them in scientific-research works and making the pedagogical-scientific activity attractive.

#### **5.6 There are set policies and procedures for the staff promotion.**

ASPU doesn't apply clear policy and procedures directed to professional development of teachers at institutional level. By professional development the University mainly considers professional training of teachers. There are no mechanisms of increasing teachers' motivation, neither clear policy and procedures of teachers promotion. However, there are some ways of promotion, e.g. free-of-charge publication of teachers' scientific articles in ASPU periodicals and financial compensation in case of publication of works in international peer-reviewed journals. Moreover, the increase of number of publications has been registered also due to the application of the mentioned promotion mechanism. Another mechanism of promotion is the provision of mobility opportunities to teachers although the clear mechanisms of fostering and promoting mobility are missing, and the number of ASPU teachers who participated in mobility is very low.

In the regulation on rating of teaching staff it is mentioned that rating results will be applied in promotion and advancement of teaching staff. While in this respect no facts have been provided to the expert panel. According to the presented data, since 2015 no increase of salaries has been registered, and cases of financial promotion are strictly limited. ASPU doesn't make evaluation of efficiency of promotion mechanisms either.

The way of ensuring ASPU teachers' development and sustainability is the recruitment of best graduates by chairs which guide them to postgraduate academic programs. In this direction some steps have been taken, in particular, in 2015 the "Policy on Promotion of Research and International Research Activities of ASPU Freshman Staff" was developed. ASPU pays special attention to the involvement of young specialists in scientific-research activity and advancement. In this term the recommendation provided in the expert panel report in 2015 played a role as far as based on it the University has taken steps in the direction of advancement of young specialists. In the last 3 years the number of specialists holding the scientific title of Associate Professor has been increased and, according to the data provided by the University, young specialists obviously form the majority of teaching staff in the specific weight of the mentioned increase.

It is also visible that there is imbalance between female and male specialists in terms of transferring from the position of Associate Professor to Professor. According to the presented data, the average number of female Associate Professors is twice bigger as compared with the number of male specialists, and in the position of Professor the number of females is three times less which provides ground to conclude that the sensitive mechanisms of promoting female specialists are missing.

#### **5.7 The Institution has necessary administrative and support staffs to achieve the strategic goals.**

The rights, obligations and functions of administrative and support staff are described in the regulation on "Types of ASPU Structural Units, Categories of Positions and Ways of their Occupation". The University has also developed some job descriptions for administrative and support staff.

In recent years some activities have been carried out in the direction of administrative and support staff trainings, in particular, trainings have been organized in the following topics – communication and conflict management, legislation on education, economy, etc. as well as some trainings directed to online education have been organized. The University hasn't identified the needs of administrative and support staff. At the same time there are no bases to state that the carried out trainings were efficient.

In recent years some specialists of education quality and from international projects as well as young specialists with innovative thinking have been involved in the administrative staff. Based on the



improvement plan in compliance with the previous accreditation recommendations, the mechanism of accountability of the University's administrative units has been improved.

Some structural changes have been made in the administrative-managerial system. In particular, the Strategic Planning Department has been closed and its functions have been put onto the Education Improvement Department which already has a wide scope of functions. The Internal Audit Division has also been closed although the internal stakeholders find that the Division functioned efficiently. Nevertheless, no clear grounds on made changes have been provided to the expert panel by the University. The latter doesn't make evaluations on efficiency of activity and performance of the administrative and support staff.

## **CONSIDERATION**

In general, it can be stated that ASPU is ensured with teaching and support staff who have respective qualifications and necessary professional qualities.

The existence of different types of labor contracts – main/full-time, internal and external double-jobbing and hourly rate, allows the University to recruit leading specialists of the professional field and thus to solve the problem of ensuring with high quality specialists for academic programs. By reviewing the documents which reflect teaching staff as well as meeting with teaching staff members, it can be stated that mainly teachers with respective qualifications, scientific titles and degrees as well as leading specialists teach at the University. However, it must be noted that the implementation of the policy on distribution of subjects taught by teaching staff is not clear, in particular, there are some teachers who don't have scientific titles but teach about 10 subjects, while teachers who hold scientific title teach one or two subjects.

The requirements set for professional qualities of teaching staff which are described in program descriptions are very generic. Moreover, they are identical in all specialties of BA and MA programs and they mainly refer to the general qualification of specialists of the given professional field and pedagogical practice. The expert panel finds that such a general approach to the requirements set for teaching staff who provide academic programs cannot ensure the selection of specialists with necessary competences. And the recruitment of teachers on non-competitive basis can influence the transparency and objectiveness of the quality of educational services and the educational process. Besides, the fact that the Rector has the priority to cancel the decision made by the Competition Committee violates the principle of competition and can cause corruption risks. The expert panel also finds that the efficiency of mechanisms of planning, recruitment, selection and dismissal of ASPU administrative, teaching and support staff is not sufficiently analyzed and evaluated from the perspective of implementation of the University's strategic goals and objectives. This can bring to the recruitment of administrative, teaching and support staff who don't have sufficient competences which will consequently have a negative impact on the efficiency of the governance and acquisition of LOs of academic programs.

The expert panel positively evaluates the fact that ASPU applies mechanisms of evaluation of teaching staff. However, the fact that the multicomponent system developed for regular evaluation of ASPU teaching staff isn't fully invested and applied, and the analyses on the first phase of taring are missing, makes it difficult for the expert panel to evaluate the purposefulness and efficiency of the process. After studying the results of evaluation of teachers by students, it can be stated that the obtained data cannot be considered to be reliable as far as the methodology is not clear, the data collection

mechanisms are limited and the principle of making analysis is unclear (there are some data which are identical in case of both full-time and part-time studies). As such, there are no in-depth analyses which would allow to clarify the main achievements and reasons of shortcomings. The fact that the mechanisms of self-evaluation and peer-review are not applied yet, makes it difficult to have an overall picture of the process. The application of comprehensive evaluation would give an opportunity to ground made decisions with valid data. In addition, taking into account the fact that respective activities directed to the elimination of shortcomings are mostly not carried out, endangers the teaching quality improvement. The above mentioned is important as far as the second phase of the rating system is planned to launch in 2019 according to the regulation on rating of teachers, and the results of the first phase can foster the improvement of the evaluation process.

ASPU gives importance to the necessity to ensure professional development, however, both resources (there are hardly any financial allocations from the budget) allocated and activities carried out in this direction are limited. The trainings are mainly carried out due to teachers' personal initiative. Although teachers have opportunities to participate in international trainings, and ASPU has proposed training topics and has formed a time-schedule, no significant achievements have been registered. The expert panel hasn't been provided with grounds which state that trainings are based on the identification of teachers' needs and results of analysis of their professional and educational-methodical activities. This means that this process is not sufficiently in compliance with the goal and respective objective relating the HRM stipulated in the SP, i.e. "to continue recruiting teaching staff in compliance with current QA requirements of academic programs".

It is more worrisome the problem concerning the load of the teaching staff; the load is very high and it often doesn't reflect the real load of teachers which can be risky in terms of teaching staff retention. It should also be mentioned that for the current period, ASPU doesn't have a considerable problem of flow though the load and salaries are not in compliance with each other and cause discontent among stakeholders. Not less troublesome is the big number of courses (10-16) taught by the same teacher which, on the one hand, can influence the quality of teaching and endanger the smooth educational processes, on the other hand. This means that in case of health issues or dismissal of one teacher the implementation of academic programs is put under risk. As far as ASPU doesn't make clear planning of HR and the policy on HR retention is missing, the risk of the mentioned problem is increased.

The ASPU's priority in terms of advancement of freshman teachers and young specialists is clear. Based on the fact that in the last 3 years the number of young teachers has been increased, and the responsible positions have been recruited with young specialists, it can be stated that the University has started to give importance to the advancement of young specialists.

In ASPU there are some mechanisms of promotion of teaching and support staff but they need to be developed in order to foster staff members' professional progress. The University should foster more the publication of research outcomes of teachers and researchers in national and international journals. The financial resources which are allocated to ensure teaching and support staff's professional, scientific-research and pedagogical improvement and to satisfy the needs of their professional development are neither sufficient nor sustainable which can endanger the staff sustainability and can lead to the outflow of staff. ASPU should search for alternative financial sources and make efforts to diversity financial flows, otherwise the loss of human resources can put into risk both the implementation of academic programs and achievement of strategic goals and objectives in the planned deadlines.

**SUMMARY.** Taking into consideration the fact that the University is ensured with teaching and support staff with necessary professional qualities, including specialists of the given professional fields and employers, there are developed regulations and procedures which are mainly functioning in the University, the advancement of young specialists is given importance to after the previous accreditation, the expert panel finds that ASPU **meets** the requirements of the Criterion 5.

**CONCLUSION.** The expert panel evaluates the compliance of ASPU institutional capacities with the requirements of the Criterion 5 as *satisfactory*.

## CRITERION VI. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

**CRITERION:** The Institution ensures the implementation of research activity and the link of the research with teaching and learning.

### FINDINGS

#### 6.1 The Institution has a clear strategy promoting its research interests and ambitions.

The ASPU ambitions and interests in the field of research are defined in the SP – under the provision on “Modern Research and Innovation”. According to the SP, research is one of the University’s priorities and the University strives to develop its scientific-research activity and has set the objective to gradually become a scientific-research university. In order to reach this, the University has set prioritized objectives among which “the efficiency of scientific-research and scientific-publication activity, preparation of scientific staff, transfer of intellectual outcomes” should be mentioned. At the same time, the research goals and objectives of the University are too ambitious and too general, and they don’t reflect specific research interests and priorities of the University in spite of the fact that in the previous accreditation expert panel report the necessity to stipulate research priorities was also mentioned. The University doesn’t yet function clear mechanisms to ensure successful transition to become a research HEI. **The tendency to perceive ASPU as a research university is not fully enrooted in stakeholders' perceptions<sup>30</sup>.**

The predetermined actions are often too broad and not realistic for the set deadline, and the KPIs are not measurable. Except for the SP action plan, there are no concrete actions and required resources directed to the attainment of research goals according to which the scientific activity of chairs would be developed and carried out.

From the perspective of the University’s research ambitions to become a research university, the financial allocations directed to the assurance of fulfillment, development and sustainability of scientific-research activity are few, according to the budget. The costs set by the budget allocated to scientific and research formed 4,25% in 2018, 3,17% - in 2017, . 4,61% - in 2016, but it is not clarified to which strategic objectives and actions the mentioned costs are directed. Only the document of estimate of financial

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<sup>30</sup> This part was re-formulated based on ASPU’s observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: “The stakeholders also accept ASPU as a university which prepares specialists in the field of Pedagogy rather than a research university.”

outflows for 2019-2020 visualizes the distribution of amount of costs according to some objectives of the SP directed to research and innovation. In particular, 2 scientific projects were funded by ASPU – “Laboratory of Study of Armenian Civilization” and “Scientific Laboratory of Education in Mathematics”. It is not grounded why exactly these labs have been prioritized and to what extent these directions are viewed as priorities in terms of developing the University’s scientific activity. While in the previous accreditation expert panel report there was a recommendation which pointed out the necessity to expand and coordinate the scope of theoretical and applied research relating to the problems of secondary school. On the other hand, according to the provided documents, the University allocates financial means for the acquisition of equipment and materials for conferences and labs as well as for the replenishment of library with professional literature.

The University has only partially been led by the recommendations provided in the previous accreditation by adding and highlighting the research component of its SP, but no concrete directions of the scientific-research activity have been outlined.

## **6.2 The Institution has a long-term strategy and med term and short-term programs that address its research interests and ambitions.**

The ASPU’s long-term strategy which reflects the research interests and ambitions of the University is defined in the SP. The mid-term plans mainly relate to the basic and thematic funding by the Scientific Committee of the RA MoES. According to the presented data, the University has registered increase of the number of mentioned projects in the last years.

It should be mentioned that the research directions of faculties and chairs which should be in line with the SP are not clearly defined. Research activities are mainly carried out by personal initiatives of teachers. In some cases teaching staff members are involved in research topics at levels of chairs and structural units. **Only the annual work plans of chairs visualize what the main research directions are, and the actions<sup>31</sup> have very general formulation without any measurable outcomes.** In the reporting year the carried out activities of each chair are involved in the ASPU annual reports, however, they don’t clearly visualize the link between chairs’ scientific-research activities and the priorities set by the University.

Although there are qualitative and quantitative data relating the research outcomes in the research projects carried out in the University, the analyses of achievements of research projects are missing, in particular, it is not analyzed to what extent they foster the fulfillment of the ASPU strategy, to what extent the research outcomes are integrated into educational process and to what extent the results are available to internal and external stakeholders (in spite of the fact that in the previous accreditation expert panel report it was recommended to develop and apply tools of evaluating the efficiency of scientific-research activity and mechanisms of measuring the progress). It is also worth mentioning that the analysis of the quality of scientific-research works, their efficiency and distribution of resources allocated to them in accordance with research directions of the University and chairs is missing. The reports of the Scientific-Research Center and the current report on implementation of the SP action plan 2017-2018 merely evidences the performance and it is mechanical rather than based on content analysis.

In the site-visit the report on the process of organizing the scientific-research and publication activities of the University provided by the Vice-Rector on Scientific Affairs was presented, however,

<sup>31</sup> This part was re-formulated based on ASPU’s observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: “Although the research directions are stipulated in annual work plans of chairs...”

the report doesn't contain quantitative and qualitative data on efficiency of carried out activities but instead presents the topics of base and thematic research projects, events, number of publications and suggestions on improvement of the process.

It should also be noted that the University doesn't make current monitoring of mid-term and short-term research projects the necessity of which was mentioned by the previous accreditation expert panel.

### **6.3 The Institution ensures the implementation of research and its development through sound policies and procedures.**

The coordination of the University's research activity is carried out in a centralized way by the Scientific-Research (SR) Center. As a centralized unit, the SR Center fulfills a number of functions and programs (development of documents and concepts, consultancies, trainings, coordination of postgraduate education, informational-analytical activities, etc.). While carrying out activities, the SR Center is led by objectives set in the scientific-research field stipulated in the SP. The expert panel finds it difficult to evaluate the planning process of the Center as far as the latter didn't provide annual plans to the expert panel. In the self-evaluation the SR Center's annual reports are presented which (the annual reports) reflect the performances according the action plan of the SP goal on "Modern Research and Innovation" but only the fact of performance or non-performance is mentioned. There are no available analyses of efficiency of carried out actions grounded by qualitative and quantitative data.

Although the University has a unit which coordinates the scientific-research activity, there isn't any clear policy and procedures aimed at conduction of research and their development. In the site-visit it turned out that no mechanisms fostering the development of the University's research and innovation have been factually operated so far. Neither outcomes of research carried out within the organization of postgraduate education nor research outcomes of the University are commercialized in spite of the fact that according to the ASPU improvement plan in compliance with the recommendations provided in the previous accreditation expert panel report the University had taken the commitment to develop mechanisms of commercializing the University's research output and to improve the commercialization process. As the meetings with employers showed, the applied research activities in cooperation with them are almost missing.

The University views the development of research and stimulation of innovation by establishment of labs (about 13b labs have been established). However, especially the labs covering the field of biology need to be improved and replenished. Teachers' published articles are viewed as research outcomes (the publication is mostly initiated by teachers).

There is a Student Scientific Association in ASPU but students' research and interests are poorly linked with the profile of ASPU. The University doesn't implement any policy on fostering and development of students' research activity as such. The publications of students are strictly limited. There are good practices of student-teacher joint research in the specialties of Special Pedagogy and Psychology which, however, was not disseminated at institutional level. In the previous accreditation the expert panel also gave importance to the expansion of teacher-student research and suggested it as a recommendation. **In order to give feedback on the recommendation, the University has taken some steps towards expanding the scope of its research activities. Although the positive dynamics of indicators**

registered in the reporting period is observable, the general indicator is low as compared with the total number of ASPU's students<sup>32</sup>.

ASPU has developed the following regulatory documentations to increase the efficiency of the research activity: "Policy of Fostering the Conduction of Freshman Staff Members' Research Activity and Conduction of International Research", "Regulation on Citation Norms and Plagiarism". However, the expert panel wasn't provided any evidence which would state that the mentioned regulations function. Moreover, there are no comprehensive mechanisms ensuring academic honesty at ASPU yet.

7 periodicals are published by financial aid of the University. Three of them are involved in the list of journals approved by the Supreme Certifying Commission. ASPU considers the opportunity of publishing teachers' research outcomes free of charge as a mechanism of promotion of teachers' scientific-research. At the same time, ASPU gives importance the publications of teachers in international scientific databases such as PIIHQ and Scopus while rating teachers although the rating system is still in the piloting phase, and the results haven't been applied for teachers' advancement and promotion. ASPU is committed to support teachers to publish their works in journals involved in international databases/depositories by compensating necessary publication costs.

In ASPU interdisciplinary, inter-faculty and inter-chair research activities are very limited. The inter-chair studies carried out within the framework of the "Special Education" academic program are among good experiences which, however, is not a common practice at ASPU. The exchange of accumulated practice among chairs aimed at assurance of proportional development and dissemination of achievements is lacking.

It should be noted that taking into consideration the fact that ASPU is the biggest education institution which prepares specialists in the field of Pedagogy, **ASPU's research activities on current problems of secondary or vocational education are not coordinated**<sup>33</sup> in spite of the fact that within the framework of the previous accreditation the expert panel recommended to expand and coordinate the scope of theoretical and applied scientific research activities relating to the problems of secondary school, and this recommendation was not reflected in the improvement action plan approved by ASPU in 2015.

#### **6.4 The Institution emphasizes internationalization of its research.**

At levels of separate faculties and chairs of the University the internationalization of research activity is given importance to. An institute of staff members responsible for internationalization has been established at faculty level. The job description of the Deputy Dean on International Cooperation is described. At the same time no specific examples are presented which would point out what achievements the given faculty has registered from the perspective of internationalization of scientific research activity.

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<sup>32</sup> This part was re-formulated as a result of discussion among the ASPU representatives and expert panel members. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "The University hasn't taken enough steps to increase the number of research activities in order to increase the level of involvement of teachers and students in spite of the fact that in the previous accreditation the expert panel had given importance to the mentioned issue and suggested it as a recommendation."

<sup>33</sup> This part was re-formulated based on ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "ASPU carries out little number of coordinated research activities on current problems of secondary education or vocational education in spite of the fact that..."

ASPU outlines that the registration of its WISDOM periodical published in English in the Scopus and Web of Science is among its achievements. Since 2017 this periodical is also a member of the Publication Ethics Committee. This fact gives an opportunity to ASPU teachers to publish works more often. ASPU has an ambition to register two more periodicals in the mentioned depositories.

The organization of international conferences (5 conferences in 2017 and 10 – in 2018), teachers' business trips and participation in international conferences, contracts signed with foreign HEIs and scientific institutes as well as teachers' publications in international scientometric depositories are among steps which foster internationalization of the University's research activity. In 2017 the University registered increase of number of publications in journals involved in the Web of Science, Scopus и РИНЦ, however, in 2018 the number was twice decreased.

The teachers who are more active in carrying out scientific-research activity regularly participate in national and international conferences organized in ASPU and in other RA HEIs. Nevertheless, the University mentions that ASPU teachers' proficiency in foreign language, especially in English - as an international scientific language, is not at sufficient level.

Although ASPU points out the necessity to internationalize research, there are no policy and mechanisms which would coordinate and promote the involvement of students and teachers in international research initiatives. The clear planning and implementation of actions directed to internationalization of the University's research is missing though ASPU had planned to develop and approve a separate regulation on international research activity, following the recommendation on investment of clear policy of internationalization provided by the previous accreditation expert panel.

Although ASPU has a big number of contracts, it hardly makes research within the framework of international cooperation. There are no grounds of cooperation with international scientific-research centers and structures either. The University is not involved in international scientific-research grant projects. Commercialization of research outcomes is not made at international level.

#### **6.5 The Institution has well established mechanisms for linking research with teaching.**

The flexible mechanisms of interconnecting research and educational process which have been stipulated in the action plan are still missing in the University. The mechanisms fostering the involvement of teachers and students in research activities are not clear. No evaluation of efficiency of research activity carried out by chairs and teachers from the perspective of its impact on the educational process is made.

The studies of the structure and content of academic programs clearly show that the educational modules of research component are few except for some academic programs (e.g. Faculty of Education Psychology and Sociology). The research component involved in the educational process is linked only with the preparation of final papers and MA theses. Moreover, sometimes final papers and MA theses are not linked with the qualification or even with the direction of the given chair. It can also be stated that teaching and learning methods described in academic programs haven't been aimed at students' involvement in research activity.

It can be stated that the outcomes of research carried out by teachers are informally integrated into educational process by fragmentally being reflected in syllabi. The research outcomes are not always used in the form of published material such as textbook, manual or methodical guide. The University

doesn't carry out evaluation of impact of individual teachers' research outcomes or of research activity from the perspective of their impact on the educational process.

## CONSIDERATIONS

The expert panel positively evaluates the stipulation of goals reflecting ASPU's research interests and ambitions by forms of objectives and possible steps for their implementation separated in the SP. However, in order to ensure the efficiency of research activity, the University should set a priority to develop concrete mechanisms of implementation and evaluation of defined objectives which is still incomplete but which would ensure the clarity and measurability of planned results. The strategic goal and objectives defined in the scientific-research activity are too ambitious. The expert panel finds that the outlined actions have too broad formulation, often immeasurable and non-realistic for the 5 years set for the implementation of the SP. It creates an impression that in the SP the University has focused more on what possible steps can be taken to become a scientific-research university rather than what the University aims to realize in the upcoming 5 years. At the same time it is worrisome that by striving to become a scientific-research university, ASPU hasn't yet defined its vision in the sphere of research and separate and complete strategy reflecting its clear grounds. Such a strategy would allow to establish firmer grounds for and regulate current research activities as well as to outline and ground target directions and strategic priorities of their development perspective. In this respect the University cannot be in compliance with its ambitions to become a scientific-research university yet.

ASPU doesn't clearly indicate what specific directions it will develop and what are the priorities in the scientific-research activity. This is stated by the fact that in the SP it is not mentioned which concrete scientific schools and research topics fostering commercialization the University wants to develop. On the other hand, the mid-term and short-term planning is not directly aimed at fulfillment of the SP objectives as far as the actions are not planned from top to bottom but derive from the initiatives of faculties, separate chairs and teachers.

In fact, the efficient and targeted financing of research by the University is missing. Under this condition the lack of financial means and stable inflows cannot fully justify and ground the situation; it would be proper to ensure more purposeful and efficient planning of existing means. The grant projects can be the source of additional financial inflows directed to the scientific-research activity. ASPU realizes and gives importance to the necessity of fundraising but practical steps and results are not tangible. The concept of viewing the commercialization of research (and their outcomes) as a stable source of income is not enrooted in ASPU yet which, however, would let the University commercialize the process and outcomes of research, foster more applicable and modern (including those in compliance with current tendencies of scientific research at international level) research and respectively have considerable investment in terms of ensuring sustainability of financial inflows.

In order to attain the research objectives and fulfill respective actions defined in the SP, considerable human and financial resources are required which is not visible in the budget planning and distribution. As the main unit responsible for coordination of research activity, the Scientific-Research Center has several functions and scarce of human resources. In fact, the reports of the Center are not analyses of efficiency of its activity, hence, it is difficult to state how efficiently the Center fulfills its responsibilities. The Scientific-Research Center is funded by the Scientific Committee of the RA MoES. According to the expert panel, this fact cannot ensure the sustainability and continuity of activity of the



Center in compliance with the SP as far as the Scientific Committee has its priorities. In this regard the expert panel is concerned about the fact that the planning process which derives from the ASPU strategic objectives is not aimed at the University's ambition to become a research university and thus the implementation of goals set by the SP becomes risky.

Although the diversity of content of ASPU academic programs and human resources provides wide opportunities for development of interdisciplinary and inter-professional complex research, no targeted activities are taken in this direction, while the very interdisciplinary and inter-professional complex research activities ensure the efficient use of research potential, identification of new opportunities and spheres of joint works as well as acquisition of required, competitive and applicable outcomes. And the lack of inter-chair and interdisciplinary research also hinders balanced development of the University and dissemination of best practice.

The opportunities for ASPU staff to publish articles in scientific collections free of charge and to participate in conferences can be some kind of stimulation for researchers but this cannot be considered to be a full mechanism of activating research activity.

Based on the review of documents and meetings organized within the framework of the site-visit, it can be stated that ASPU gives importance to the internationalization of research activity. At the same time the teaching and administrative staff members realize and don't refuse the necessity for intensifying activities in this direction. Apart from interesting opportunities, such collaboration puts forward higher requirements for the University which are not fully ensured and satisfied in the current period. In particular, the process of internationalizing research is one-sided with focus on participation of some staff members in international conferences and on publication of research works in international periodicals.

The expert panel positively evaluates ASPU's efforts towards registering its periodicals in international scientific depositories. This can have a positive impact on formation of research rating of the University and purposeful and efficient use of its research potential. On behalf of participation in international research projects based on inter-university partnership, other aspects of internationalization of ASPU's research activities relating the integration into modern European research collaboration networks and projects, are not developed yet, hence the University's perspectives of internationalizing its research and making its research outcomes recognizable are endangered.

There is a necessity to take more active and practical steps in order to ensure balanced relation between research and educational processes and their continuity. Research of MA theses which are presented as a linkage of research and educational processes are necessary but not sufficient and they don't state about significant achievements of the University in the given field. The efficient, coordinated and stable platforms and toolset of students' involvement in the field of research as well as research cooperation among teachers and students are missing. On the one hand, the existence of the mentioned tools and platforms would stimulate research activeness of staff and students, and identification of internationalization opportunities, on the other hand. The fact that research jointly made by students and teachers are strictly limited and students' initiative is low, endangers the formation of students' research skills and competences. However, it would be possible to judge and to have an overall picture on efficiency of link between research and educational processes only based on respective studies and analyses which the University doesn't carry out. At the same time, the assurance of interconnection of

research and learning processes would be more efficient and coordinated in case respective procedures and mechanisms were existent.

## SUMMARY

Taking into consideration the fact that the actions defined by the improvement plan in compliance with the previous accreditation recommendations are not partially fulfilled, in particular, the clear policy on development of scientific-research activity is missing, the theoretical and applied research works relating the problems of secondary school are few, motivation of students and teachers to carry out research is low, there are no clear mechanisms of commercializing scientific outcomes, the mechanisms of monitoring and evaluating efficiency of scientific-research works are not sufficiently functioned, there are no concept and policy on internationalization of scientific-research activity, and there is not tight interconnection between research activity and educational process, the expert panel finds that ASPU **does not meet** the requirements of the Criterion 6.

**CONCLUSION.** The expert panel evaluates the compliance of ASPU institutional capacities with the requirements of the Criterion 6 as *unsatisfactory*.

## CRITERION VII. INFRASTRUCTURE AND RECOURSES

**CRITERION: The Institution has necessary resources to create learning environment and to effectively support the implementation of its stated mission and goals.**

### FINDINGS

#### **7.1 The Institution has an appropriate learning environment for the implementation of current academic programs.**

ASPU defines the fundraising of financial stable, diverse flows and alternative financial sources as well as the assurance of institutional infrastructures meeting current requirements as the 5th goal in its SP.

The University has 6 in-use educational campuses with total area of over 31400 sq. m. Two of the campuses, including the building of Applied Art which is actively exploited, are emergency buildings. During the site-visit the internal stakeholders mentioned that there is a lack of classrooms. Besides, the internal stakeholders stated that **ASPU doesn't properly ensure heating**<sup>34</sup>.

Following the recommendation provided in the previous accreditation, **ASPU has equipped the 60% of its classrooms with technical means**<sup>35</sup>; some of the classrooms are equipped with screens, TVs and projectors. The furnishing of classrooms is traditional (theater) and it doesn't foster the conduction of classes with interactive and collaborative methods.

The University has followed the recommendation provided in the previous accreditation, relating the improvement of educational-scientific infrastructures. In this context it must be stated that

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<sup>34</sup> This part was re-formulated based on ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "ASPU doesn't properly ensure heating; in winters it is impossible to have classes because of the low regime of heating system."

<sup>35</sup> This part was re-formulated based on ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "ASPU has partially equipped its classrooms with technical means..."

there are a number of labs the major part of which are media-labs which have been established within the framework of the World Bank grant project. Besides, a new lab of biology has been opened. However, it should also be mentioned that the materials observed in the labs of biology are few, they have no protection means, instructions of material use, and there isn't any policy on lab safety. The materials and facilities of observed labs are out-to-date. The lingaphone cabinet of foreign languages is not properly equipped with technical and technological means.

In contrast to the mentioned, the Faculty of Culture is properly furnished. Although there are studios and dance halls, the area of dressing rooms is not big and shower rooms are missing.

The University has convenient halls with modern furniture and technical equipment which (the halls) are established to organize meetings, round-tables and discussions.

The University has a buffet-canteen with proper service and friendly staff. There is a sports hall in ASPU.

The University ensures wireless WiFi, however, **the number of users is limited (800 users)**<sup>36</sup>. ASPU has installed the Google Classroom; in this context the University has installed computers in reading halls.

In terms of library equipment, ASPU has ensured reading halls in different campuses where there are available books and literature of the given professional field of concrete academic programs. The University makes efforts to replenish the library with published literature and to ensure electronic books. In 2014 the number of electronic books was 260, while in 2018 – 12159. However, it should be highlighted that ASPU is not subscribed to modern professional electronic databases. It has partial availability to a number of open access and free-of-charge electronic resources which, however, are not pedagogical or educational resources.

The University has launched actions of digitizing library resources but the relation and contact with library subscribers is not digitized yet. There isn't any electronic communication, e-catalogue, remote check of availability of books, electronic loan of books, etc.

Although the University admits that the vast majority of its students are from RA regions, it doesn't have any dormitory. At the same time, accepting the imperative to have such an infrastructure, ASPU tries to involve foreign grant holders in order to ensure capital investment in the construction of dormitory.

The surveys conducted by the University and the meetings organized in the site-visit state that not all stakeholders are satisfied with the existing infrastructure and resources, but the reasons of dissatisfaction are not analyzed.

## **7.2 The Institution provides appropriate financial resources with necessary equipment and facilities as needed to achieve its mission and goals.**

With the aim to create, maintain and improve efficient educational and research environment, the University makes budget allocations to ensure labs with technical equipment and to replenish library fund. The University makes budget allocations in the directions of “Capital and Current Restorations” as well as “Acquisition of Equipment, Facilities, Electronic Technologies and Property”. However, it must be mentioned that there is a tendency of decrease of such allocations (in 2014 - 1.03% and 2.01%, in 2018

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<sup>36</sup> This part was re-formulated based on ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: “...however, its coverage is limited.”

- 0,10% and 0,83% respectively). The distribution of resources is not linked with the set directions of the SP. There are neither defined priorities nor analyses grounding the resource allocation. The inflows generated from the main activity of the University have been reduced (educational services) which is not compensated by the University in accordance with its profile and goals stipulated in the ASPU Charter (e.g. trainings of pedagogues across RA, organization of examinations and other courses for principals). The decrease is more than it is presented in the budget line indicating the decrease of total inflows. This decrease was covered by the increase of other incomes. The main direction of expenses of the University is salaries. It should be noted that the decrease of salaries in the reporting period many times exceeds the amount of reduction of total income. The expenses directed to the improvement of resources are factually insignificant – in 2018 they don't reach even 1%, and library costs are significantly involved in post, TV, representative or area cleaning and service expenses.

The other main direction of expense of the University is the acquisition of technical means. It is notable that in the previous years the ASPU expenses have been decreased, conditioned by the decrease of number of students. Other means of fundraising are international projects and funding by the Scientific Committee which are mainly long-term – 2-3 years, and they have targetedness in terms of expenditure. ASPU has distribution of expenses in accordance with SP directions in which fluctuations are observed in the line of expenses allocated to science and research; after 4,16% in 2016 a decrease has been registered though the last fluctuation is positive (in 2017 – 3,17%, in 2018 – 4,25%).

The University tries to intensify international relations but there are no separate allocation to this direction in the budget. As the site-visit showed, all the expenses allocated to the organization of summer schools are covered by ASPU. In general, the negative balance is visible in the planned budget and factual performance.

### **7.3 The Institution has policy on financial distribution and capacity to sustain and ensure the integrity and continuity of the programs offered at the Institution.**

Only recently ASPU has adopted the “Policy on Management, Distribution and Monitoring of Resources of ASPU” (31.01.2019) and this document wasn't applied for the self-evaluation period.

The financial flows are generated from the following two sources – budget expressed by compensation of costs of mainly students studying free of charge (state funding) and other inflows (approximately 20%), and extra-budget in which the major part of financial flows (up to 70%) generate from tuition fees. The financial means generated from grants form about 10%. Other extra-budget sources form approximately 5%. By this, the diversification of ASPU's financial sources is limited. The mechanisms of financial distribution in accordance with academic programs are not applied, i.e. diversified funding. The University has planned to compile the opening of factual financial outflows in compliance with strategic priorities but the opening does not visualize the policy on distribution of financial means. The distribution of financial resources for one year is made at the beginning of the academic year

The budget distribution is not made in accordance with the SP directions. The financial resources are distributed according to expenses which are priorities for the given period and are subject to delay, and allocations are made according to lines. The main allocations in accordance with the budget are made based on the expenses for salary fund, discount of tuition fees, state budget costs, science costs and

assurance with material-technical resources. The budget distribution of the University is discussed and approved by the Board of Trustees.

In order to manage and control financial flows, ASPU has established Financial Program and Statistics Department and Internal Audit Division. The latter is still mentioned in the organigram of ASPU but both positions of the Division are not occupied and the unit doesn't factually carry out activity. No grounds or analyses on efficiency of activities of the mentioned structural units have been presented to the expert panel.

The University doesn't make analyses on cost effectiveness. Besides, there are no grounds of financial allocations; it is visible from where this or that cost was necessitated. In order to evaluate the purposefulness of use of financial means, ASPU has undergone external audit by an independent audit company.

The planning of expenses is carried out based on applications presented by the structural units of the University in accordance with their needs.

However, as the review of documents shows, ASPU doesn't make long-term financial planning, and there are no grounds of evaluation of efficiency of the policy on distribution of financial resources. Besides, although the previous expert panel had provided recommendation on the necessity to ensure financial allocations for the implementation and continuation of academic programs based on identification of needs and analyses of academic programs, there aren't such analyses, and the University doesn't make distribution of financial resources according to documents and in accordance with academic programs, neither regarding inflows nor outflows.

The observations of the site-visit have shown that the income of the previous stage has been used by the University with the aim to ensure technical equipment. In recent years, caused by the decrease of number of students and in parallel with the reduction of income, ASPU has started to make savings and switched to survival mode.

#### **7.4 The Institution's resource base supports the implementation of Institution's academic programs and strategic plan, which promotes sustainability and continuous improvement of quality.**

In 2014 the University developed a procedure of evaluation and revision of efficiency and availability of educational resources. However, there are no evidences to state that the mentioned procedure is functioning.

In fact, the compliance of resources in terms of implementation of academic programs and SP goals is not analyzed.

The University views the opportunities of diversification of financial resources as a guarantee of stability. In particular, the state funding, grant projects and paid services/trainings are pointed out. However, the feasibility of using such opportunities is not evaluated either. The comprehensive institutional approach and initiative directed to the recruitment of additional financial resources is not observable either.

The distribution of ASPU financial resources is made in a traditional way – according to expense lines. There are mechanisms of planning of material-technical base. Although the University doesn't have clear policy and procedures of distribution of material-technical resources, the academic programs reviewed by the expert panel are mainly ensured with sufficient amount of resource base which was

approved during the site-visit. There are computer rooms and labs which are equipped with computer technologies and software and constant Internet.

In order to implement academic programs, the library continuously makes efforts to replenish existing literature. According to results of surveys conducted by the University, the indicators of satisfaction of stakeholders with professional literature of the library are evaluated as satisfactory.

#### **7.5 The Institution has a sound policy and procedure to manage information and documentation.**

The documentation and documentation circulation are carried out according to the “Regulation on Documentation Circulation of Armenian State Pedagogical University after Kh. Abovyan”. Some changes have been made based on the mentioned regulation but the investment of documentation circulation electronic system is not fully completed.

The accountancy is conducted partially electronically. There is an Automatic Management System of Educational Process. This electronic informational platform ensures the circulation of information about students and teachers. However, the activities directed to the automatization /digitization/ of internal documentation circulation based on recommendations provided by the accreditation are not completed yet.

The University doesn't have clear policy on publication of external information. The documents are published and available on the website of ASPU. All the important documents are digitized. The system of archiving documents functions.

By the operation of the Google Classroom at student-teacher level the documentation circulation has reduced the volume of syllabi, thematic divisions, lectures and assignments, evaluation tests by transferring them to the electronic environment.

#### **7.6 The Institution creates safe and secure environment through health and safety mechanisms taking into account the students with special needs.**

In all campuses of the University there is a security service. In some sections video surveillance is ensured. Due to proactive efforts of the Ministry of Emergency Situations fire safety activities are organized. There is an evacuation plan in case of natural disasters.

There are two Medical Points with first aid necessary items.

The University functions canteen.

In the last two years ASPU has signed a contract of voluntary medical insurance with “Rosgosstrakh Armenia” ICJSC for the teaching staff of the University.

Following the recommendation provided by the previous expert panel, ASPU has taken some activities to ensure the satisfaction the special needs of people with disabilities by investing different programs. However, in terms of ensuring physical infrastructure, there are no facilities for people with disabilities.

#### **7.7 The Institution has special mechanisms in place for the evaluation of the effectiveness, applicability and availability of resources given to the teaching staff and learners.**

Among other surveys, ASPU conducts surveys among its stakeholders on their satisfaction with resources. As the presented content states, such a survey was conducted once, but the date of its conduction is not clear, e.g., as far as the document reflecting the analysis on teachers' needs is not digitized, it is impossible to see what actions were planned and implemented from the perspective of

identified needs and evaluation of improvement steps. The surveys have shown rather low level of satisfaction in a number of directions, including medical service, lack of professional literature and sanitary hygienic condition. During the site-visit, different stake holders mentioned that the existing resource base needs to be replenished and updated. In order to implement observed academic programs, the existing resources – computer technologies, several applicable software packages, and library fund, are not fully available to teachers and students. The evidences grounding the discussion of these results are missing. There isn't any regularly functioned and efficient mechanism of evaluating the applicability, availability and efficiency of resources.

## CONSIDERATIONS

The expert panel evaluates the efforts of the university aimed at assurance of necessary resource base for the educational process as satisfactory. ASPU is open in terms of resource allocation and it strives to improve the conditions of classrooms and labs, to modernize academic infrastructures. The central campuses as well as the campuses of Faculties of Philology and Culture are in favorable condition. The university has a rather big territory in the center of the city, however, it has faced the challenges to re-exploit emergency campuses or to transfer them to the marginal area of the city. The campus of applied art which is one of the two observed emergency campuses is dangerous for people and obviously it cannot meet the accepted demands set for the educational environment.

The contrast becomes much more obvious in comparison with the favorable condition of the other campuses. Except for the Faculty of Culture, in case of which there is also necessity to invest basic sanitary hygienic infrastructures, the condition of the other buildings meets the minimum requirements. The exterior of classrooms is not attractive, it is not possible to use some of them at late spring months because of the heat. The necessity to regulate the heating mode in all campuses should also be emphasized. Under existing conditions it is possible to implement academic programs but the physical condition will lead to the decrease of students' learning motivation and opportunities to develop practical skills, thus being limited by mostly theoretical knowledge.

The steps taken towards technical and technological equipment are not sufficient to organize classes with modern ITCs which reduces the potential of efficient operation of the Google Classroom as well as intensiveness of conduction of classes.

The reasons conditioning the relatively low indicator of satisfaction of modernity and volume of professional literature of library resources, as well as the absence of subscription to electronic databases make risky the modern research literature, the modernity of provided content and investment of knowledge triangle.

The actions planned in the direction of dormitory infrastructures can foster the increase of mobility but for the current period their absence impedes the involvement of ingoing and outgoing students from both RA regions and abroad. The expert panel understands the difficulty of involving financial investment which is necessary for the establishment of considerable infrastructure and highly appreciates ASPU' initiatives of searching for grantholders, including those in Asian countries.

In contrast to the above mentioned difficulties, the assurance of internal favorable condition, especially in terms of sanitary hygienic condition, requires huge investment. The sanitary hygienic condition existent in ASPU and the level of assurance with hygienic items, except for administrative

areas, creates an impression that the University doesn't take care which is not proper to higher education institution.

The absence of policy on distribution of SP priorities in accordance with financial resources endangers the factual fulfillment of prioritized directions of the ASPU SP. The lack of purposeful allocations directed to the modernization of ASPU's resources, scientific-research activity, internationalization and teacher training is especially visible.

It is worrisome that ASPU has taken limited initiative to diversify its financial resources. Research base and thematic funding and international projects cannot insure continuous development, besides, the outcome generated from the mentioned projects needs to be re-considered, invested and disseminated for which the university does not allocate financial resources from its own means which will lead to stagnation of newly generated or borrowed knowledge and working rules which is already visible today.

For years, ASPU has had negative balance in terms of the planned budget in spite of its savings; while making new financial planning, the university did not take into consideration the factual performance of the previous phase and there was a lack of definition of efficiency of costs which can lead to the financial mistakes and incomplete planning, thus generating possible default consequences.

The university doesn't make considerable investment in the direction of continuous and sustainable development and improvement of separate academic programs. However, due to existing resources, the implementation of academic programs is mainly possible. The assurance with resources is at the level of survival, however, the infrastructures and investment insuring sustainable improvement of quality are not sufficient.

The university's efforts made in the direction of digitization of accountancy and documentation circulation, especially in terms of using its own potential, are commendable, however, the incompleteness of digitization of these processes can slow down a number of procedural regulations.

ASPU has made considerable efforts to insure safe environment, to support teaching staff by ensuring their health insurance but the existence of additional physical facilities of campuses would also make the overall integrity possible.

The mechanisms of evaluating the applicability, availability and efficiency of resources provided to students and teachers are considered to be surveys which are conducted among ASPU stakeholders, however, they are fragmental, disposable, do not show dynamics and do not serve as a base for identification of needs relating the material-technical equipment and physical resources. The factual absence of such flexible mechanisms endangers the proper planning of resources and cost effectiveness in scarce of resources.

**SUMMARY.** Taking into consideration the existence of infrastructural resources and campuses of the university, existence of published library resources, ASPU's efforts towards technical and technological equipment and enrichment, budgeting practice interlinked with SP priorities, digitization of documentation circulation, organization of basic safe and secure environment and partially objective substantiation of lack of means, at the same time not disregarding the imperative of distribution of financial resources and necessary internal analyses on cost effectiveness, diversified financial planning conditioned by priorities, as well as continuous modernization of existing resources, the expert panel finds that ASPU **meets** the requirements of the Criterion 7.



**CONCLUSION.** The expert panel evaluates the compliance of ASPU institutional capacities with the requirements of the Criterion 7 as *satisfactory*.

## CRITERION VIII. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

**CRITERION:** The Institution is accountable to the government and society for the education it offers and the resources it uses as well as for the research it conducts.

### FINDINGS

#### 8.1. The Institution has clear policy on accountability.

ASPU has set the goal to ensure public integration and social cooperation in its SP 2016-2020 (goal 6), particularly giving importance to the “further development of public relations.”

The accountability of the university is directed to all of its stakeholders, however, there isn’t any separate regulation on reporting. At the same time, the accountability is regulated by the hierarchical structure of the university in which the subordinate units are accountable to superiors, e.g., chairs are accountable to the given faculty, and the faculty – to the coordinating Vice-Rector. The reports of all subordinate units are integrated into the Rector’s annual reports which are discussed in the Board of Trustees.

According to the regulation set by the RA Legislation, ASPU presents diverse reports both to the external and state bodies.

The university has an interesting format of public accountability according to which the activity and achievements of the university are presented by means of the video. However, it should be highlighted that the compliance of the long-term and annual plan format and report format with the content is not always visible.

It is notable that the university has revised the format of reporting approximating the reports of the structural units to the self-evaluation report developed by ANQA. The Rector's report is also presented in this format which is quite comprehensive (up to 500 pages) and it is a mechanical combination of annual reports presented by all structural units.

It should be emphasized that based on the expert panel recommendation (2015), the university has tried to invest the mechanism of evaluating the efficiency of accountability, in particular, it has conducted “questionnaire directed to the identification of transparency of ASPU Rector’s report and policy adopted by ASPU.” The document reflecting the analysis of questionnaire results is not numerated, among others, and it includes a number of indicators the methodological bases of which are not visible (e.g., “65% of respondents mentioned that they participated in the Rector’s report”).

#### 8.2. The Institution ensures transparency of its procedures and processes and makes them publicly available.

Following another recommendation provided by the previous expert panel (i.e., to ensure continuity and consistency in public relations), ASPU has pointed the PR Department as a unit which is responsible for multiformat communication. The activity of the mentioned Department is regulated by

the Charter adopted in 2014. In order to ensure continuity and consistency in public relations, ASPU applies diverse media means – “Pedagogical University” official newspaper, website, Facebook page, Youtube channel, “PHAMA” student radio channel, “Success Formula” TV channel. The official website of the university gives an overall picture about key processes of ASPU and provides useful information to its applicants and stakeholders; there are available reports on student admission, conducted sessions, etc., key decisions and orders, charters of structural units and departments, information on discount system of tuition fees, programs scholarships, etc.

The website of the university presents different structural units of ASPU. However, because of the complex structure of the website, the program descriptions and syllabi are not easily available; instead of being under the sections on Bachelor/Master/or Names of Faculties, they are posted in the section of Documents of the web page of Education Quality Assurance and Management Division.

The Russian and English versions of the website also contain information.

Besides the fulfillment of functions relating dissemination of media on assuring public relations, ASPU also makes visits to different educational institutions, including schools, vocational institutions, thus raising public awareness on the activity of the university.

However, the university doesn't evaluate the efficiency of applied mechanisms directed to the transparency of processes.

### **8.3. The Institution has sustainable feedback mechanisms for establishing contacts with society.**

Following the recommendation provided in the previous phase of accreditation (to improve the mechanisms of ensuring feedback with wide layers of society), ASPU has ensured the existence and functioning of some mechanisms which formulate feedback with society – feedback sections of the web page (5 messages per day), Facebook page (25 messages per day), as well as meetings with schools. As the meetings in the site-visit showed, the discussions on internship results with hosting institutions can be considered to be feedback mechanisms. The reports presented by the presidents of Final Attestation Committees can also be viewed as a feedback mechanism by the university.

By means of website feedback, the applicants mainly raise concerns relating **tuition fees and specialties**<sup>37</sup>.

As a result of the site-visit, it turned out that external stakeholders have not mainly directly participated in activities directed to the development to the academic programs or they have only been familiarized with the developed content taking it per se. The external stakeholders participate in decision-making process of the university only at the level of representativeness of collegial governing bodies. In 2018, ASPU studied the needs of employers among other external stakeholders. As a suggestion, employers give importance to the increase of number of practical courses, development students' methodical competences and increase of hours allocated to internship. During the site-visit it turned out that the university-employer feedback and the cooperation among employers and ASPU are ensured by means of personal network, mediated by responsible staff members of Faculties, chairs and teachers.

The efficiency of mechanisms fostering the establishment of public relations is not evaluated yet.

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<sup>37</sup> This part was re-formulated based on ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "...relating tuition fees and specialties. There are no grounds on feedback with other external stakeholders in the existing platforms."

#### **8.4. The Institution has mechanisms that ensure knowledge /value/ transfer to the society.**

The university doesn't have approved policy on transfer of knowledge to the society, but the diverse elements of the process are implemented informally.

There is a "Temporary Regulation on Professional Volunteering of ASPU Students and Provision, Stipulation, Accounting and recognition of Student's Additional Educational Points for Their Volunteering", due to which the students get a point for their volunteering, and the point is added to their final grade. It should be mentioned that in spite of the existence of the regulation and the provision on adding maximum 5 points, the observation of defences of final papers showed that the implementation of the process is sometimes not in compliance with the requirement set by the regulation.

ASPU transfers knowledge by means of organizing meetings, workshops (education for parents), trainings (for local teachers and teachers from Diaspora), museums, as well as by disseminating the research outcomes (e.g., educational-methodical manual on "Pedagogical Health Science in Elementary School") and labs (e.g. Lab on Studies of Childhood Problems). ASPU specialists author school textbooks, and the University raises public awareness on different social problems by means of different media means, e.g. the movie on disability produced jointly with "Mutual Aid Center" NGO.

The transfer of knowledge on importance of pedagogical values and pedagogy is ensured by the ASPU's museum, "Pedagogical University" official newspaper and "Success Formula" TV channel. The museum is also partially adapted to people with special needs.

Besides, ASPU is an active educational-cultural center which organizes events and discussions, expos, concerts and other activities. The final attestation speech of the academic program on Dance Art can serve as a vivid example of public accountability and dissemination of cultural values. However, it should be noted that the University doesn't study the public demand and social challenges yet.

#### **CONSIDERATIONS**

The expert panel positively evaluates that ASPU gives importance to the accountability, transparency and publicity which is also reflected in the SP. Although the separate description of the flow of accountability processes is missing, the hierarchy of the University's organizational structure ensures the bottom-top accountability.

The expert panel also positively evaluates the ASPU's initiative to approximate its reports to the ANQA format but at the same time the panel mentions that the reports mainly include facts and records of some statistical data, and the conclusions, proposals of actions directed to the elimination of identified shortcomings and analyses are missing which can hinder further processes directed to the identification of weak points, further improvement and development. It can be concluded that the change of format hasn't yet led to real analysis which impedes the recognition of the real picture and evidence-based decision making.

ASPU applies sufficient and diverse platforms to make its activity transparent and available to the society. In the website there are feedback mechanisms but it should be mentioned that the link with external stakeholders, especially with employers and alumni is still weak.

The expert panel finds it positive that ASPU takes actions towards dissemination of knowledge and values among the society. At the same time, the panel thinks that the University has a huge amount of unused potential in this direction, taking into consideration the diverse aspects of pedagogical science

and education within the scope of which ASPU can act as a leading know-how carrier. Being a monopolist in a number of specialties in the RA higher education system, ASPU can occupy the market of current consultancy services which will not only generate public good but will also ensure additional financial inflows.

Positively evaluating all the development, the expert panel highlights that ASPU hasn't yet invested mechanisms of evaluating the efficiency of in-use tools which deteriorates the proper operation of the PDCA cycle.

**SUMMARY.** Taking into consideration the existing hierarchical accountability of the University, the platforms ensuring public availability of current processes and development, the existence of mechanisms fostering the establishment of public relations and the transfer of knowledge and values, as well as accountability directed to internal stakeholders, the state governing bodies and wide layers of the society, the expert panel finds that ASPU **meets** the requirements of the Criterion 8.

**CONCLUSION.** The expert panel evaluates the compliance of ASPU institutional capacities with the requirements of the Criterion 8 as *satisfactory*.

## CRITERION IX. EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND INTERNATIONALIZATION

**CRITERION:** The Institution promotes experience exchange and enhancement through its sound external relations practices, thus promoting internationalization of the Institution.

### FINDINGS

**9.1 The Institution promotes its external relations through sound policies and procedures aimed at creating an environment conducive to experience exchange and enhancement and internationalization.**

ASPU has prioritized the activity directed to internationalization by involving it in the SP as a 7<sup>th</sup> direction and naming it "Expansion of International and External Activity". According to the SP action plan, the actions divided into 3 big objectives, respective KPIs, outcomes and responsible structural units are defined. **The University has approved the "Policy and Strategy on Internationalization for 2015-2020"**<sup>38</sup>. The quantitative KPIs defined in the SP are not grounded.

The aspect of objectives on internationalization covers both educational programs and educational activity, as well as research, international mobility of students and teachers and internationalization activities. In order to create an environment fostering the practice exchange, development and internationalization, no clear procedures and mechanisms promoting external relations are developed yet. Although the university gives importance to the creation of an environment which will promote practice exchange, as well as to the study and adaptation of international practice, they are not defined in the form of clear policies and procedures.

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<sup>38</sup> This part was re-formulated based on ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "However, the given priority is not expressed in the clearly developed separate policy, procedures and processes."

Although the external relations and internationalization are strategic priorities for the university, there are no targeted expenses allocated to internationalization in the budget distribution. In the site-visit it turned out that a number of costs related to internationalization (e.g., summer school) are mentioned under other lines of budget distribution, e.g., educational expenses, representative expenses and they are not visible at first sight.

## **9.2 The Institution's external relations infrastructure ensures regulated process.**

ASPU has a Vice-Rector on HR and International Collaboration, as well as International Collaboration Division with 5 positions which acts in line with the charter. The functions of the mentioned Division mainly refer to the fulfillment of actions aimed at internationalization of ASPU's activity and these actions are mostly organizational. The Division also organizes and conducts meetings with the aim to inform about opportunities of mobility of students and teaching staff, as well as to recruit and guide applicants. The International Collaboration Division collects information on international processes taken at different levels and units from structural units as well. In order to activate the actions or provide information on international processes of the university's different faculties, ASPU has set the position for the Deputy Dean on Science and International Collaboration. No evaluations on efficiency of the investment of such an institute are existent yet.

The site-visit showed that the processes directed to the internationalization of ASPU are not coordinated and the initiative of internationalization taken by structural units is mainly individual. The actions of internationalization are hindered because of the low level of proficiency in foreign languages among students and teachers. This circumstance also conditions the limited membership and involvement of teaching staff in international networks or associations.

There are no analyses of results and achievements relating the activity of the aforementioned division. The efficiency of the Division's activity or the impact of international projects and exchange programs implemented so far on ASPU academic programs and other types of activity is not evaluated. There are no plans of follow-up improvement actions based on results of international projects either.

ASPU collaborates with the USA, EU, CIS countries and China in different formats; there is a program with double diploma (Pázmány Péter Catholic University (Hungary)), as well as visits lasting several days are organized or preliminary arrangements (China) on funding and investment are insured. Such a cooperation is regulated by agreements signed with institutions. ASPU states that in comparison with the data registered in 2015, the number of current suchlike contracts has been increased from 29-41. However, the studies of the site-visit have shown that some of the cooperation contracts are either completed short-term contracts and documents regulating fragmental cooperation or wide-scale agreements without any concrete or targeted actions.

In ASPU, the mobility of students and teachers is mainly ensured within the framework of Erasmus + project. The university states that in 2015-2018, the number of mobility of teaching and administrative staff was increased up to 297 cases, and 27% increase was registered as compared with the data of 2011-2015. Nevertheless, the numbers of administrative and teaching staff mobility, program and content indicators are not differentiated. In terms of student mobility, the indicator of outgoing students points out 339 students for all five years. The framework of collaboration with Pázmány Péter Catholic University and summer school are viewed as a fundamental way of mobility for ingoing students.

According to data in years, mobility of ingoing students was registered only in 2016-2017 and in 2017-2018, 5 and 2 students respectively.

It is notable that internal mobility is also ensured by means of preparatory courses to which students from Middle East and Persian Gulf States who want to continue their Education in Europe and consider ASPU as a platform for developing their languages and other professional knowledge, apply.

In regard to external mobility, the information differentiated according to years is available since 2015-2016 academic year. According to the information, the indicator of student mobility in years didn't exceed 11 in any year. As it was turned out from the meetings with stakeholders in the site-visit, the University doesn't apply tools of identification and evaluation of international students' needs.

The site-visit also showed that there are a number of structural units, such as Internship Division, which give high importance to the opportunity to organize internship through international exchange programs; since 2016 up to now two cases of conduction of internship in the University of Lille have been registered<sup>39</sup>.

Among components of international activity the ERASMUS Capacity Building projects can be mentioned, in particular, 3 suchlike programs were implemented and summed in the reporting period, still the University is mainly passive in applying to international projects.

ASPU has a summer school in which students from different countries participate. The University gives importance to summer school by considering it as a tool which raises international awareness on its activity and RA.

The training of students from Diaspora are also among important directions of the University's international activity. The trainings were held based on delegation of the RA state units.

The expert panel registers that in the field of research the internationalization is limited by the involvement of ASPU "WISDOM" monthly in international depositories. In the near future ASPU strives to ensure registration of two more monthly journals. However, there are no active international research projects and programs.

The University has a number of courses which can be implemented in a foreign language; there are probably translated syllabi of two MA programs in a foreign language but there are no data stating that the whole program description is in a foreign language, and that the internship, MA thesis and teaching are conducted in a foreign language.

### **9.3 The Institution effectively collaborates with local and international counterparts.**

ASPU is a member of many transnational structures among which European University Association, Association of Rectors of Pedagogical Universities in Europe and Francophone University Agency should be mentioned. Besides, ASPU cooperates with different international universities within the framework of ERASMUS project, bilateral agreements and summer school.

The University also collaborates with those structures of UN which deal with child right and related rights. In addition, there are some collaborative relations with Armenian representatives of other international organizations (British Council, etc.).

The existing formats of collaboration have led to the improvement of academic programs in some faculties and to the exchange of experience of some structural units. There are no clear steps taken towards dissemination of acquired best practice.

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<sup>39</sup> This part was re-formulated based on ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "...however, for the current period such opportunities are lacking."

Some activation of cooperation is especially visible in the scope of summer school which is stated by the expansion of geography of partner countries.

It must be outlined that ASPU has a quite successful experience in cooperation with local labor market. There are some practice of preparing theses and making research projects jointly with local structures but they are limited.

As the expertise and the site-visit have shown, the University doesn't make evaluation of efficiency and analysis of the International Collaboration Division's activity and of cooperation neither with local nor with international organizations, and the coordinated impact on different manifestations of the University's activity is not determined. Although ASPU has contracts of collaboration, **some of them do not factually function**<sup>40</sup>.

#### **9.4 The Institution ensures internal stakeholders' appropriate level of a foreign language to enhance efficiency of internationalization.**

The University admits that the low level of proficiency in foreign languages among internal stakeholders hinders the activation of processes directed to internationalization, still ASPU doesn't have any policy on improvement of the condition in this sphere. In all academic programs there are courses in foreign languages, namely Russian and English, but during the site-visit it turned out that these courses don't formulate sufficient knowledge which would enable them to participate in international projects.

Facultative courses have been organized for students in ASPU, however, the Facebook page of this structure states that the structure is not active. No evaluation of efficiency of the mentioned courses has been made.

According to ASPU, the level of proficiency in foreign languages among teachers is 100%. As it turned out in the site-visit, this indicator hasn't been extracted as a result of a concrete study but is based on approximate visions; it has been assumed that teaching staff members are proficient at least in Russian. At the same time ASPU states that teachers' involvement in international processes is impeded because of the very lack of proficiency in foreign languages. Moreover, the University doesn't make evaluation on proficiency of foreign languages among teachers.

#### **CONSIDERATIONS**

The expert panel appreciates the involvement of the 7<sup>th</sup> direction - "Expansion of International and External Activity" in the SP, at the same time stating that ASPU doesn't have separate clear policy on internationalization which would clarify the realization of directions defined by the ASPU mission and would involve all/different spheres of activity – involvement of foreign students and teachers, international partnership, exchange programs for students, internationalization of curricula, internationalization at home, international benchmarking, etc. The expert panel points out that there are a number of elements of internationalization but they are not implemented in a coordinated way. In some cases the steps directed to internationalization are conditioned by personal initiative and personal links. The absence of a policy on internationalization and external relations reflecting all the key aspects of the University's activity can put into risk the coordinated internationalization of the University. As a result, ASPU can be left outside the framework of modern international developments.

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<sup>40</sup> This part was re-formulated based on ASPU's observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: "...the majority of them do not factually function."

The expert panel positively evaluates the cooperation with Pázmány Péter Catholic University (Hungary) including cooperation in the direction of establishment of the Chair of Armenian Studies, as well as the organization of summer schools and exchange programs as well as the perspective of expanding partnership with Asia. The expert panel points out the absence of agreements and mechanisms which practically regulate all the collaborations as far as the framework or fragmental agreements don't ensure the coordinated fulfillment of actions directed to internationalization.

It is positive that ASPU tries to make internationalization processes available to lower levels of the University, up to separate faculties, but in general the absence of analysis of activities carried out by the International Collaboration Division and Deputies of Dean on Science and International Cooperation as well as the lack of mechanisms evaluating the efficiency make it risky the organic interrelation of international processes in all faculties as well as the link among educational, research and other processes.

The expert panel is concerned about low indicators on mobility which are registered in ASPU. Except for the indicators relating summer school, the real mobility and exchange of students and teachers, both internal and external, form up to 0.1%. Such indicator state about the fact that the University has weighty obstacles. It would be beneficial for ASPU to take active steps in the following two directions – a) to foster the proficiency in foreign languages, especially English, among students and teaching staff, b) to raise stakeholders' motivation by clearly showing the efficiency of exchange and international experience in the context of further education and professional activity. The expert panel highly evaluates ASPU's initiative to publicize and disseminate the Armenian educational and cultural values by means of summer schools and at the same time states that it would be more beneficial for the University to ensure link with the specialties of ASPU. Moreover, ASPU still needs to take considerable steps towards initiation/development of international research projects and assurance of participation in them as well as international recognition of research outcomes.

The expert panel positively evaluates the continuation of partnership relations established by means of different international projects which is viewed as a guarantee ensuring possible intensification of international processes, however, the panel strongly emphasizes the fact that ASPU hasn't fulfilled the actions set by the improvement plan approved by the University, which were mentioned in the expert panel report of the previous accreditation and in respective recommendations which reflected the aforementioned problem.

The absence of mechanisms evaluating the efficiency of the activity carried out by bodies responsible for international processes of ASPU, absence of further improvement actions, as well as lack of mechanisms evaluating the needs relating internationalization existent at all levels, including those (needs) relating international students, hinder the clear and targeted planning, aimed at activation of internationalization. In this respect the expert panel highlights the infeasibility of KPIs defined by the SP action plan and the ambition at the level of ASPU's current capacities. In order to efficiently carry out international processes, the University should take the commitment to make realistic evaluation of its basic situation and define feasible KPIs aimed at its vision by capitalizing its achievements and capacities.

**SUMMARY.** Taking into consideration the University's membership with a number of transnational organizations, the established partnership, the international relations and perspectives to expand them, the good practice of implementing program with double diploma, the summer school, the existence of



separate infrastructure and efforts taken towards promotion of collaboration with lower levels of hierarchy, the expert panel finds that ASPU **meets** the requirements of the Criterion 9.

**CONCLUSION.** The expert panel evaluates the compliance of ASPU institutional capacities with the requirements of the Criterion 9 as *satisfactory*.

## CRITERION X.INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

**CRITERION: The Institution has an internal quality assurance system, which promotes establishment of a quality culture and continuous improvement of all the processes of the Institution.**

### FINDINGS

#### 10.1 The Institution has quality assurance policies and procedures.

ASPU defined its internal quality assurance (IQA) policy in 2012. There are descriptions of the policy and the procedures in other documents which were approved later, in particular, “ASPU Concept of Quality Assurance”, “ASPU Guide on Internal Quality Assurance”, “ASPU Guidelines of Quality Management System (Management, Transparency, Accountability) and Quality Assurance”. There are objectives and steps for their implementation relating Quality which are defined in the SP (e.g., “Objective 1.4. To increase efficiency of processes and structures of IQA system”). Although ASPU has a number of described procedures, they are not put into practice yet and they mostly don’t form a part of unified QA policy and IQA system. The QA policy doesn’t reflect the SP directions and priorities and hasn’t planned the continuous improvement of the university’s educational and other processes based on the SP directions and priorities. The policy is developed on the previous version of European Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance, and the national and institutional peculiarities are partially taken into account. ASPU QA division hasn’t made analysis of efficiency of the QA policy and procedures, and their impact hasn’t been evaluated.

In the QA Manual, there are some IQA mechanisms such as QA of teaching and learning (evaluation of academic programs by teachers, external evaluation of academic programs, monitoring of academic programs based on statistics-qualitative and quantitative indicators, study of students’ academic progress, student load, monitoring of assessment of students’ knowledge, monitoring of performance of teaching staff), QA of research, study of alumni’s professional track, assurance of feedback with employers, as well as study of labor market requirements which **are not implemented or if implemented, not on a regular basis**<sup>41</sup>. Among factually applied QA mechanisms, the self-evaluation, surveys and focus groups, rating process of teachers and class observations can be mentioned. Their application is not regular and coordinated and the results do not have targeted impact on educational and other processes. The reliability and efficiency of tool set is not evaluated yet. The processes of organization and conduction of surveys, collection and elaboration of data, as well as evaluation of efficiency are not ensured with clear methodology. The university doesn’t make comprehensive content analyses of evaluation results, and the reasons of problems and consequences are not studied. In the documentary analyses, no significant and targeted problems have been revealed. Some data presented in the self-

<sup>41</sup> This part was re-formulated based on ASPU’s observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: “In the QA Manual, there are some IQA mechanisms ...are not regularly implemented.”

evaluation are approximate percentages. In the surveys there are data which are identical for both: full-time and part-time system, particularly in surveys relating the efficiency of infrastructures. No improvement activities are taken based on studies and identified problems. There are no clear mechanisms (learnt lessons) of improvement. No feedback on survey results is insured. Although the results are published on the website, the meetings showed that the stakeholders are not aware of that.

The availability of official documents relating the QA system is insured in the informative portal of QA system of the university's website. The university doesn't have clearly developed KPIs on QA processes yet. The university doesn't apply flexible mechanisms of identifying and disseminating best practice of QA.

#### **10.2 The Institution allocates sufficient material, human and financial resources to manage internal quality assurance processes.**

In 2012, ASPU established Education Quality Assurance and Management Division (EQAM) with 3 positions. In the staff recruitment process, the definition of requirements set for professional qualities has been highlighted. The requirements involve professional competences and skills. It should be noted that neither evaluation of performance of the EQAM Division's staff, nor needs assessment are carried out. The Charter of the EQAM Division was approved in 2018. The activity of EQAM Division is coordinated by the Management of Educational Processes and Improvements which is subject to the Vice-Rector on educational processes. The university has defined job descriptions in which the functions of the EQAM Division's staff members are formulated. There are staff members responsible for QA at chair and faculty levels with whom the expert panel had meetings as a result of which it turned out that the majority of them are not aware of the QA policy and the activities of EQAM division. Accordingly, the recommendation on expansion of opportunities directed to the professional development of QA responsible staff members, as mentioned in the previous expert panel report, is not taken into account. The EQAM Division makes annual planning which is not based on the SP or conceptual documents on QA of the university. The QA reports are presented by the Management of Educational Processes and Improvements. As the studies of reports showed, the reports innumerate carried out processes and are not content reports with quantitative and qualitative data and analyses of achievements and reasons of shortcomings. In the SWOT analysis of its self-evaluation report, ASPU also mentions that there is a lack of professional expertise of QA responsible staff members, and the cooperation between the EQAM Division's staff and specialists International Education is passive.

As the observations of conditions of the EQAM Division's activity stated, the mentioned division is currently ensured with necessary office facilities, furniture and material resources. There are all necessary positions created for the assurance of personnel of the division. The provision of material and financial resources is ensured in a centralized way, upon necessity. ASPU has compiled mid-term budget planning estimate 2019-2020, in which the list of material and financial resources which are necessary for QA processes is stipulated to the EQAM Division (2019) and the budget based on the list. However, the mentioned document hasn't been approved yet.

The internal stakeholders of the university – students, teaching staff, heads of respective structural units and other representatives of ASPU staff, who participated in meetings, were mainly unaware of the QA Manual and the provisions involved in it.

### **10.3 The internal and external stakeholders are involved in quality assurance processes.**

In 2016, ASPU approved the Regulation on Involvement of Internal and External Stakeholders in ASPU QA Processes and Their Needs Assessment, according to which “ASPU regularly ensures the involvement of its stakeholders, studies their needs, evaluates and takes into account the results for making changes, developing and improving the strategy.” However, as the meetings with the stakeholders showed, the mentioned regulation does not factually function as far as the involvement of stakeholders in the development of both QA Manual and regulatory documents was weak. In general, the involvement of stakeholders, especially in external QA processes, is passive. The university tries to ensure the involvement of its internal stakeholders in QA processes by respectively involving them in committees or by conducting surveys. But the students and the teaching staff haven’t shown active participation and are not aware of survey results. As the meetings with part-time and international students showed, they didn’t participate in surveys. According to the meeting results, the external stakeholders (alumni and employers) are mainly not involved in QA processes, and their participation in surveys was passive. Hence, the recommendation provided in the previous accreditation in terms of expanding the scope of involvement of external stakeholders and evaluating efficiency has not been followed. The university has only ensured feedback on internship due to the efforts taken by internship division. The involvement of external stakeholders in QA processes is mainly ensured due to personal initiatives and relations. The labor market representatives’ opinions on the quality of academic programs and students are collected in evaluation of internships.

The efficiency of current mechanisms of involvement hasn’t been evaluated, and there are no policy and procedures on evaluation in spite of the remark mentioned by the previous expert panel. The extent of stakeholders’ participation in QA processes and the efficiency of the mentioned processes are not evaluated. The stakeholders’ apprehension of IQA policy is at low level.

### **10.4 The internal quality assurance system is periodically reviewed.**

The EQAM division of the university gives importance to the continuous improvement of quality as the most important principle of its policy, in particular, according to the EQAM Division’s Charter, one of the objectives is “the development and regular revision of ASPU QA policy and strategy, administrative support at all levels.” However, there are no policy and procedures on revision of IQA system and mechanisms and tools of regular revision of the system. ASPU mentions that the results of TEMPUS “MAHATMA”, “ESPAQ”, “ARMENQA” and “BOOST” projects jointly implemented with a number of RA and foreign partner organizations serve as a basis for the university’s QA system. However, the university hasn’t made targeted benchmarking in order to develop QA policy and procedures. There are significant differences between IQA systems described in documents and those being currently used. As the meeting with the Management of Educational Processes and Improvements Department showed, currently the university urgently needs to revise its QA policy as far as the in-use policy is outdated and it doesn’t take into account current challenges. But the university hasn’t revised the system yet in spite of the fact that in the recommendations provided by the previous accreditation expert panel it was suggested to “improve the QA mechanisms by means of which the university will be able to evaluate and to continuously revise the IQA system.”

The university hasn’t invested systems of current monitoring and evaluation of QA system either, and respectively the analyses of efficiency are missing. The PDCA cycle in QA processes is not fully

completed yet. The majority of processes planned for the solution of problems identified after the previous accreditation are still in the phases of planning and implementation; the phase of implementation is not completed in all processes. The processes implemented for improvement are not based on evaluation results. The planning and implementation of improvement processes do not follow the evaluations which are carried out from time to time. There are no grounds for revisions based on analyses. The carried out processes are not linked with the SP in a cycle, hence, the recommendation of the previous expert panel report regarding the assurance of application of the PDCA cycle at all levels is not followed.

#### **10.5 The internal quality assurance system provides valid and sufficient grounds for the external quality assurance processes.**

The self-evaluation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation of institutional capacities is viewed as a main base for the fulfillment of processes of external evaluation of QA. But in fact, the presented self-evaluation is not an analytical document, has a descriptive character, and the provided information is not grounded with qualitative and quantitative data. In some cases, the presented data are approximated and are not based on analyses. The requirement of some standards and the presented information are not in compliance with each other. There is no institutional, coordinated approach to the data collection, analysis and application. The process carried out in some structural units is regulated but the mechanisms of management and dissemination of information among different structural units are not clear. There are no defined quality indicators, and the reports are not provided according to indicators.

The analyses made as a result of QA processes have been documented and published on the website. In spite of that, the necessary documentary bases of some processes such as evaluation of the activity of the EQAM Division and respective reports, qualitative and content analyses of survey results, analyses of QA and efficiency of other mechanisms, minutes of meetings-discussions with internal and external stakeholders are missing.

#### **10.6. The internal quality assurance system ensures the transparency of the processes at the Institution providing valid and up to date information on their quality to the internal and external stakeholders.**

In the steps mentioned for the Objective 1.4 of the SP the university defines the following: “To ensure the transparency and publicity of standards of internal quality evaluation, self-evaluation process and respective report, the feedback in QA processes and to involve internal and external stakeholders of the university in the mentioned processes.”

In order to reach this goal, a separate webpage of the Management of Educational Processes and Improvements has been created. For external evaluation of QA the self-evaluation of ASPU, attached documents, the Rector’s reports and regulatory bases are published **on the webpage. The same information**<sup>42</sup> is published in several places. The site is not used to ensure feedback. The stakeholders’ awareness on the posted materials relating QA is at low level.

### **CONSIDERATION**

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<sup>42</sup> This part was re-formulated based on ASPU’s observations. In the previous version it was formulated in the following way: “...on the webpage. The search for the information available on the webpage needs to be simplified. The same information...”

The absence of clear procedures based on a number of approved documents relating the IQA policy of ASPU states about the fact that the principles and approaches presented in the mentioned documents haven't been converted into processes. That is to say, the IQA system of the university is still in the stage of investment and it is not sufficiently integrated into processes, is not operated in a coordinated way, and there is no institutional approach. The mechanisms which would enable the university to evaluate the process of formulating quality culture and continuously improving the processes of the university are not clarified and integrated. The steps taken towards efficient operation of the system are not coordinated yet. The imperfection of mechanisms and toolset evaluating the efficiency of different processes as well as the lack of analyses do not allow to evaluate the impact of QA processes on the improvement of academic programs and the activity of the university. There isn't any unified system of making internal evaluation of efficiency of processes which would complete all the mechanisms and procedures. There are no traditions regular evaluation and formulation of improvements either. The results of conducted surveys do not undergo qualitative analysis which makes their application non-targeted. In fact, the IQA policy and procedures of the university haven't been realized and invested never becoming a flexible QA system.

The collaboration among EQAM Division, staff members responsible for quality at chair and faculty levels and other structural units is poor which hinders the integration of quality culture in ASPU. Currently, the IQA system is focused on separate, fragmental procedures, disregarding the evaluation directed to the improvement and the systemic approach. The reliability and validity of applied QA mechanisms haven't been evaluated which doesn't allow the university to evaluate their efficiency.

With the aim to manage IQA processes, ASPU provides human resources by appointing QA responsible staff members in faculties and chairs. Although the university gives importance to the recruitment of the EQAM Division with specialists having respective qualification and experience, there is still an urgent need for further professional trainings with the aim to establish functional team and to adopt analytical approach. The material and financial resources provided to the mentioned Division are generally sufficient for carrying out activity.

In spite of the existence of different mechanisms described in the approved regulation, the factual involvement of internal and external stakeholders in QA processes of ASPU is very weak. The conduction of surveys is viewed as the main mechanism of involvement but the low percentage of participation or the irregular conduction of surveys haven't allowed to identify the targeted problems. Moreover, the absence of further improvements based on them has negatively influenced internal stakeholders' motivation, thus leading to their fictive participation. On the other hand, the fact that stakeholders' needs are mainly raised by means of surveys, limits the opportunities to get objective information and to ensure feedback with them. There isn't factual involvement of internal and external stakeholders in QA processes; the mentioned stakeholders have passive participation in conducted surveys and studies which doesn't ensure jointly made research on quality or integration of results in respective spheres.

There is an urgent need to revise the IQA system as far as in fact the documentary bases and the current system are not in compliance with each other. The IQA system doesn't foster continuous improvement yet. The IQA system still needs to have indicators and feedback in order to point out its strong and weak points and to develop improvement plans.

In spite of the safe evaluation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation, it hasn't become an analytical document yet. It doesn't create sufficient grounds for the processes of external evaluation of QA. The self-evaluation culture hasn't been enrooted in ASPU yet.

The presentation of documentary bases on the quality of the university's processes to internal and external stakeholders in the website gives an opportunity to ensure transparency, although there is a need to simplify the search for the data available on the website. Because the reliability and efficiency of the website is not analyzed, the university hasn't identified its stakeholders' unawareness on the results of research activities on the quality of processes carried out by the EQAM Division.

**SUMMARY.** Taking into consideration the fact that the problems of the IQA system which were identified during the previous accreditation, mostly continue to be up-to-date, the system is in the phase of formulation, it is not sufficiently integrated into the activity of the university, it does not foster the continuous improvement of ASPU's all processes and does not promote the formulation of quality culture yet, the QA processes are not carried out in a coordinated way, internal and external stakeholders are passively involved in the mentioned processes, and the activities directed to the qualitative evaluation of efficiency of carried out processes and revision based on the evaluation results are missing, the expert panel finds that the QA system of ASPU doesn't sufficiently foster the continuous improvement of processes yet and formation of quality culture, hence ASPU **does not need** the requirements of the Criterion 10.

**CONCLUSION.** The expert panel evaluates the compliance of ASPU institutional capacities with the requirements of the Criterion 10 as *unsatisfactory*.

## EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

CRITERION	CONCLUSION
I. Mission and Goals	Satisfactory
II. Governance and Administration	Unsatisfactory
III. Academic Programs	Unsatisfactory
IV. Students	Satisfactory
V. Teaching and Support Staff	Satisfactory
VI. Research and Development	Unsatisfactory
VII. Infrastructure and Resources	Satisfactory
VIII. Social Responsibility	Satisfactory
IX. External Relations and Internationalization	Satisfactory
X. Internal Quality Assurance System	Unsatisfactory

11 October 2019

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**Christine Soghikyan**  
Chair of the Expert Panel

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1. CVs OF EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS

**Kristine Soghikyan** - Graduated from Yerevan Institute of Foreign Languages after V. Brusov, Faculty of Romano-Germanic Languages (in qualification of "Teacher of English and French") in 2000, and in 2003 - full-time PhD education in the same university. Since 2000 K. Soghikyan works in Yerevan State Linguistic University after V. Brusov, afterwards renamed as Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences (YSULS). She has participated in many international projects, conferences and courses by attending a number of foreign universities, including universities of Syracuse, Columbia, Michigan, Massachusetts (USA). In 2000-2008 K. Soghikyan worked at both RA and foreign secondary schools as an English teacher. In 2005-2007 she was an expert of the European Center for Modern Languages (Austria) and respectively co-authored the European pedagogical-methodical self-evaluation portfolio (EPOSTL - The European Portfolio of Student Teachers of Languages). In 2008 she was awarded the Scientific Degree (PhD) in Philological Sciences, and in 2012 - Scientific Title of Associate Professor. In 2011-2012 K. Soghikyan provided lectures in the European Educational Regional Academy and within the same period she also supervised the methodical group of "Written Speech" at YSULS. Since 2012 she is the Head of the Chair of English Communication and Translation at YSULS. Since 2001 up to now K. Soghikyan works as a consecutive/simultaneous interpreter by collaborating with a number of international organizations and embassies. She has authored and co-authored more than three dozens of articles. Since 2018 K. Soghikyan is involved in the institutional accreditation processes of RA education institutions as an expert.

**Gagik Ktryan** - in 2005 graduated from Yerevan State University, Faculty of Informatics and Applied Mathematics in specialization of Mathematics, Bachelor's Degree, and in 2007 - in specialization of Informatics and Applied Mathematics in the same Faculty, Master's Degree. In 2010 G. Ktryan was awarded the Scientific Degree (PhD) in Physics and Mathematics in the specialization of Computational Mathematics (the topic of research - "On Multivariate Polynomial Interpolation and Gasca-Maeztu Conjecture"). The scope of research interests involves the Multivariate Polynomial Interpolation, Differential Equations with Ordinary and Partial Derivatives, etc. Since 2008 G. Ktryan teaches in the higher education system. In 2012-2015 he was the Vice-Rector on Educational Reforms and the Head of Quality Assurance Center in Movses Khorenatsi University, and in 2015-2018 - Head of the Quality Assurance and Analysis Division (2<sup>nd</sup> Class Counselor) in the Military Aviation University after Marshal A. Khanperyants of the RA Ministry of Defence. Since November 2018 G. Ktryan is the Deputy Head (1<sup>st</sup> Class Counselor) of the Public Relations and Communication Division of the RA Ministry of Defence. He has participated in a number of conferences devoted to the problems of higher education quality improvement. In 2012 G. Ktryan participated in the training on "Internal Quality Assurance in the RA Professional Education Sphere". Since 2015 G. Ktryan is involved in accreditation processes of the RA higher education institutions as an expert.

**Narine Khachatryan** - in 1999 graduated from Yerevan State University (YSU), Faculty of Philosophy, Sociology and Psychology in specialization of Psychology, as a Diploma Specialist. Since 1999 she has



worked as a Researcher in YSU, afterwards - as a teacher. In 2006 N. Khachatryan was awarded the Scientific Degree (PhD) in Psychological Sciences, and in 2008 - the Scientific Title of Associate Professor. Since 2011 up to now she is the Head of the Chair of Personality Psychology and the Scientific Supervisor of the "Personality and Social Environment" laboratory. She has participated in a number of international research, training and exchange programs. In 2010 N. Khachatryan was the scholarship holder of the training program (JEDP) for young teachers held by the American Councils for International Education (ACTR/ACCELS) and participated in the training in the University of Kansas (USA). In 2014 N. Khachatryan participated in the "Promoting Internationalization in Higher Education through Cultural and Structural Adjustment" (PICASA, TEMPUS project) and participated in the training in Belgium. She has conducted a number of grant projects in directions of both scientific research and development of innovative courses. Is a member of Editorial Board of four peer-reviewed periodicals, including the "Current Issues in Personality Psychology" international periodical. The scope of research interests involves the problems of personality development sustainability and welfare, tolerant consciousness, problems of personality and culture, gender psychology, psychological health and treatment. N. Khachatryan has authored more than 35 research publications, including scientific articles and educational-methodical manuals. In 2019 she was involved in the expert panel carrying out institutional accreditation as an expert.

**Peter Caris** - in 1998 graduated from Leuven Catholic University with the MA qualification in Biology. P. Caris is the Senior Adviser of the Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). In the recent years he has been involved in the project on integration of institutional observations in Flanders and was responsible for the development of assessment methodology for vocational educational institutions and colleges. P. Caris is the Secretary of the Council dealing with issues on higher education community stakeholders and has actively promoted the development of the new QA system. In 2018 he participated in the ENQA Leadership Development Program which involved the topics of global tendencies of higher education, EHEA development, higher education policy development tendencies and QA activities.

**Srbuhi Michikyan** - in 2019 graduated from Yerevan State University, Faculty of Sociology, BA Degree in specialization of Sociology. In 2016 she participated in the three-month training for student-experts organized within the framework of the ANQA "Student Voice" project. In 2017-2018 she carried out voluntary activities in the same center. Since 2017 S. Michikyan is a member of the Committee on Social Issues of the Armenian National Students' Association (ANSA). She has participated in a number of international projects and national conferences. In December 2017 - February 2018 S. Michikyan worked in the "Bridge of Hope" organization as an observer of inclusive education evaluation in pre-school institutions and schools. Since 2018 she is involved in the QA processes as a student-expert.

## APPENDIX 2. TIME-SCHEDULE OF SITE-VISIT

20.05.2019 - 24.05.2019

20.05.2019		<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Duration</i>
1	Meeting with Rector of university	10:00	10:30	30 minutes
2	Meeting with representatives of Board of Trustees	10:40	11:30	50 minutes
3	Meeting with members of self-evaluation working group	11:40	12:15	35 minutes
4	Meeting with Vice-rectors, Head of Financial Planning and Statistics Department and developers of Strategic Plan	12:15	13:15	60 minutes
5	Break, closed session of expert panel	13:15	14:15	60 minutes
6	Meeting with representatives of employers	14:30	15:30	60 minutes
7	Meeting with representatives of alumni	15:40	16:40	60 minutes
8	Review of documents and closed session of expert panel	16:50	18:00	70 minutes
21.05.2019		<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Duration</i>
1	Meeting with Deans	09:45	10:45	60 minutes
2	Meeting with heads of professional chairs implementing the academic programs mentioned in the self-evaluation and the group responsible for the development of programs	11:00	11:45	45 minutes
3	Meeting with heads of chairs	12:00	13:30	90 minutes
4	Break, closed session of expert panel	13:30	14:30	60 minutes
5	Meeting with teaching staff (8-10 teachers)	14:45	15:30	45 minutes
6	Meeting with adjunct (part-time) teachers (8-10 teachers)	15:45	16:30	45 minutes
7	Review of documents and closed session of expert panel	16:30	18:00	90 minutes
22.05.2019		<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Duration</i>
1	Meeting with heads and representatives of structural units (Division of Electronic Management of Education, Division of Organization of Student Academic Track (Mobility), Division of Management of Educational Processes of Teaching staff, Scientific-Research Center, Division of Coordination of Scientific-Research Activities, Diaspora Scientific-Research Center, Internship Center)	09:45	10:30	45 minutes
2	Meeting with representatives of Student Council and Student Scientific Association (10 representatives)	10:45	11:30	45 minutes
3	Meetings with representatives of students (BA & MA full-time 8-10 students)	11:45	12:30	45 minutes
4	Break, closed session of expert panel	12:45	13:45	60 minutes
5	Meeting representatives of students (BA & MA part-time 8-10 international students)	14:00	14:45	45 minutes
6	Observation of resources (Deans' Offices, chairs, labs, research centers)	15:00	16:00	60 minutes
7	Review of documents and closed session of expert panel	16:00	18:00	120 minutes
23.05.2019		<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Duration</i>

1	Meeting with heads of structural units (University-Employer Collaboration, Media and PR Department, Division of International Cooperation, HR Department, Accountancy, Special Department)	10:00	11:00	60 minutes
2	Class observations	11:15	13:00	105 minutes
3	Break, closed session of expert panel	13:00	14:00	60 minutes
4	Meeting with staff members responsible for QA	14:15	15:15	60 minutes
5	Observation of resources (Scientific library, Museum of History, IT Center, computer classrooms, sports hall, First Aid Point, halls, classrooms, "Chess" scientific-research institute)	15:30	16:30	60 minutes
6	Review of documents and closed session of expert panel	16:30	18:00	90 minutes
<b>24.05.2019</b>		<i><b>Start</b></i>	<i><b>End</b></i>	<i><b>Duration</b></i>
1	Observation of resources (workshops, studios)	9:45	11:15	90 minutes
2	Open meeting	11:15	12:00	45 minutes
3	Break, closed session of expert panel	12:00	13:00	60 minutes
4	Meeting with staff members selected by expert panel	13:00	13:45	45 minutes
5	Closed session of expert panel	13:45	14:15	210 minutes
6	Meeting with the Rector	17:30	18:00	30 minutes

### APPENDIX 3. LIST OF DOCUMENTS FOR OBSERVATION

N	Name of Document	Criteria
1.	ASPU self-evaluation and appendices, electronic survey	
2.	Report of faculty plans presented as analyses of achievement of goals defined by the study program	1.3
3.	Analysis of efficiency of ASPU organizational structure	2.1
4.	Policy on management of financial resources (approved on 31.01.2019)	2.3
5.	Analyses of labor market needs and educational environment	2.4
6.	Samples of work plans of structural units, chairs, Deans' Offices	2.5
7.	Charters of faculties and chairs	2.5
8.	Regulation on Activity of Faculty Council, including the procedure on selection of members	2.5
9.	Regulation on Activity of Educational-Methodical Committees of Faculty Council (if separate documents are available) or the presence of respective structural unit in the mentioned regulation	2.5
10.	Minutes of sessions of Faculty Council and Educational-Methodical Committees	2.5
11.	Rector's annual reports presented as annual reports of structural units	2.5
12.	Reports of Presidents of Final Attestation Committees	2.7
13.	Course description of "Foreign Language" academic programs for BA and MA studies	3.1
14.	Minutes and reports relating meetings of working groups compiled for revision of academic programs	3.1
15.	Class-schedules	3.1
16.	Minutes of chair session	
17.	Summaries presented for academic programs, including those in foreign languages (full-time and part-time, 2013-2018)	3.2
18.	Register of attendance/register (full-time, part-time, 2013-2018)	3.2
19.	Analysis of results of teachers' class observations Papers of class observations	3.2
20.	Thematic distribution presented as plans of classes	3.2

21.	Students' individual works - essays, course papers (2 papers for each specialization evaluated as excellent and unsatisfactory), materials of group works	<b>3.3</b>
22.	Students' individual works - theses, diploma works (6 papers for each specialization - 2 of them evaluated as satisfactory, 2 -excellent, 2 - unsatisfactory)	<b>3.3</b>
23.	Academic papers of students	<b>3.3</b>
24.	Students' grade bulletins	<b>3.3</b>
25.	Assignments/tasks provided in the subjects of "Foreign Language/English", "General Psychology", "Pedagogy", "Higher Mathematics"	<b>3.3</b>
26.	Peer-reviews of presented theses	<b>3.3</b>
27.	Requirements set for preparation of theses	<b>3.3</b>
28.	Assessment criteria of theses	<b>3.3</b>
29.	Regulation on Defence of Theses	<b>3.3</b>
30.	Examination questionnaires, tickets	<b>3.3</b>
31.	Samples of examination tests	<b>3.3</b>
32.	Teacher Manual on Development of Effective Courses and Academic Programs, ARMENQA presented as regulation on calculation of credits	<b>3.3</b>
33.	Minutes of State Attestation Committees for the last 3 years, minutes of respective discussions and made decisions	<b>3.3</b>
34.	Guide on Erasmus+ Credit Mobility presented as a document regulating the mobility of students and teachers	<b>3.4</b>
35.	Mechanisms/tools of efficient assessment of teaching and learning, filled-in questionnaires	<b>3.5</b>
36.	External opinion on academic programs, changes made based on it	<b>3.5</b>
37.	Students' transfers from full-time to part-time education and vice versa/ for the last 5 years	<b>4.1</b>
38.	Number of students according to faculties	<b>4.1</b>
39.	Number of foreign students, geography according to academic programs	<b>4.1</b>
40.	Reports of working groups for professional orientation and respective minutes of sessions of Faculty Councils	<b>4.1</b>

41.	Functions and contract of Preparatory Division, presented as a documentation package of the Division - attendants' evaluation papers, registers, assignments, examination results	<b>4.1</b>
42.	Regulation on Students' Rotation	<b>4.2</b>
43.	Regulation on Partial Discount of Students' Tuition Fees	<b>4.2</b>
44.	Percentage of Students benefiting from discounts of tuition fees	<b>4.2</b>
45.	Minutes of faculties' sessions	<b>4.2</b>
46.	Minutes of conferences organized before and after internship	<b>4.2</b>
47.	Charter of Student Scientific Association (SSA) Minutes of sessions of Student Council and SSA Minutes and agendas of annual events of Student Council and SSA Annual plans o of Student Council and SSA	<b>4.2</b> <b>4.7</b>
48.	Grounds regulating the activity of academic advisors, work plan - list of current events, results	<b>4.2</b>
49.	Reports of methodists attached to internship groups, or samples on provided consultancy	<b>4.3</b>
50.	Functions, work plan, annual reports of University-Employer Cooperation Center	<b>4.5</b>
51.	Sample of contract signed with employers	<b>4.5</b>
52.	Total number of alumni (2015-2018) in general and according to academic programs	<b>4.5</b>
53.	Results of studies on employment of alumni	<b>4.8</b>
54.	Requirements set for competition on teaching staff recruitment	<b>5.1</b>
55.	Samples of teachers' portfolios in the direction of presented academic programs	<b>5.1</b>
56.	Individual working development plans of teachers	<b>5.1</b>
57.	Functions of teaching staff, job description	<b>5.1</b>
58.	Sample of contracts signed with teaching and support staff	<b>5.1</b>
59.	Policy on dismissal of teaching staff	<b>5.1</b>
60.	Results of analyses on class observations and surveys together with remarks, proposals, conclusions which are presented and discussed with other teachers, in sessions of chairs and Rectorate	<b>5.3</b>

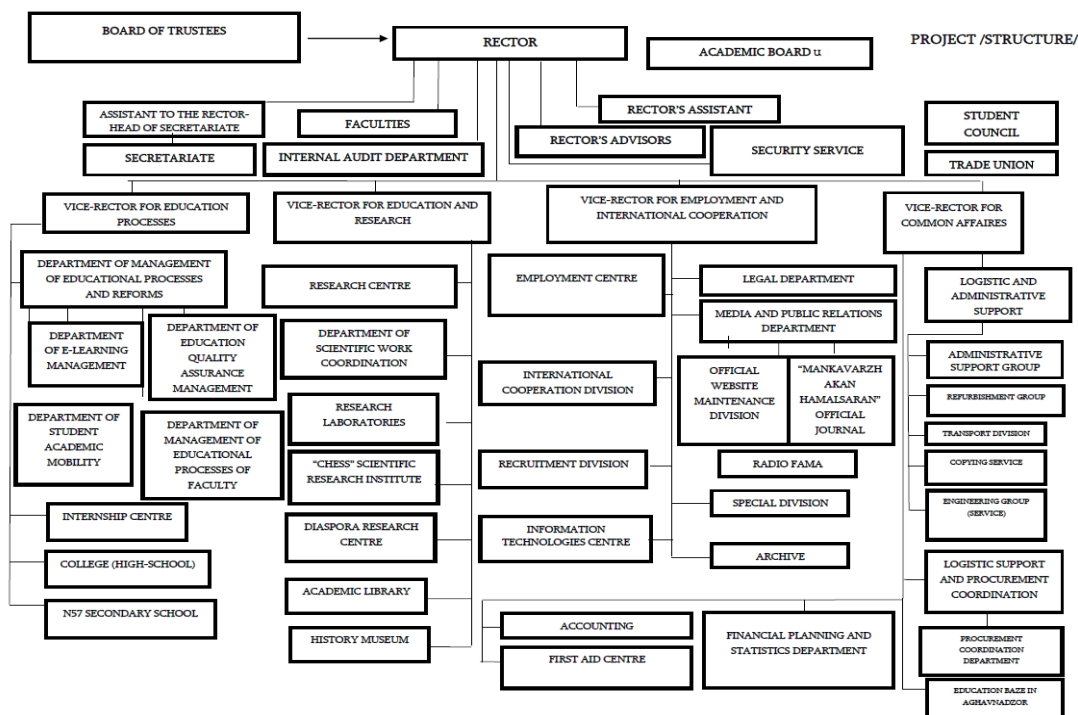
61.	Minutes of sessions of chairs, Faculty Councils, Rectorate, Scientific Council on students' dissatisfaction and proposals	<b>5.3</b>
62.	Program of teacher professional trainings, reports, analyses of evaluation of efficiency	<b>5.4</b>
63.	List of staff	<b>5.5</b>
64.	Topics and time-schedule of seminars, meetings	<b>5.5</b>
65.	Reports of administrative staff	<b>5.7</b>
66.	Programs of State Science Committee presented as annual plans of Scientific-Research Center	<b>6.1</b>
67.	Short-term, mid-term and long-term research programs of chairs and respective analyses on their fulfillment	<b>6.2</b>
68.	Samples of checking of results through plagiarism-detection programs, including those with negative conclusions	<b>6.3</b>
69.	List of research works published in international (CIS and other countries) peer-reviewed journals in the last 3 years	<b>6.3</b>
70.	List of reports provided by students in international conferences	<b>6.4</b>
71.	Rector's annual reports presented as functions and reports of ASPU's structural units	<b>8.1</b>
72.	Sample of ASPU's ads booklets	<b>8.2</b>
73.	Academic Programs in foreign language(s)	<b>9.2</b>
74.	List and time-schedule of courses taught in a foreign language	<b>9.2</b>
75.	Annual work plans of Division of Education Quality Assurance and Management (EQA & Management) (for the last 3 years)	<b>9.2</b>
76.	Plans of implementation of QA processes for the last 3 years	<b>10.1</b>
77.	Job descriptions of QA responsible staff members	<b>10.1</b>
78.	Rector's reports presented as reports of EQA & Management Division for the last 3 years	<b>10.1</b>

#### APPENDIX 4. RESOURCES OBSERVED

1. Classrooms
2. Studios
3. Divisions
4. Deans' Offices
5. Chairs
6. Laboratories
7. Research centers/labs
8. Educational-Experimental centers
9. Cabinet-classrooms
10. IT Center
11. Computer classrooms
12. Multimedia labs
13. Structural units
14. Sports halls
15. Canteens
16. Scientific library
17. Faculty libraries
18. Reading halls
19. Museum of History
20. First Aid Center
21. Halls
22. Dance halls
23. Concert halls
24. Dressing rooms
25. "CHESS" Scientific-Research Institute
26. Scientific-Research Center



## APPENDIX 5. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION INSTITUTION



## APPENDIX 6. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. **ANQA** - National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation
2. **ANSA** - Armenian National Students' Association
3. **ASPU** - Armenian State Pedagogical University after Kh. Abovyan
4. **ECTS** - European Credit Transfer System
5. **EQA** - education quality assurance
6. **EQF** - European Qualifications Framework
7. **HEI** - higher education institution
8. **HR** - human resources
9. **HRM** – human resource management
10. **ITs** - information technologies
11. **KPIs** - key performance indicators
12. **LOs** – learning outcomes
13. **MoES** - Ministry of Education and Science
14. **NQF** - National Qualifications Framework
15. **PAP** - professional academic program
16. **PDCA** - plan-do-check-act
17. **QA** - quality assurance
18. **RA** - Republic of Armenia
19. **SP** - Strategic Plan
20. **SSA** - Student Scientific Association