



# **Report for Institutional Accreditation**

## **Yerevan Haybusak University**

**2023**

## Table of contents

1	Introduction .....	4
1.1	Institutional accreditation .....	4
1.2	Assessment process .....	5
1.3	Information about Yerevan Haybusak University .....	5
1.4	Main changes based on recommendations of the previous institutional accreditation ..	7
2	Summary of institutional accreditation findings .....	7
3	Institutional accreditation findings .....	13
3.1	Strategic management .....	13
3.2	Resources .....	19
3.3	Quality Culture .....	23
3.4	Academic ethics .....	29
3.5	Internationalisation .....	35
3.6	Teaching staff.....	40
3.7	Study programme .....	45
3.8	Learning and teaching.....	53
3.9	Student assessment.....	60
3.10	Learning support systems .....	64
3.11	Research, development and/or other creative activity.....	68
3.12	Service to society.....	74
4	Assessment findings of the sample of the study programmes.....	78
4.1	Dentistry DMD .....	78
4.1.1	Planning and management of studies .....	79
4.1.2	Learning, teaching and assessment .....	81
4.1.3	Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff.....	84
4.2	Management BA.....	86
4.2.1	Planning and management of studies .....	86
4.2.2	Learning, teaching and assessment .....	89
4.2.3	Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff.....	92
4.3	Law MA.....	86
4.3.1	Planning and management of studies .....	94
4.3.2	Learning, teaching and assessment .....	100
4.3.3	Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff.....	103

4.4	Psychology BA .....	105
4.4.1	Planning and management of studies .....	106
4.4.2	Learning, teaching and assessment .....	108
4.4.3	Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff.....	111

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Institutional accreditation

**‘Institutional accreditation’** is the process of external evaluation which assesses the conformity of a university or higher education institution’s management, work procedures, study and research activities and environment to both legislation and the goals and development plan of the higher education institution itself. This is feedback-based evaluation in which an international assessment panel analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the institution of higher education based on the self-assessment report of the institution and on information obtained during the assessment visit, providing recommendations for improvement and ways of implementing them.

**The goal of institutional accreditation** is to support the development of strategic management and quality culture that values learning-centeredness, creativity and innovation in the higher education institutions (**HEIs**), as well as to increase the societal impact of education, research and development delivered by the HEIs.

HEIs are assessed according to twelve standards of institutional accreditation. Assessment focuses on the core processes of the HEI – learning and teaching, research, development and creative activities, and service to society – as well as on strategic management of the organisation and resource management. The learning and teaching process is examined in more detail under five standards (study programme, teaching staff, learning and teaching, student assessment, and learning support processes). Throughout the assessment process, there is a focus on academic ethics, quality culture and internationalisation.

The Institutional Accreditation Report consists of two parts: (1) evaluation of twelve institutional accreditation standards, and (2) a report on quality assessment of a sample of study programmes. **Achievements that exceed the level of the standard (not compliance with the standard) are presented as strengths. Areas of concern and recommendations point to shortcomings in meeting the requirements of the institutional accreditation standard** and affect the formation of the final decision of the Council. **Opportunities for further improvement are proposals for improvement that do not contain a reference to noncompliance with the standard** and the inclusion or exclusion of which is at the discretion of the institution of higher education. Proposals for further developments will not affect the final decision of the Council.

Institutional accreditation is based on the regulation *Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation* approved by HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education as of 7.01.2022.

The institutional accreditation of Yerevan Haybusak University took place in April 2023. The Estonian Quality Agency for Education (**HAKA**) composed an international expert panel, which was approved by the higher education institution. The composition of the panel was thereafter approved by the order of HAKA director.

**The composition of the expert panel was as follows:**

<b>Anca Greere</b>	Chair of the Panel, Professor, Babes-Bolyai University Cluj; Romania
<b>Jonathan Loose</b>	Secretary of the Panel, Director of Learning & Teaching, Heythrop College, University of London; UK
<b>Marge Vaikjärv</b>	Student member of the Panel, PhD student of the University of Tartu; Estonia
<b>Tanja Dmitrovič</b>	Professor, former Vice-Rector, University of Ljubljana; Slovenia
<b>Kristi Joamets</b>	Senior Lecturer, Tallinn University of Technology; Estonia
<b>Katri Kerem</b>	Professor, Estonian Business School; Estonia
<b>Kairi Kreegipuu</b>	Professor, Head of the Institute of Psychology, University of Tartu; Estonia
<b>Ewen McColl</b>	Director of Clinical Dentistry, Peninsula Dental School, University of Plymouth; UK

## 1.2 Assessment process

The assessment process was coordinated by HAKA staff – Mr Hillar Bauman, Ms Karin Laansoo and Ms Marge Kroonmäe.

After an initial preparation phase where the distribution of tasks between the members of the assessment panel was determined, the work of the assessment panel in Armenia started on Monday, 17th April 2023.

During the following four days, from Monday 17th to Thursday 20th of April 2023, meetings were held with representatives of Yerevan Haybusak University as well as external stakeholders.

On Thursday, 20th April 2023, the panel held a meeting, during which the findings of the panel were discussed in detail and the structure of the final report was agreed. Findings of the team were compiled in a first draft of the assessment report and evaluation of the 12 accreditation standards.

In finalising the assessment report, the panel took into consideration comments made by the institution. The panel submitted the final report to HAKA on 19.06.2023.

The current report is a public document and made available on HAKA website after HAKA Council has made an accreditation decision.

## 1.3 Information about Yerevan Haybusak University

Yerevan Haybusak University (YHU) was founded in 1991 and in 2003 absorbed a number of institutions forming the current day educational provider. Today, YHU sees itself as a new type

of educational institution that combines the aspects of private and public education, as a multidisciplinary university complex comprising four institutes and 40 clinical and specialised centres. YHU offers educational programmes in the medical, juridical, humanitarian, economic and applied decorative (design) fields, at both bachelor's and master's levels. There are in total 18 study programmes on offer. The University aspires to become a leading educational institution and research centre in Armenia with internationally recognised education quality. Underpinning these aspirations are two main strategic goals: 1. to create a harmonious enabling environment for the academic and professional development of the students and faculty and 2. to create an environment for nurturing the students' civic responsibility. There are plans set in motion to develop the existing infrastructure and to consolidate areas which had previously been raised as requiring attention by EKKA/HAKA accreditation process.

The number of students over the last five years has fluctuated somewhat, with an average of 2100 students being reported per year. YHU notes that there was a decline in numbers following the pandemic, however in 2022, YHU absorbed over 350 students from another Armenian University when the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports suspended its licenses. Currently (2022/2023), the total number of students rests at 2105, with 1830 being enrolled in the Institute of Medicine across General Medicine, Stomatology and Pharmacy programmes. Teaching staff is at 175, with the Institute of Medicine alone having 97 members of teaching staff, which is understandable given the high proportion of students on medicine-based programmes. Out of the 175 teaching staff members, 85 are listed with a PhD qualification and 14 are noted to be international staff. 62 administration staff members support the organisational activities of YHU.

### **Main impressions of the self-evaluation report and the visit**

The Panel will like to thank the Rector, Vice-Rector and other members of the YHU senior management team, but also all the staff, students and external stakeholders who took the time to speak to the Panel and clarify vital aspects of the processes at YHU. This has given the Panel a fuller understanding of all aspects across all HAKA standards and the Panel is confident that the views expressed in this report will provide helpful guidance for YHU for future developments.

The Panel reviewed the self-evaluation report and originally found that the evidence submitted was insufficient to give a full perspective of the activities of the institution. The Panel thus requested additional evidence and appreciated the availability and readiness of YHU to supply the necessary evidence. The Panel found the same readiness during the review visit when requests for further clarification were made. Also, during the visit the Panel was satisfied with the level of discussions and thanks all participants for their openness and collegiate interactions. The discussions were, of course, greatly aided by the interpreters who were very quick to understand the line of questioning and to summarise, as needed, for the Panel the responses. This made all meetings highly efficient, as the majority of participants preferred to use Armenian as the language of response.

## **1.4 Main changes based on recommendations of the previous institutional accreditation**

YHU opted to be accredited by HAKA on the Standards HAKA promotes. The Panel recognises that these are a threshold which for many international contexts is still fairly high. However, the alignment of HAKA standards with the European Standards and Guidelines means that on accreditation of YHU there is better comparability with European and global partners. YHU has taken this challenge and made it into its strategic approach, which the Panel has appreciated.

It was also evident that continuous efforts had been made from the previous review visit to address the multiple concerns expressed, and the Panel believes the trajectory is positive, although there is still a lot of effort to be put in motion. However, YHU has clearly demonstrated its commitment to this long-term process.

The Panel noted that many of the actions put in place in response to the previous review still require sometime before there can be a full demonstration of their effectiveness and an evaluation of their impact. In the sections of this report which follow, the Panel has been explicit about how changes have been implemented and where it may still be too soon to understand their efficiencies. However, overall, there was clear sense that all areas were being considered and action was definitely not being ignored or delayed. This is further appreciated in Standard 1.

## **2 Summary of institutional accreditation findings**

### **General Findings**

The Panel wishes to acknowledge the efforts made by YHU to address the recommendations made in the previous EKKA/HAKA accreditation report. The Panel noted that this detailed engagement with the EKKA/HAKA process demonstrates commitment towards the educational experience and has the potential to consolidate YHU's role in the eyes of its students, its staff and other stakeholders. However, there is still substantive work to be done across the institution before it can safely meet the quality standards of HAKA. Currently, there are 11 standards marked as "partially conforming to requirements" and one standard (S11) as "not conforming to requirements".

The Panel recognises that the time from the previous EKKA/HAKA engagement is not very long and notes that many initiatives, especially in response to the previous EKKA/HAKA report, have only been in place for a short period of time, as such the Panel cannot draw full conclusions about the effectiveness of strategy implementation and related governance and monitoring processes. This has also increased the difficulty for the Panel in assessing evidence, some which is still emerging or in draft form.

However, based on the changes instigated and the direction of travel presented by the University, the Panel is confident that its views are well grounded in the evidence presented and that the recommendations it has formulated in the following sections for the report can be

useful for the University to further develop its policies and process towards an improved stakeholder experience.

In considering the evidence and while having discussions with the various stakeholder groups at YHU, the Panel noted that YHU had set some strategic targets which were ambitious and difficult to achieve in the context of current resources. The Panel found that YHU had not considered the level of risk effectively, nor had it done any effective benchmarking to determine if such ambitions could be deemed realistic. The Panel cautions against further expansion and recommends that efforts continue to stabilise initiatives already in application and concentrates attention on further quality improvements in areas which require these most, i.e. governance, internationalisation, research. Any future expansion plans will need to be well managed for risk and, whereas currently there is a tendency to focus in quantity in strategic terms, the Panel cautions against this approach and would like to encourage YHU to privilege quality over quantity, i.e. to ensure that its key efforts are placed in the direction of improving quality of existing provision, rather than expanding provision either horizontally or vertically. This will demonstrate a better and more comprehensive understanding of student-centeredness, and one which will place the current student in the centre of YHU attention with resources and initiatives directed towards existing students on existing provision.

The Panel acknowledged that quality assurance activities have intensified and special attention is being given to the key standard areas as promoted by HAKA. Communication and engagement of stakeholder was still found to be quite informal and the Panel is of the opinion that more needs to be done to formalise practices to ensure that review and improvement activities are aligned with international practices and effectively communicated for implementation.

The Panel noted that in the delivery of the SPs some issues were evident in how the review activities take place and found that the SP Working Groups should have their activities better regulated and more effectively monitored so that they could render better and more consistent results. It is also important that recruitment of staff is supported by clear contractual arrangements and that not just teaching load, as contact hours, is quantified, but that clear responsibilities are allocated for research and community service. This is only possible if programmes rely mainly on full-time staff, with hourly-paid staff taking a low percentage of the overall programme workload; however, this was not the case on some of the SPs where hourly-paid staff took on most of the responsibilities for the programme. For the teaching and learning experiences to be at the right level, the Panel recommended that the infrastructure, i.e. classrooms, library, software access needed to be upgraded. Additionally, an area in need of closer monitoring relates to the way learning outcomes are formulated, how these meet the higher education level requirements (as level 6 bachelor's or level 7 master's) and how assessments are designed to ensure that students can demonstrate achievement of the anticipated learning outcomes.

YHU promotes many programmes, however the great majority of students is part of the programmes with a medical orientation (e.g. medicine, pharmacy, dentistry). The Panel has expressed a level of concern in regards the sustainability of programmes in other fields where the content of the programme is less aligned with international practice and the number of students is fairly low, as is the engagement of staff with research or professional initiatives.

Finally, internationalisation and research are two areas where the Panel noted that more consistent efforts were needed, and that this should be supported with appropriate resource allocations and more realistic strategic planning, if notable progress is to be registered.

## Commendations

- The University's commitment to promoting quality through participation in HAKA accreditations.
- The University's diligence in relation to responding to many of the recommendations of the previous HAKA accreditation. The Panel recognises steady progress and encourages YHU to continue with these efforts.
- The development of quality tools specifically geared towards the ESGs and HAKA quality standards.
- The commitment of the university staff in providing comprehensive support to students is appreciated and creates a trusting environment.
- The engagement of academic staff with governmental bodies to contribute expertise, advice and guidance to national authorities where development directions are decided.

## Recommendations (selection, please see Standards for details)

- Strategic planning should propose attainable targets which are accompanied by a comprehensive risk analysis and offer qualitative measures of success. YHU should focus on consolidating existing arrangements for partnerships and curricula before expanding exponentially. The Panel sees this as an area of concern especially in regards to the portfolio of programmes.
- The governance system should be strengthened for a clear delineation between institutional direction and academic decision-making, and all decision-making should be properly formalized and systematically monitored. Committees should be provided with Terms of Reference and explicit reporting lines.
- YHU should ensure that the data being collected is relevant, reliable and when analysed has the potential to support both strategic and operational decision-making.
- YHU should further systematise staff development processes to ensure that activities support the development of new knowledge, skills and behaviours, with particular emphasis on English Language development.
- YHU should focus investment in the library to extend the digital resources to enable staff to exploit e-learning opportunities for the benefit of students' learning. Similarly, classrooms need upgrading so as to facilitate modern teaching techniques, including having cameras for hybrid delivery (not just the laptop), if hybrid teaching is to continue in this format.
- YHU should review utilisation of hourly-rate staff to mitigate the sustainability risk for programmes where there is overreliance on staff paid on hourly-contracts
- The University should formalise feedback arrangements with all categories of stakeholders to ensure feedback can be systematically captured and analysed.
- The University should take a more proactive approach to quality assurance to ensure that a quality culture is recognised and becomes integrated across all stakeholder groups.
- YHU should develop clear and thorough procedural rules for solving complaints of various types, including discrimination, whistle-blowing etc. There should be an explicit process for appealing the judgments of the Ethics Commission on any matter. Complaints procedures should, as a matter of priority, guarantee confidentiality at all stages of the process.
- Research involving human participants should be approved ethically with clear rules as to how approval may be approached. Systems should be developed to monitor the implementation of this.

- Plagiarism prevention and plagiarism detection in the digital environment need improvement in approaches and means by which plagiarism is confirmed should make use of human-decision-making practices.
- The YHU should actively support student and teacher mobility by creating more exchange opportunities and promoting the benefits of mobility to all stakeholders.
- The YHU should shift its focus from expanding the international partner network to increasing the quality of the network and deepening relationships with international partner institutions that are most appropriate in terms of student and faculty mobility, study programmes, and research projects.
- YHU should adopt a holistic system that takes into account teaching, research, and administrative workloads and specify all work commitments in employment contracts.
- The institution should aim to bring continual improvement in the effectiveness of programme reviews across the institution. These reviews of the review process should lead to developments in the regulations that indicate an increasingly coherent, detailed, and shared institutional understanding of how an effective review should be conducted.
- YHU is recommended to update the Terms of Membership of the SPWG to ensure that it is impossible for groups to be approved to undertake their work without sufficient representation from both internal and external stakeholder groups.
- Learning outcomes should be worded consistently to reflect the level of study and learning, teaching and assessment methods should align with level to help students progress effectively.
- YHU is recommended to adopt the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in order to assess the level of English among students and staff.
- YHU is recommended to create a written, implemented policy to ensure that all learning resources are accessible to all students admitted to a programme.
- YHU is recommended to provide teachers with topic-specific training on assessment methodologies that will allow the combined assessment of knowledge, skills, and competencies.
- YHU is recommended to review the final grade formation formula to ensure that it measures the level of achievement of expected learning outcomes and development of assessment matrixes/rubrics.
- YHU is recommended to hire a separate psychologist to provide psychological support to students.
- YHU is recommended to develop standardised and sustainable process for monitoring students' advancement and criteria for intervention for high- and underperforming students.
- YHU should clearly and systematically define research goals and areas of focus at the institutional level.
- YHU should provide targeted funding to support research projects that are closely aligned with the institution's positioning, vision, values, strategic goals, and other relevant factors.
- The University should make efforts to establish a link between their researchers and international research environments.
- YHU should specify the time allocated for research in its employment contracts and should link this to (realistic) targets for individuals (e.g. in a three-year period). If these targets are met, then incentives/rewards could follow.
- YHU should work out guidelines and objectives for service to society. This should be done together with development of action plan and means for assessing the impact of these activities.
- YHU should consider carefully its understanding of lifelong learning and how it will support this systematically.

	conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
<b>Strategic management</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Resources</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Quality culture</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Academic ethics</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Internationalisation</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Teaching staff</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Study programme</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Learning and teaching</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Student assessment</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Learning support systems</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Research, development and/or other creative activity</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Service to society</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Key to evidence****E:** interviews with employers and other external stakeholders**M:** interviews with management staff**S:** interviews with students**A:** interviews with alumni**T:** interviews with teaching staff**R:** inspection of resources (e.g. library, laboratories)

**SER:** Self-Evaluation Report

## 3 Institutional accreditation findings

### 3.1 Strategic management

#### Standard

**Development planning at the higher education institution is purposeful and systematic, involving various stakeholders.**

**The higher education institution regularly evaluates the achievement of its stated objectives and the impact of its activities.**

#### Guidelines

The HEI has formulated the objectives and key results for its core activities – learning and teaching; research, development and creative activities, and service to society – taking into account national priorities and the needs of society, focusing on its strengths and reducing unnecessary duplication both within the HEI and throughout higher education in Armenia.

The HEI is managed in accordance with its mission, vision and core values, as well as objectives set out on the basis of those principles. Responsibility for implementation of the goals and action plans of the development plan are clearly specified. Achievement of the objectives and effects of the activities are evaluated regularly.

Sustainable development, creativity and innovation are supported and given value in both core and support activities.

The HEI is mindful of the opportunities provided by digital technologies in planning for development activities.

Membership of the HEI (including students), as well as external stakeholders, is involved in developing and implementing the HEI's development plan and action plans. The HEI members share the core values that serve as a basis for the institution's development plan.

#### Indicators

- The rate of achieving the objectives set in the development/action plan (key results)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

### Evidence and analysis

The University has a clear mission statement which has the capacity to guide strategic and operational developments. However, when the Panel probed the priorities of YHU, each stakeholder group articulated their own priorities rather than subscribing to a unified approach for institutional purposes. This demonstrated that institutional messaging is not sufficiently strong to ensure alignment of individual educational and administrative structures with higher management. Additionally, on some areas the understanding of the priority seemed fairly limited and even when this was communicated comprehensively, it still only allowed operational structures to relate to limited objectives. A clear example was the approach to

internationalisation which is explicitly declared to be a top priority by senior management, including the Rector. However, the Panel found that internationalisation was understood in fairly limited terms to refer to the number of partnerships and the number of international students which YHU could host and this translated on the ground in the implementation of particular programmes in the drive to attract a high number of international students, without putting in place the necessary qualitative measures for appropriate delivery and the relevant support functions. (see also Standard 5)

The previous EKKA/HAKA report emphasised the need for improved strategic management, with recommendations clearly noting that the review panel at the time was concerned that not enough clarity was present in strategic documents, and where actions had been proposed it was difficult to measure their success. This made strategic management a problematic area for the institution. For the present accreditation, the University presented a Strategic Plan with two main goals and 5 sub-actions – teaching, research, and service to the community are covered, and there is an explicit emphasis on student-centeredness. In discussing these directions further during the visit it became apparent to the Panel that the institution's management was acutely aware of areas in need of development. Teaching is slowly moving away from more traditional, lecture-based delivery, but a greater emphasis is still needed on the integration of modern technologies and on making teaching more interactive than didactic. Research, too, is an area where multiple actions still need to be taken before the institution achieves a satisfactory position. However, the Panel found that for community services the University was able to make a stronger demonstration via multiple engagements with government or other national institutions, as well as initiatives administered internally such as the Law Clinic, for example. The meetings during the visit confirmed the concept of student-centeredness applied by the University is one in which student needs are met as far as possible and student feedback is actioned after proper consideration. The Panel also had some evidence that student-centeredness in teaching, learning and assessment refers to the possibility of stimulating creative thinking and analytical skills. However, on some of the SPs this proved more declarative than demonstrable in practice, as many of the courses still presented high levels of lecturing with little evidence of more modern forms of interaction which could allow for learner autonomy, entrepreneurship and critical analysis to be developed in students. (see Law MA).

The Panel was presented with the Strategic Plan 2021-2025, revised 2022 at the request of HAKA with an explicit Changelog (Strategic Plan - Annex1 p. 9). This also contains a table highlighting Key Result Areas and Performance Targets. Whereas, the Panel appreciates that these constitute concrete steps towards a more measurable approach, it notes that there are some targets which were very ambitious, indeed, and there is the risk that these may be unattainable (e.g. 1.1.1 new programmes/review programmes targets for 2025-2026 and 1.1.3 international collaborations targeted at 150). This concern is strengthened by the decrease in students numbers which the university highlighted. The Panel asked how these targets were arrived at and why YHU judged their achievement important and was not presented in response with a vision of expansion in which these targets would have a concrete role. The university management were largely unable to articulate qualitative criteria to be applied in monitoring these targets and there was no commensurate resource planning, either in terms of infrastructure or staffing, which could support such rapid developments. The institution also did not present a view regarding curricular disciplines, beyond saying that the University wanted to retain its current disciplinary profile. This presents a stark contrast to the high number of programmes proposed for development and launch in the very near future.

The Panel found that the University's targets also demonstrated a lack of consideration of risk and the Panel therefore asked to understand any identified risks, without receiving a satisfactory response. The University indicated to the Panel the actions they wanted to take but were unable to associate levels of risk and to propose any mitigation for the risks anticipated. As an example, when discussing how international students are being considered, the examples referred to arrangements which have a high degree of unsustainability and a low degree of quality for the student experience. To propose to open parallel delivery schedules for international students without having the necessary staff proficient in English in place to teach, and without making any curricular adjustments relevant for international students, creates a substantive risk for students coming from abroad and does not guarantee them a comparable education. However, this was exactly what the Panel was told could happen if any number of international students were willing to enrol. Another example which the Panel believes comes with high risk is related to the large number of partnerships which YHU proposes to open (150). The Panel was told that many of these could be derived from individual contacts, but failed to explain how the risk of staff turnover, i.e. if the individual contact left YHU, could be mitigated in the volatile employment context in which the higher education sector in Armenia operates. Indeed, YHU reiterated multiple times that staff salaries were purposefully higher than for the rest of the country, however, when probed, the Panel found out that mainly contact hours are counted in the workload and many other activities are not accounted for. Consequently, there is insufficient guarantee for staff staying on for longer periods, i.e. the arrangements which are currently in place do not provide sufficient reassurance that staff members may be convinced to stay on for longer periods of time, and this raises a sustainability risk. The University did not present a risk register or any committee Terms of Reference to focus on risk.

YHU presented a benchmarking strategy which is now eight years old, from 2015 [YHU\_Benchmarking-2015-EN], accompanied by a statement of intended revisions. This strategy clearly outlines principles by which benchmarking needs to be conducted, including criteria for selecting partners. Benchmarking partners are to be selected on the following principles, listed explicitly in the benchmarking strategy document: 1. have a quality assurance policy and mechanisms for its implementation, 2. be comparable in terms of students, professors, abilities, resources, mission and tasks, 3. be interested in benchmarking, 4. have experience in improving higher education processes and research and implementation of advanced practices and serious qualitative achievements. The same document also includes a scheme of the benchmarking process which clearly shows the operational steps to be taken to achieve these goals. The Panel believes these are important guiding principles and, if implemented consistently, they have the potential to lead to major improvements. However, in the interviews, the Panel found that while some partners had been identified for individual programmes which improved very specific content areas (e.g. by adding or removing some courses or topics within courses), there were no examples of benchmarking taking an institutional approach. The University did not present any institutional benchmarking partners which YHU would collaborate with. The University is thus not sharing qualitative and quantitative data, and practice experiences to allow for monitoring and improvements of its activities in relation to other institutions of comparable positioning within the higher education sector with similar ambitions.

The Panel found that the University's application of benchmarking was, for now, restricted to comparison of existing public information, which YHU representatives would identify online, scrutinise and derive adjustment actions for the University, if deemed appropriate. In terms of programme level approaches, the interviews did not present a comprehensive, overarching

procedure for benchmarking at programme level, either. Whereas some areas of comparison were highlighted via the evidence submission [29-Benchmarking], it was unclear to the Panel what steps had been taken to focus on those areas and what the programmes may have found to be methodologically applicable, i.e. to render the desired outcomes from the process. The interviews [I on QA] outlined that the Study Programme Working Groups are responsible for conducting benchmarking activities and discovering what can be taken from programmes at other universities. The QA office oversees this process, which may be repeated at every review stage. As YHU relies on identifying and comparing themselves with information from other universities, the Panel believes it is missing out on valuable developmental conversations with a benchmarking partner, where sharing of practice can create adjustments on both sides. Benchmarking is, thus, viewed to be one-sided, limiting and insufficiently dynamic to reach its full potential for the institution and to render a variety of benefits.

The governance system is presented as being a shared model of participation in the university's management (SER p. 5). The underlying principle is that "all groups within the University act as partners, not merely performers". While this can be a strong basis for top-down and bottom-up collaborations, the Panel found that, in the main, the approach taken by the University is reactive, rather than proactive, and any suggestions eventually come for final decision-making to the Rector's table. Indeed, the University Council is the highest academic decision-making structure, and the Panel heard of multiple documents which require Council approval. However, the distinction between "board of trustees" functions and academic functions may be more evident in theory than in actual application. The Panel received no evidence to confirm locus of responsibility for different areas of decision-making and to demonstrate how terms of reference are used for the various committees in operation. As such, the Panel found it difficult to ascertain if the committee structure is functional, if escalation works, if it is appropriately streamlined and if stakeholders find it relevant for the University management. From the discussions during the visit, the Panel noted that there were still many instances where decision-making could be informal and hence less systematic than might be required from an institution of this type and size. The Panel concluded that the institution should strengthen the system of committees that is responsible for institutional governance. A separate committee (and sub-committees) should take responsibility for governance of academic matters. The institution and its leadership should look to this committee for assurance that academic matters are being governed effectively. Academic governance should involve only those who have the relevant academic qualifications, skills, and experience.

The Panel noted that the University collects high volumes of data from its various processes and administrative staff sometimes struggle to identify what could be relevantly analysed and passed on to inform decision-making. Indeed, the Panel asked what data is mainly being used for decision-making and probed for examples where data has generated changes in approaches being taken, either at institutional or programme level. However, there were no examples to highlight the use of data. This becomes particularly important in the future as cross-programme or cross-unit decision-making can only rely on information systematically collected and comparatively analysed to reflect repetitive issues or negative trends, in need of institutional-level attention.

It was noted by YHU that their engagement with stakeholders is high on the institutional agenda and that strategic developments and quality assurance processes frequently make use of a wide range of stakeholders. However, the Panel found a number of areas where this engagement was deficient and could not render effective outcomes. As such, representation on committee

structures is limited to internal members, including students. However, students have had no training in undertaking these roles and, whereas they noted they were well supported in the role, it was unclear if their contribution could not be further maximised by more comprehensive briefing and training. Industry representatives were members of Study Programme Working Groups. However, it was unclear what contributions they were making and what explicit proposals they might have made in relation to curricular development. Graduates also confirmed that their involvement was minimal, but they would be willing to offer more back to the institution. The Panel considers it important to engage stakeholders of different profiles across all layers of decision-making, including strategic planning, as stakeholders can give a clear steer on where the labour market is going and whether the university positioning is aligned with national and international directions.

Specific emphasis is placed on the engagement with HAKA as an external quality assurance body, with strategic decisions being geared towards meeting HAKA standards, so as to ensure alignment with the European Standards and Guidelines. The Panel acknowledged the efforts made by YHU to address the recommendations made in the previous EKKA/HAKA accreditation report. The Panel also recognised that the time from the previous EKKA/HAKA engagement is not very long and noted that many initiatives, especially in response to the previous EKKA/HAKA report, have only been in place for a short period of time, as such the Panel could not draw full conclusions about the effectiveness of strategy implementation and related governance and monitoring processes. However, based on the changes instigated and the direction of travel presented by the University, the Panel noted the diligence of the University and its senior management team to ensure all recommendations are eventually resolved to a satisfactory level. This will ensure that policies and process can be further developed towards an improved stakeholder experience.

## Conclusion

Overall, the Panel appreciates concrete steps are being taken towards more purposeful and systematic strategic planning. However, it notes that objectives still lack clear monitoring measures and notes that the quantitative expansion proposed in strategic documents is not properly underpinned by qualitative criteria. The University lacks a proper risk management system and conducts benchmarking in restricted terms, which does not allow it to understand if developments are attainable and relevant by comparison to national and international standards. Whereas core activities – learning and teaching; research, development and creative activities, and service to society – are part of institutional priorities, there is insufficient clarity on how these are disseminated to stakeholders to generate a unified approach. For now, committees are in operation, but the overarching governance responsibilities start and end with the Rector, rather than a more diffused system of responsibility. Some of the goals set are found to be less attainable and to bring a high risk to the institutional resourcing capacity and the student experience, longer term. Consequently, the Panel finds this Standard to **partially conform to requirements**.

## Strengths

- The University's commitment to promoting quality through participation in HAKA accreditations.

- The University's diligence in relation to responding to many of the recommendations of the previous HAKA accreditation. The Panel recognises steady progress and encourages YHU to continue with these efforts.

### **Areas of concern and recommendations**

- The Panel has observed that YHU engagement with stakeholders does not ensure that the University receives sufficient input, at strategic level, for the directions it is taking. YHU should strengthen its communication with internal and external stakeholders in relation to institutional priorities, so that actions across the various institutional structures can be clearly guided by such priorities.
- The Panel is concerned that currently the strategic plan proposes targets which are unjustifiable and can deplete the resources of YHU. The Panel noted that there was no concrete awareness of risk in relation to these targets, nor was there a clear measure of success, beyond a numerical/statistical evaluation. Strategic planning should propose attainable targets which are accompanied by a comprehensive risk analysis and offer qualitative measures of success. YHU should focus on consolidating existing arrangements for partnerships and curricula before expanding exponentially. The Panel sees this as an area of concern especially in regards to the portfolio of programmes.
- The Panel is concerned that YHU does not apply a clear differentiation between leadership and academic decision-making, and that many decisions are still noted to be addressed in informal ways. The governance system should be strengthened for a clear delineation between institutional direction and academic decision-making, and all decision-making should be properly formalized and systematically monitored. Committees should be provided with Terms of Reference and explicit reporting lines.
- The Panel observed that the University has a benchmarking policy, however the procedure for benchmarking is extremely limited and does not form part of a collaborative partnership with comparable institutions. The University should apply the benchmarking policy in all its detail and aim to establish effective partnerships at an institutional level for the sharing of qualitative and quantitative data which can drive improvements across all institutional activities, and not be restricted to specific areas of individual programmes. In a partnership, the sharing of information becomes vital to both partners as they discuss possibilities to support each other procedurally.
- The Panel is concerned that data collection and data management at YHU are not sufficiently fit for purpose and, hence, cannot support strategic drivers or operational activities on the ground. YHU should ensure that the data being collected is relevant, reliable and when analysed has the potential to support both strategic and operational decision-making.

## 3.2 Resources

### Standard

**The higher education institution develops its staff and manages its physical and financial resources in a purposeful, systematic and sustainable manner.**

**Internal and external communications of the higher education institution (including marketing and image-building) are targeted and managed.**

### Guidelines

The HEI has an efficient staff development system in terms of both academic and support staff. The principles and procedures for employee recruitment and development are based on the objectives of the HEI's development plan and are fair and transparent. The principles for employees' remuneration and motivation are defined, available to all employees, and followed.

Allocation of the HEI's financial resources is based on the objectives of its development plan. The management and development of its infrastructure (buildings, laboratories, classrooms, digital infrastructure, etc.) are fit-for-purpose and economically sound. The infrastructure is regularly analysed (including the network, digital equipment, software and services, IT systems, user support, digital security, etc.), taking into consideration among others the needs of students, teaching staff and other members of the HEI personnel.

Sufficient resources are available for updating the infrastructure for education and research, and/or a strategy exists enabling the HEI to acquire them.

The HEI has defined information protection rules (including on data protection and the protection of user privacy) and these are implemented. The development and security of the online learning and teaching environment are ensured. The online learning and teaching environment allows to identify the authorship of student work.

The HEI has a functioning system for internal and external communications, relevant to the target audiences. The information made public about HEI's activities (including study programmes) and the findings of external evaluations is correct, up to date, easily accessible and understandable. The HEI has a system to popularise its core activities and academic career opportunities. The HEI members are informed of the decisions relevant to them in a timely manner.

Employee satisfaction with management, working conditions, information flow, etc., at the HEI is surveyed regularly and the survey results are used in quality improvement activities.

### Indicators

- Distribution of revenues and costs
- The results of the staff satisfaction survey
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## Evidence and Analysis

Decisions about financial resource allocation and infrastructure investment are made by the Rector. Smaller requests for resources go via the relevant deans to the Rector, and the University is in the enviable position that such resource requests are usually granted [M]. Larger resource investments are discussed in the Rectorate and, where appropriate, the final decision is sanctioned by the Rector [S; M]. There was evidence of ongoing development of physical infrastructure with a new integrated clinic due to open in August 2023 [R]. Future allocation of resource should be based on a sound business case highlighting risks and benefits for the University. This could be based on likely student satisfaction or increase in research quality and quantity.

The previous EKKA accreditation highlighted that the University was demonstrating insufficient emphasis on staff management and noted the need to invest in the University's most valuable resource: its staff. There was some evidence of the development and delivery of staff training in the English Language, and utilisation of digital technology [S; T] to enhance education although in both cases the Panel believes this needs consolidation as a matter of some urgency. Staff and student surveys are being utilised to implement change and to develop infrastructure, with clear examples of the staff and student feedback loop being completed [S; T]. An example of staff and student feedback impacting on infrastructure change was the new integrated Dental Clinic in development. This had been requested by students and staff to have more clinics on site and this was being implemented and close to completion.

Since the previous HAKA assessments job descriptions and personnel specifications have been revised and further developed [M], and these are utilised in staff selection. In some study areas, YHU has been able to attract international visiting lecturers who have up-to-date theoretical, practical, and clinical knowledge [SER]. The Panel agreed that further utilisation of international visiting lecturers would benefit teaching and learning, and should also focus on stimulating research output.

YHU provides a range of professional development opportunities for staff, and the Human Resources department reported developing an online development platform focusing on English Language Development and Digital learning [M]. A number of staff reported utilisation of these resources with positive benefits, but uptake appeared sporadic [T]. However, it was not clear to the Panel how the staff most in need of these development opportunities were identified. The Panel noted a risk that the staff who were most motivated were availing themselves of training but did not see development opportunities being directly linked to appraisals. The Panel did not have sufficient evidence to demonstrate that outcomes from staff appraisals are linked to remuneration, and it was not clear to the Panel what this remuneration actually involved [M:S]. The Panel observed that increased transparency around the metrics to achieve performance based bonuses would further encourage staff to strive for excellence.

The Panel noted in the case of a specific course an over reliance on hourly paid staff (see SP Psychology). This is a significant risk with regards to sustainability of teaching and learning, staff development and academic governance. In this example staff advised they were not paid for attending work related training external to the University and this needs to be addressed to ensure equity amongst staff. If this situation is notable in other programmes which the Panel did not sample during the accreditation process, it is important that the University put in place the

necessary arrangements to ensure this risk is diminished across all such programmes. (See Standard 1)

YHU has an established library [R] and the Panel observed the laborious process of scanning ageing textbooks into digital format. The library appears limited in size [R] given the number of students, and there was a perception this space would be insufficient for equitable access at key assessment junctures. Whilst the library holds multiple copies of key texts from reading lists for at least some programmes, it was unclear if up to date digital versions of these key texts were readily available [R]. In at least one case (SP Psychology) the library could not demonstrate that these texts were available. The library offers access to free internet and some texts are held in electronic format, but numbers were relatively limited [R]. The Panel concluded that some funds should be directed to the modernisation of electronic library resources. The Panel considered there was insufficient access to state-of-the-art e-textbooks or dedicated software programmes, particularly in English. A specific issue was noted in regards photocopying and arrangements for protection of copyright [R] (see Standard 4).

With regards to resourcing infrastructure relating to classrooms the Panel observed that in some area's classrooms need upgrading to facilitate modern teaching techniques [R]. If the University plans to continue with hybrid delivery, then this includes the installation of cameras to improve the experience for online students rather than relying on the use of laptops. The Panel concluded that the University should specify and document minimal requirements for the equipping of its teaching spaces to facilitate a basic level of consistency across the University while still allowing some spaces to go beyond the minimal requirements and to have additional special equipment for specific purposes.

The panel noted in most buildings observed there was limited wheelchair access [R] and little consideration given to access to teaching areas for students with additional needs. This should be considered as a priority for current buildings and for all future new builds.

The internal and external communication relies on personal connection and lacks strategic approach. The Panel found no written communication strategy that would state which communication channels are being used, which information is delivered via which channel, who is responsible to (e.g., forming a weekly newsletter to students or staff) and how is the successfulness of a communication channel measured. As planned and targeted communication can support the implementation of various procedures and regulations developed, strategic approach is necessary for quality management.

Internal communication between staff as well as between staff and students is personal and informal [S, T, M] Digital platforms (e.g., Moodle) are not utilized for fast sharing of information (e.g., changes in schedules or cancelation of a lecture) [S, T]. Reliability on informal communication routes is not scalable and sustainable should the number of students increase as the institution envisions. In addition, as many studies-related regulations were translated to English for the review, it remained unclear how the international students could be informed about the aforementioned regulations.

For external communication, the YHU webpage and personal relationships (incl. through alumni) were highlighted [SER, M]. The Webpage is available also in English and has a separate subpage for applicants which contains links to document templates, but no deadlines for submissions are not included and there is no specification for which period the fees are presented (e.g., it is stated that General Medicine fee is 5000 USD, but not if this is for a semester, academic year or the whole programme). Additionally, only the names of the

programmes are presented but no further description of the focus and expected study outcomes of programmes. The Panel finds that lacking and unclear presentation of information might hinder the institutions aim to attract more students, incl. international students.

Students reported the support they had received with regards to resourcing green initiatives i.e. tree planting around campus [R]. Directing resources towards green initiatives, particularly in infrastructure projects where there appeared to be limited green space, is a positive development and one which the University should support. Making resources readily available for Green initiatives would not only meet the universities environmental responsibilities, but would allow students areas to relax in, hence promoting mental health.

## Conclusions

Whilst the Panel noted some targeted allocation of resources, this needs to be linked more closely to the overall development strategy of the University. An area the Panel observed needed urgent prioritising was the library's digital offering and to provide initial start-up support for specific research projects. The Panel also formed the view that professional marketing in key international markets and upgrading the English language web page could attract high quality international students more successfully. Consequently, the Panel finds this Standard to **partially conform to requirements**.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- The Panel had difficulty establishing how performance was linked to remuneration. YHU should further improve the transparency and understanding of the principles of employees' remuneration. This issue should be considered when benchmarking against other institutions nationally and internationally.
- It is unclear how improving English language skills was recognised in performance appraisals. YHU should further systematise staff development processes to ensure that activities support the development of new knowledge, skills and behaviours, with particular emphasis on English Language development
- The library is under resourced with regards to allow full utilisation of e learning. YHU should focus investment in the library to extend the digital resources to enable staff to exploit e-learning opportunities for the benefit of students' learning
- Certain programmes appear to have an over reliance on hourly paid staff. YHU should review utilisation of hourly-rate staff to mitigate the sustainability risk for programmes where there is overreliance on staff paid on hourly-contracts
- There appeared limited evidence of systematic marketing with regards to the overseas market. Resource allocation should be increased to improve marketing which appears to be ad hoc rather than systematic particularly international marketing
- Classrooms were ill equipped with regards to blended learning. Classrooms need upgrading so as to facilitate modern teaching techniques, including having cameras for hybrid delivery (not just the laptop), if hybrid teaching is to continue in this format.

## Opportunities for further improvement

- Steps are being taken to promote green initiatives. The University may wish to continue to consider environmental factors as a high priority for resource allocation.

### 3.3 Quality Culture

#### Standard

**The higher education institution has defined the quality of its core and support processes, and the principles of quality assurance.**

**In the higher education institution, internal evaluation supports strategic management and is conducted regularly at different levels (institution, units, study programmes).**

**The findings of internal and external evaluations are analysed, and quality improvement activities implemented.**

#### Guidelines

Members of the HEI have agreed upon definitions for the quality of their core and support processes and are guided by them in their daily work. The HEI has established its policies and procedures for internal quality assurance (internal evaluation). The regular internal quality assurance both at the institutional and study programme level takes into account, inter alia, the standards set out in these Guidelines. All members of the HEI, including students and external stakeholders, participate in internal evaluations.

Internal evaluation of study programmes results in feedback from experts within the HEI and/or from outside it. Regular reviews and enhancements of study programmes ensure their relevance, including their compliance with international trends. In the course of internal evaluations, peer learning, comparisons with other HEIs regarding their results and means for achievement, as well as a sharing of best practices take place, among other things.

Internal evaluation is based on the following key questions in quality management: What do you want to achieve, and why? How do you want to do it? How do you know that the activities are effective and will have the desired impact? Is there an equilibrium between the desired outcomes and the resources used for their achievement (including technological solutions)? How do you manage the quality improvement activities?

#### Indicators

- Improvement activities implemented based on the analyses of internal evaluations in the HEI's core and support processes (examples from different areas)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

### Evidence and analysis

Quality Assurance is the responsibility of the Centre for Development and Education Quality Assurance (CDEQA), which produces annual reports and proposes quality priorities for the University. The CDEQA is also responsible for drafting internal quality assurance policies and related documentation. The SER refers to a Concept note developed by CDEQA which was drafted to meet the expectations of the recommendations formulated under the previous

EKKA/HAKA accreditation process. At the request of the Panel, the concept note was provided and evidence that it acts as a guiding document was presented in the interviews.

The principles for quality assurance are set out in the Education Quality Assurance Manual, updated and approved in December 2022 [SER p. 11]. Recent changes were made to the Manual and the CDEQA indicated that for dissemination purposes a flowchart was created to map changes and the dissemination of changes happens via email communication and meetings with staff and students, where this flowchart is also distributed/discussed. However, the Panel also heard that changes may occur quite frequently and that something that might have been agreed two months ago but is found to not be working as expected will see an immediate change. This raises the risk of the community participants not being able to keep up with the changes and possibly acting on previous versions of regulation rather than more currently approved ones. Whereas the Panel recognises that it is important to make adjustments when absolutely necessary, it would caution against too much change outside of given cycles. The Panel also asked if there is a policy for policy changes which could better guide such activity, but was told that none had yet been drafted, although the University seemed to embrace the usefulness of such a policy.

A policy for policy changes should also include a version control system for tracking changes in formally approved documents. Normally, all formal documents should use a standard template that includes a log to show the date, author, and approval of any changes. This will ensure the security, and transparency of document updates.

The main tool described for collecting quality-related information is the satisfaction survey. Currently, the CDEQA administers multiple surveys, which were previously hand-written and are now transitioning online. Indeed, the main source of quality-related feedback information has been confirmed to be surveys, with heavy reliance on their outcomes to give a clear steer, even at strategic level, for the institution. However, the Panel found participation from all stakeholder groups to be variable, with graduates whom the Panel met and industry representatives indicating that they had not completed the surveys. Both graduates and industry representatives referred to informal arrangements with direct contacts as being the prevailing mechanism by which they get involved with the activities of the University. The Panel believes such engagement needs to become more systematic, with monitoring tools in place to ensure it is rendering benefits for the institution. YHU seems to be aware of this need as the SER [p. 6] notes that the use of surveys is being streamlined to address a consistency concerns, and that moving forward employee and alumni will be presented with surveys annually. The CDEQA hopes to make the data collection more efficient and more manageable.

The Panel was told by some interviewees that student surveys were conducted annually while others believed it was twice a year. The surveys include satisfaction questions about all aspects of the educational environment (including infrastructure, IT systems, user support, etc) but are not specific about the courses and the teaching, although students can comment on these, and often do, in the open sections. The Panel believes direct questions on course performance are important as such data should be collected consistently to ensure decisions are made in an informed manner from an integrated summary of views.

The University also uses teaching observations as a developmental process, where a small group of peers and students make notes on classroom interaction and pedagogical methodologies which are then shared with the teacher and improvements discussed. The Panel asked how identified good practice may be disseminated to other staff members. The Panel also asked whether analysis of areas in need of development is conducted across multiple

observations to support YHU to put in place continuous professional development plans. For now, the Panel understands that the teaching observations are maintained for individual benefit of the teachers observed. The Panel thus encourages YHU to make better use of this tool as part of their quality assurance procedures and ensure that information collected is captured in institutional analysis and gives opportunity for institution-wide disseminations.

The Panel understands that the CDEQA also instituted a more comprehensive quality assessment process, which was designed across 9 standard areas and which involved representatives from all programmes, 1-2 members on a voluntary basis, each institute will end up with a team of 10. As part of this process there is the opportunity to also conduct SWOT analyses to be discussed in formal meetings, convened once the form is completed. It was unclear to the Panel if this is part of the regular processes for QA or was conducted outside periodic QA engagements, i.e. catered for a specific purpose, e.g. accreditation. The Panel does not know if this will continue on a yearly basis. However, the Vice-Rector confirmed that this tool is helpful in giving a clear understanding of where efforts need to be intensified, although the Panel would argue that the representativeness amongst volunteer respondents maybe somewhat skewed, and trying to extend its application to a broader respondent group could render different perspectives.

YHU confirmed that there is ongoing collection of data, and many evaluations are prepared quantitatively. However, the Panel found that this was rarely used strategically for decision-making, either at programme or institutional levels. (see Standard 1) In respect ongoing monitoring, the Panel heard that the suggestion box and the repetitive surveys allow for any satisfaction dips to be identified and areas highlighted to be given attention. Additionally, it was confirmed that students would turn to their teachers to rectify aspects. The Panel considers that this may work at an individual course level, however, where changes may need to affect consistently more courses, or more structures, possibly also administrative, there was no mechanism by which such implementation could be proposed. For institutional level aspects, there were no ongoing monitoring activities described, mostly annual activities will feed into QA processes.

YHU Study Programmes are governed by the "Regulation for Evaluation, Revision, Approval, and Closure of Professional Study Programmes (SP)", which was initially adopted in 2015 and revised in 2022 by the Centre for Development and Education Quality Assurance (CDEQA)). The Regulation offers details of how cyclical review of programmes is to be undertaken, the purpose for periodic review and the areas to be scrutinised. It also offers clarity on the role of the Working Group (SPWG) which is appointed by the Rector for each SP to undertake the review process. WGs have been confirmed to include representatives of the staff of the chairs of the institute, students, graduates and representatives of employers, although graduates confirmed to be less active in this respect.

The periodic review process is done based on indicators which the CDEQA provides, examples of which are included in the Regulation [p.3]: "the compliance of the final results with the requirements of the NQF, the compliance of teaching and learning methods with the learning outcomes, the compliance of the subject programmes with the curricula, the content compliance of SPs with other educational programmes, the percentage of those who continue their studies, the percentage of those who are employed, the response of employers (survey), etc." Beyond offering the QA tools and the necessary data, CDEQA representatives confirmed they do not get involved in the work of the SPWG and will only acknowledge the outcomes once the work is completed. To carry out the compliance analysis, the WG looks at the SP package created for this

purpose which includes, in the main: the learning outcomes, the study plan, the syllabi, the teaching process and student evaluation methods. Whereas it is clear that periodic review processes need to establish the currency of the programme, whether it continues to be in alignment with labour market needs and student interests, and if the available resources (human and material) continue to be adequate for the programme, the actual application was assessed to be varied by the Panel and with debatable outcomes. For example, some of the SPs which were investigated as part of the accreditation sample raised questions in respect of their content, the progressive sequencing and the alignment of learning outcomes with the EQF levels of study. The Panel believes that more should be done to ensure the outcomes of the periodic review are made use of. The CDEQA should be taking an active role in verifying that the SP package, which results from the SPWG review process, contains well-articulated learning outcomes. The verifications should ensure that SP learning outcomes are in alignment with EHEA recommendations on usage of Bloom's taxonomy, and that they are measurable and can be used as a clear guide for selecting appropriate teaching methodologies and assessment options. Indeed, the content for the programme requires expert evaluation, which CDEQA representative may not hold, however the results of some revisions have not rendered the best results in respect of content, either. It is, thus, important that membership is selected carefully, and that some international representation is ensured – currently, it was confirmed that only for dentistry there is international participation, however this is by a current student and a graduate of the SP, rather than industry professionals. (See Standard 7)

As part of the review process, the SPWG also identifies and endeavours to investigate similar programmes at international institutions to inform changes. This is referred to as benchmarking by YHU. The Panel agrees that this is a step towards alignment with international trends, but argues that benchmarking should be done in partnership, via active interaction not passive observation. (see Standard 1)

The Panel probed the regularity with which periodic review happens on any given programme and was told that review happens as and when needed depending on the development in the specific disciplines. Indeed, the Regulation [p. 2] notes that "The SP review period is determined by the cycle of its implementation, developments in the given professional field, etc.". Whereas YHU appeared positive about its agility in programme review, the Panel considers there is a risk which needs to be mitigated, as too much change, too often can impact negatively on the delivery of the programme from both staff and student perspectives. (See Standard 7). The Panel asked how smaller changes are controlled and where the oversight lies for minor changes incrementally creating major changes over time, but received no answer of how this may be monitored. When multiple minor changes are brought to the programme, there is always the possibility of there being some collective impact on the programme learning outcomes, which may require overarching revisions and allows the opportunity of course correction, should this be necessary. The Panel believes that a fixed period for the review cycle can be beneficial to the institution, with some changes allowed in between cycles. The Panel considers that a clear calendar would need to be instituted so that the cycles by programme could be systematically managed. This would give the CDEQA more monitoring capacity and would not exhaust valuable resources, which are clearly limited on the quality assurance front.

In all of its internal quality assurance processes, the CDEQA claims YHU endeavours to engage a variety of stakeholders, however the coverage and impact of this engagement was found to be variable by the Panel (see also Standard 1). It was also not clear to the Panel how the feedback loop is closed with these stakeholders on recommendations/suggestions they may be making.

For the quality system to be fully operational, it is important that stakeholders receive regular and systematic communication on how their input had been considered, what decisions were made in response to their feedback and what would constitute next steps in those particular areas of development. Stakeholder motivation and responsibility towards quality can be greatly impacted when there is a clear understanding that the effort being made through the surveys or meetings attended does actually result in positive action and is valued by the institution.

## Conclusions

Overall, the Panel found that YHU was progressing its internal quality assurance arrangements and creating more streamlined approaches which have the capacity to safeguard the resources available and to render more focused results. It was observed that for now the paradigm for action was reactive, meaning that YHU was well equipped to respond to requests made by stakeholders and could action them in a fairly reasonable timeframe. However, the Panel would like to see YHU taking a more proactive approach, where quality assurance can play a decisive role in strategic planning and management. To achieve this YHU would need to revise some of its structures for increased efficiency and relevance and formalise interactions with all stakeholders and capture even informal communication which could feed into institutional overviews. At present, the Panel considers that quality assurance is more the preoccupation of the CDEQA and that there is more work to be done before all stakeholders feel a direct responsibility towards quality improvements. Consequently, the Panel found this Standard to **partially conform to requirements**.

## Strengths

- The development of quality tools specifically geared towards the ESGs and HAKA quality standards.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- The Panel is concerned that currently there are multiple surveys used, however these do not render most effective results and do not play a full and direct role in guiding decisions at the University. The University should revise the usability of surveys to ensure these are rendering relevant outcomes to inform decision-making and support improvements across all areas of provision, including specifically targeted improvements for individual courses.
- The Panel was told that for some categories of stakeholders informal interactions constitute the only form for feedback-gathering. The Panel was concerned that some of this feedback may fail to reach formal channels so as to be given the attention and oversight needed. The University should formalise feedback arrangements with all categories of stakeholders to ensure feedback can be systematically captured and analysed.
- The Panel found the SPWG to be less functional and with little direct real impact on quality assurance developments. The Panel was concerned that the SP information packages being produced lacked in consistency across programmes and frequently failed to offer clear details in alignment with EHEA requirements. The University should revise the working arrangements of the SPWG and create more oversight from CDEQA to ensure good quality SP documentation is consistently produced. (See also Standard 7)
- The Panel found that many of the actions taken were in response to issues raised, i.e. when problems were brought to the attention of senior management, rather than in

anticipation of possible developments as part of futureproofing considerations. The University should take a more proactive approach to quality assurance to ensure that a quality culture is recognised and becomes integrated across all stakeholder groups

### **Opportunities for further improvement**

- The Panel found that there are many policies which are being revised as and when necessary, without a formal cycle for such revision and with the high risk of stakeholders losing sight of changes made, as random and frequent dissemination can be less effective. The University may wish to develop a policy for policy management to facilitate a cycle for revision.

### 3.4 Academic ethics

#### Standard

The higher education institution has defined its principles for academic ethics, has a system for disseminating them among its members, and has a code of conduct including guidelines for any cases of non-compliance with these principles.

The higher education institution has a functioning system for handling complaints.

#### Guidelines

The HEI values its members and ensures that all its employees and students are treated according to the principle of equal treatment.

Employees and students of the HEI are guided by the agreed principles of academic ethics in all their activities.

The HEI supports its students and teaching staff in their understanding and responding to ethical issues. Teaching staff and students do not tolerate academic fraud, including cheating and plagiarism, and they will act immediately upon any such occurrence. Attention is paid to the application of principles of academic ethics in the digital environment: avoidance of creative theft, the protection of intellectual property rights etc.

Management of complaints from HEI members (including discrimination cases) is transparent and objective, ensuring fair treatment of all parties.

#### Indicators

- The percentage of student papers checked by plagiarism detection systems and the percentage of detected plagiarisms
- Other indicators depending on the HEI, for example statistics about complaints (total number, the proportion of decisions taken in favour of the applicant)

### Evidence and analysis

YHU has defined its principles for academic ethics in the Code of Ethics [12.12.22] and Code of Conduct [12.12.22] [SER, 24]. YHU also has Anti-Plagiarism Guidelines. The Panel learned that YHU strategy documents and meetings with its staff reflected awareness of value-based behaviour; YHU's conflict of interest policy can be found by interpreting the Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct; and that YHU is currently discussing its draft Policy and Action Plan on Academic Integrity Assurance.

According to the SER [24] there are academic integrity classes integrated in every study programme. Similar information is in the YHU webpage. However, the Panel couldn't find a separate course about academic integrity within all the study programmes evaluated. The Dentistry programme is the only one with a course titled, 'Academic Honesty'. In December 2022, a seminar took place for 1st year students to read and discuss the Code of Ethics [SER,

11]. Some students confirmed that they had taken part; however, this was not applicable to all given that participation was voluntary. The Panel, therefore, must judge this an optional event rather than an integral part of the study programme. Taking into account the size of the University and the multiplicity of YHU's specialties it would be more efficient to conduct academic integrity classes either for all programmes together, or for groups of similar programmes. These classes should be compulsory. The Panel met YHU's Ethics Commission, which also admitted that there could be more training sessions regarding ethics, including a session on plagiarism detection. According to SER [25] "more effective awareness raising of academic ethics" is an area in which the University is hoping to develop and to plan additional activities.

The Panel learned that the Ethics Commission is the main organ in the YHU to deal with ethical questions. The Commission's objective is to "ensure the observance of the rights, dignity and ethics of the University staff and students, to contribute to the proper implementation of the anti-corruption policy at the University, and impartial investigation of alleged violations of ethics norms." The Commission's rights and obligations are provided by the Working Procedures of Ethics Commission [12.12.2022]. The Panel learned that YHU documents [SER, Code of Conduct, and Working Procedures of Ethics Commission] sometimes uses the term 'Ethics Commission' and sometimes the term 'Ethics Committee' which can be misleading in understanding the system and authority of the institution(s).

YHU has a box for complaints and suggestions and an online platform to which complaints and suggestions may be sent. The Panel heard initially that the box is securely administered by the Ethics Commission, who hold the key, but this was later denied by the members of the Commission, who indicated that someone else filters the content of the box and only those cases which hold ethical relevance will reach the Commission. It was noted that it may be the security guard on their round who retrieves the message and presents it to the Deans. The Panel judged this problematic since students may or may not expect the box to be an anonymous channel of communication, and may or may not name staff in their complaints and suggestions. For reasons of confidentiality, relevance and efficiency, the filter should be maintained at a higher level. When asked for examples of suggestions/complaints that have reached the Commission, the members could not provide any because the membership of the Commission was new and they had not dealt with any cases, either via the box, the website, the Deans, or directly. The discussion was therefore hypothetical. The Commission did confirm that it had had a number of meetings since it had been formed, but these have concerned revision to the Code and other regulatory documents rather than handling cases of complaints or suggestions. As such, it is not possible for a Panel to evaluate the implementation of institutional regulations via the Commission and to ascertain if the Commission is proving to be a functional and effective institutional structure.

Staff and students [S; T] confirmed that complaints may generally find their resolution via informal mechanisms rather than relying on the aforementioned formal processes. Although the Panel appreciates that this may provide a more personalised touch for students, it raises two specific areas of concern: First, it is important that students feel they can confidently address any matters confidentially and informal structures cannot guarantee this; second, it is important that at institutional level data on complaints can be gathered, analysed and monitored, which becomes more difficult and inconsistent if informal procedures are used widely.

The Code of Conduct is a YHU legal act based on the Code of Ethics and should "guide the decision-making" [p 1 of the code]. The Panel learned that this document consists of principles

(mainly obligations) but does not provide a procedure detailing when and how the case would start and how it would proceed; nor does it detail any consequences could follow for the person subject to the complaint. However, the 'Working procedures of the Ethics' Commission' provides procedural rules for submitting questions to the Commission for discussion, as well as punishments that follow established cases of the Code of Conduct [p 25]. The Panel finds that having multiple documents which combine information relevant for students, especially on such important matters as complaints with ethical value, can become misleading to students. An integrated Code including the procedural details may be more appropriate to ensure information is accessible, coherent, and usable.

The Working Procedure document indicates that if necessary the Commission can provide clarification on the application of its ethical rules [Working Procedure, point 27]. In its meeting with the Ethics Commission, the Panel asked for examples of resolutions but the Commission explained that no examples are available because the Commission has not had any cases to discuss since autumn 2022. The Panel learned that because clarifications are given only on request, the procedural norms for dealing with ethics' cases are not adequate to guarantee transparency, objectivity, and fair treatment of all parties. The decision-making process by which the Commission comes to its judgments must be thorough, recorded, and available for all parties. It should also be clear whether the University's decision can be appealed and the process for this should be clear and available.

Certain aspects of ethics such as whistle-blowing, anti-corruption and bribery, non-discrimination and anti-harassment need a more specific approach than just the list of general principles concerning them. Each area could eventually be governed by its own separate regulations and clear, specific procedures. According to the Code of Conduct and SER [24], the Ethics Commission reviews all research projects entailing personal data collection to ensure privacy and protection of personal data. The Panel did not find evidence of the organisation, procedures, and possible results of such reviews. In the meeting with Ethics Commission it was explained that since they were elected [autumn 2022] there has been no research presented for ethical approval to the Commission. The Panel looked into this in some considerable level of detail and found that only researchers who approach the Commission and expressly request an ethical approval will likely be granted one. The Panel asked for the criteria by which ethical approvals are granted and what guidelines are in place to allow a staff member to know if they need to seek approval. The Commission confirmed that this is by individual choice of the staff member and agreed that this can create a level of inconsistency in approaches which brings a risk to the process and its institution-wide validity. According to practices in other institutions, the University may wish to separate the functions of complaints and ethical controversies from ethical approvals granted in cases of research. The Panel appreciates that, for now, the institution may find it is too small to provide multiple supplementary structures, but, in future, a separation of these functions will provide more effective administration, a clearer locus of responsibility for decisions on academic ethics versus research ethics, and more transparency to the University community on what the requirements are and where to address queries.

Anti-plagiarism Guidelines provide principles and a procedure for plagiarism detection. The Panel learned that YHU has made some efforts to use plagiarism detection software [Turnitin and a separate software application applicable to Armenian language. Agreements relating to this are currently in progress. This proves that currently there is a high risk of not identifying plagiarism in students' written work. Plagiarism checking currently applies only to graduation theses. However, it should be applied consistently across all written assignments, including all

essay-based assessments. The Panel encourages the University to take a preventative approach to plagiarism in which compulsory training is provided and guidance offered repeatedly in feedback on assignments to shape the students understanding of academic integrity and enable them to develop ethically-conscious practices. The Panel recognises that for Armenian, as a language of smaller-diffusion, plagiarism software may be less effective and, hence, the need for advanced training for staff to supplement any such gaps becomes high, i.e. if performance levels for the software with Armenian are lower, staff will need to be trained to identify stylistic discrepancies which may indicate plagiarised text. If such an approach is to be developed, it is important that not just staff but also students are given access to the plagiarism software so that they can test their work in advance of submission and aim to resolve any omissions of referencing which might have occurred. Additionally, the Panel would like to advise that if a similarity percentage is instituted as a threshold for plagiarism detection that the University ensures that a final human decision is made on plagiarism, especially where the allegation of plagiarism is confirmed, and that this does not remain at the level of similarity percentage. Indeed, the similarity percentage can be a starting point but then it is advisable to have a human evaluator assess the relevance of this percentage in respect the subject matter being researched, so that any final allegation of plagiarism results from academic expert judgement rather than the automatic system. Conversely, the policy should also stipulate action when the assessors might detect plagiarism even if the software does not, for example by detecting discontinuities of style or quality in the essay. The practice of applying plagiarism detection software demonstrates that there can be high levels of variability with the software picking up page numbers, references, quotations, author's name, fixed terminological constructions and including them unnecessarily in the similarity count, but also instances where plagiarised text is not detected, as the system may not have in its database the original text. The policy YHU adopts needs to account for both such situations.

The Panel did not find evidence of the policy regarding AI-based cheating like ChatGTP and others and would like to raise the risk with the University as it is likely in the near future for such practices to require firm regulation and clear procedures.

The Panel also did not find regulations of the use of social media for the promotion or reference to the University. It is important that students and staff know what the limitations of using social media channels for conveying University practice may need to be and the University should be explicit about what constitutes violation.

In the meeting at the library and with students the Panel learned that there is ambiguity regarding copyright regulations and issues arise with photocopying and digitisation of the teaching materials. The discussions suggested that up to full books could be photocopied for students, where the stock was insufficient, and that digitisation of the existing physical stock was ongoing via scanning procedures. The Panel notes that European legislation situates allowable limits at 10% without infringement of copyright and if more is to be used there would need to be explicit approvals from the publishers/authors, which the University does not seek, as a matter of practice. The University will know what legislation is applicable in Armenia; however, in the spirit of academic responsibility it is important that it aligns with international educational practices in this matter. If photocopying and digitisation is to be continued on a wide scale, institutional copyright policies need to be in effect to guide staff and students in respect of the requirements which need to be followed.

## Conclusions

YHU has defined its principles for academic ethics, however, the system for disseminating them among its members should be more comprehensive. Code of Ethics, Code of Conduct and Working Procedure of Ethics Commission of YHU are available in the YHU webpage but information about training for personnel about principles of ethics and plagiarism is missing. Academic integrity courses should be integrated into all study programmes. The complaints procedure concerning ethical questions needs further revision, and more detail. It should consider specific areas such as discrimination, harassment, whistle-blowing and corruption. All research involving human participants should be approved ethically – systems to monitor if this is implemented should be developed, everyone should submit for research projects to get ethical approval and there must be clear rules and guidelines how to decide. Copyright issues regarding teaching materials needs more transparent rules. Plagiarism detection in the digital environment needs improvement. Consequently, the Panel finds this Standard to **partially conform to requirements**.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- The Panel found that the system for disseminating the knowledge of ethics among YHU staff and students is not clear and not sufficient. The system for disseminating knowledge of ethics among YHU members should be more comprehensive. There should be more training for personnel about principles and knowledge of academic integrity should be integrated into every study programme.
- The Panel is concerned that current regulations regarding all types of complaints do not ensure confidentiality. YHU should develop clear and thorough procedural rules for solving complaints of various types, including discrimination, whistle-blowing etc. There should be an explicit process for appealing the judgments of the Ethics Commission on any matter. Complaints procedures should, as a matter of priority, guarantee confidentiality at all stages of the process, i.e. the availability of the *content* of complaints and the identities of complainants and complainees should be confidential, with the policy specifying to whom this information is available for the purpose of resolving the complaint.
- The Panel learned that the rules regulating the approvals by the Ethics Commission are not clear. Research involving human participants should be approved ethically with clear rules as to how approval may be approached. Systems should be developed to monitor the implementation of this. For the beginning, this should include the submission of all research projects for ethical approval until there is a clear understanding of the rules to be enforced. Decisions to give or withhold ethical approval should be made through a comprehensive, documented and transparent process.
- The Panel is concerned about the copyright matters regarding teaching materials. Matters of copyright regarding the duplication, digitisation, and storage of teaching materials should be explored. Clear and transparent rules should be developed in these areas that are in line with international practice and relevant legislation.
- The Panel learned that YHU policy regarding plagiarism in digital environment does not accord to the current needs considering the development of technology. Plagiarism prevention and plagiarism detection in the digital environment need improvement in

approaches and means by which plagiarism is confirmed should make use of human-decision-making practices.

### **Opportunities for further improvement**

- YHU may wish to explore how other high education institutions have organised and regulated the procedure of ethical cases and research control, and see if a separation of functions across two parallel committees may prove beneficial
- YHU may wish to develop policy details for AI-based tools which have the potential to intensify attempts at academic integrity violations and for social media communication via University specific channels.

### 3.5 Internationalisation

#### Standard

The higher education institution has set objectives for internationalisation and assesses the attainment of these objectives regularly.

The higher education institution has created an environment that encourages international mobility of students and teaching staff, supporting the development of learning, teaching and RDC activities, as well as the cultural openness of its members and society in general.

#### Guidelines

The HEI creates opportunities for international student exchanges by offering study programmes and/or modules taught in English. The learning environment at the HEI supports internationalisation and cultural openness.

Recognition of qualifications and recognition of prior learning and work experiences for student admission and programme completion are in accordance with the quality requirements set by the HEI, are systemic and consistent with the expected learning outcomes and support international student mobility.

The organisation of studies at the HEI facilitates student participation in international (including virtual) mobility (e.g., study programmes enable mobility windows).

The HEI has agreements with foreign higher education institutions and, through international exchange, sends its students abroad to study and undertake internship, providing comprehensive support for this.

Members of the teaching staff encourage students to participate in international mobility. International lecturers participate in the process of teaching, including supervision of doctoral theses.

The HEI supports and recognises the participation of its teaching staff in international teaching, research or creative projects, as well as their teaching, research or creative work and personal development which are performed at HEIs abroad.

#### Indicators

- Teaching staff mobility (in-out)
- Student mobility (in-out)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI, for example:
  - Number of English-taught study programmes by main units and levels of study
  - Percentage of foreign students (by study programmes, levels of study, in total in the HEI)
  - Percentage of study programmes that include English-taught subjects (of at least 15 ECTS)
  - Number of ECTS acquired through external mobility

## Evidence and analysis

Internationalisation is an important pillar in the development of YHU, which aspires to become an international university "with internationally recognised education quality" [M, SER]. In the past two years, the University has made significant efforts to create strategic plans at the institutional level as well as area specific strategies, including internationalisation. Based on the recommendations of the previous institutional accreditation, the internationalisation strategy was updated in November 2022, when a new action plan was also developed [SER]. The plan includes provisions on international mobility, international partnerships, language skills, intercultural awareness and multicultural competencies, performance indicators, and monitoring procedures. Some guidance documents regarding intercultural awareness and integration of international students have been developed and English courses have been included across some of the study programmes. The SER indicates that some courses taught in English are attended by Armenian and international students. An international office is planned, as an extension of the International Relations Department [SER].

Upon request, the Panel was provided with the Internationalisation Framework (draft dated 23.3.2023). It states, among other things: "YHU adopts Internationalization Strategy with the overarching goal of enhancing the quality of learning, teaching, and research and promoting civic responsibility among students and employees" [Additional Materials]. The internationalisation framework outlines three levels of internationalisation: strategic, functional, and cultural. From what the Panel observed and learned during the visit, such an approach is appropriate and relevant to the current state of internationalisation, which is still in its infancy.

The Framework also includes an operational plan with targets for each area for the period 2025-2026 but lacks specific policies for achieving these targets. For example, Table 1 includes targets for the number of students and teaching staff participating in exchange programmes and for the number of "mobility, exchange, and training agreements," but there is no indication of how mobility will be put into practice. Some of the goals listed in the plan are neither actionable nor measurable (e.g., "A complete set of actions necessary to support internationalisation strategy, integrating best foreign practices and standards"). In terms of organisational support, the YHU has recently hired a person responsible for implementing international activities.

Since these initiatives have only been in place for a short period of time, the Panel cannot draw conclusions about the effectiveness of strategy implementation and related governance and monitoring processes.

Best practice in the global educational market demonstrates that the core prerequisites for successful internationalisation of a school are (a) offering a portfolio of English-taught courses and programmes and (b) providing exchange opportunities for students, teachers, and administrators. The provision of courses taught in English depends on the ability of faculty to deliver courses in English, the language skills of domestic students (which allows for the formation of "mixed" study groups), financial support from the university to fund English track study programmes, and an organisational structure that facilitates and promotes opportunities for the full integration of international students into university activities at all levels. Inbound and outbound mobilities help create an "international climate" that is not only beneficial to the university's stakeholders, but also provides additional incentives for international partners (universities and companies alike) to deepen and expand collaboration with YHU.

The YHU offers some study programmes in English, and there are also some mobility opportunities, but in both areas the level of activity is low. The SER [p. 26] lists 11 programmes that are taught in English. From information obtained through SER and during the site visit, it appears that while there are a large number of international students in the programme Medicine, all other programmes have only a handful of international students enrolled. Of the four sample programmes included in the evaluation, only Dentistry was taught in English. In Law MA, there was one foreign student enrolled but has since dropped out. The Panel learned that non-Armenian-speaking applicants who wish to enrol in one of the YHU degree programmes are accepted and that a parallel English-language programme is organised for them (taught by English-speaking faculty). While this indicates a high degree of customer orientation, the practice of holding lectures for only one student is neither practical nor sustainable and, more importantly, results in a poorer educational experience compared to a regular programme. Even if the quality of lectures could be comparable, and this is highly dependent on staff English language competence and staff methodological approaches to English-medium delivery, such a student is isolated and does not have the opportunity to interact with classmates, work in teams, and participate in class discussions. These activities are designed to build skills and competencies that graduates need to successfully enter the job market and develop professionally, so these students miss out. (see also Standard 8)

There are no formally established English language level requirements for international students. International students are given a written English test upon admission. The Panel was provided with an example of a simple general multiple-choice language test that is inadequate for academic purposes. Some degree programmes (e.g., BA in Management) include a statement that a good command of English is a prerequisite for taking the courses, but it is not clear whether this is so in practice, and how this requirement is verified.

The YHU identified as one of the obstacles to internationalisation overall low level of English proficiency among administrative and teaching staff. The survey identified three distinct groups of staff with different levels of English proficiency, which led to the development and implementation of English courses for staff. These are delivered by professors in the English Department at Roslin Academy of YHU [M]. The Panel encourages YHU to replicate such initiatives in other areas. This is a good start, however it will take time for teaching staff to reach the level of English required for teaching the university degree programme. In the academic year 2022-2023, the YHU engaged across all programmes 12 foreign (visiting) lecturers (11 in the Medical Institute and 1 in the Institute of Economics, Management and Informatics) [SER].

On the other hand, English-taught programmes that require clinical practice (e.g., medicine and dentistry) bring another set of challenges: Students must be able to communicate with patients in their native language (in this case, Armenian). The YHU aims to address this challenge by offering mandatory courses in Armenian for international students as early as the first year of study, but the complexity of the Armenian language can prevent students from communicating effectively with patients. The Panel learned that the practical solution is that foreign students take clinical internships in their home countries during the summer holiday, which could be a viable solution for those students who cannot achieve the necessary level of Armenian. However, the YHU should retain control over this essential part of the programme by signing the contracts with the foreign clinics and agreeing oversight arrangements. This would both help students secure the placements and YHU to relevantly monitor the implementation and outcomes of the placements. There are indications that the University is considering such an approach [M].

Interviews with students revealed that the overall learning environment at the YHU is supportive [S]. Faculty, support staff, and management are responsive and willing to listen to students' concerns and address their needs. However, the situation is less favourable for international students: they receive less support from administrative staff and less pastoral care, primarily due to language barriers. Many international students are recruited by agents, which may not result in the best admissions experience. As the Panel learned [S], it happens that agents overcharge students while not providing all the services paid for. The YHU could take a more proactive approach and take more responsibility in recruiting international students and onboarding students to mitigate the challenges associated with moving to a foreign country and increase student satisfaction. (see also Standard 10)

International mobility of students and faculty is almost non-existent [SER, T, S]. Students and, to some extent, faculty are not interested in mobility even when opportunities exist [S, T]. The reasons are cultural [S] and related to language skills [S, T]. YHU claimed that in order to improve students' English skills it has recently introduced an English course as a compulsory subject (although it was not clear whether is implemented in every case). This change underscores YHU's commitment to increasing the level of internationalisation and is a first step in better preparing students to participate in the international environment. Employers would welcome this initiative [E] and could even support it by offering international internships in their foreign business units. Indicating a specific time in curriculum when mobility is best taken would further facilitate international student and faculty exchanges. At the same time, the YHU could mobilise its foreign students and visiting staff to create a more intense international climate and in this way support "internationalisation at home" for domestic students. The student council and student groups occasionally organise some activities in which they try to actively involve international students [S], but a concerted effort could help to further integrate international students.

The YHU has signed agreements and memoranda of understanding with 12 international institutions, but plans to increase that number substantially by 2025-2026 [SER, Additional Materials]. It is not clear how many institutions will be involved in the planned activities. The goals set in the Internationalisation Framework are too ambitious. The internationalisation processes at YHU would be better served by building on existing partnerships and prioritising quality over quantity by deepening its relationships with selected institutions. The Panel was told that YHU is preparing a joint-degree programme with Warsaw University of Humanities, Business and Management that could begin in 2023-2024, which seems a promising start. (see also Standard 1)

## Conclusions

Becoming an international university is one of YHU's strategic goals. Overall, the analysis shows that the University is making progress in introducing internationalisation in its various activities. It has taken initial steps to develop an international dimension, but its current level is still below international benchmarks. Consequently, the Panel finds this Standard to **partially conform to requirements**.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- The internationalisation strategy and its operationalisation have only been adopted recently, and it is too early to judge their success. YHU should establish a timetable with

milestones and checkpoints to monitor the achievement of objectives in a regular, structured, and coherent manner. It should also establish feedback loops that allow for continuous improvement in the level and quality of internationalisation.

- English language skills are largely lacking. The YHU should continue its efforts to improve the English language skills of its students and staff by offering language courses.
- There are not many opportunities to participate in mobility and at the same time there is a reluctance on the part of students and faculty to participate. The YHU should actively support student and teacher mobility by creating more exchange opportunities and promoting the benefits of mobility to all stakeholders. The University may wish to include exchange opportunities in the study programmes to facilitate mobility.
- In its strategic plan, the YHU set a goal of expanding its partner network and sign several new cooperation agreements with foreign institutions. This raises concerns for the Panel. The YHU should shift its focus from expanding the international partner network to increasing the quality of the network and deepening relationships with international partner institutions that are most appropriate in terms of student and faculty mobility, study programmes, and research projects.
- In some programmes, such as Medicine and Dentistry, where clinical practice is an essential part of the curriculum, students must be able to communicate with patients in their native language. Despite the introduction of obligatory Armenian courses, it is not anticipated that the minimum required level of Armenian can be achieved by most international students. The YHU should sign contracts with clinics in other countries to allow international students to complete internships in their home countries as a formalised part of their study programme.
- International students face many barriers when they begin with their studies in Armenia. The induction process for international students should be adapted to their needs and challenges related to living and studying in a foreign country.

### **Opportunities for further improvement**

- The recruitment process for foreign students could be greatly improved by establishing a functioning website with information about programmes, fees, admission requirements, and study conditions (such as housing, insurance, etc.). The application form should be available on the YHU website so that foreign students can apply directly to YHU programmes without going through intermediaries (such as agents).

### 3.6 Teaching staff

#### Standard

**Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of learners and value their own continuous self-development.**

#### Guidelines

Distribution of teaching staff by age and the percentage of young members of the teaching staff ensure the sustainability of studies. The career model of academic staff motivates capable young people to start an academic career and creates opportunities for their advancement.

The HEI supports systematically the development of its teaching staff. Members of the teaching staff engage in development of their professional, teaching and digital competences, improve their supervision competence, and share best practices with one another. IT and educational technological support (including training) are available to teaching staff.

Teaching staff's participation in research, development and/or creative activities supports the teaching process and ensures competence for the supervision of students' theses (including doctoral theses).

Members of the teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and/or creative work within the HEI and with partners outside the HEI, e.g. with field practitioners, public sector organisations, companies, other research and development institutions, and lecturers from other Armenian or foreign higher education institutions. Qualified visiting lecturers and practitioners participate in the teaching process.

When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their periodical evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as their research, development and creative work is taken into account, including student feedback, the effectiveness of their student supervision, development of their teaching; supervisory and digital competences, their international mobility, and their entrepreneurial experience or other work experience in their fields of speciality outside the HEI.

#### Indicators:

- Competition for elected academic positions
- Number of students per teaching staff member in full-time equivalent (FTE)
- Percentage of teaching staff holding a PhD degree
- The results of the students' feedback about the teaching staff
- Teaching staff participating in continuing training or other forms of teaching and digital competences and professional development
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## Evidence and analysis

At the time of the assessment visit (April 2023), the YHU had 278 staff in employment, 62 of whom were administrative [Additional Materials 3]. Degree programmes are offered by faculty who work in four institutes: The largest is the Institute of Medicine, which employs more than 50% of the teaching staff; the smallest is the Institute of Economics, Management, and Informatics with 13 faculty (Table 1). At the request of the Panel, the YHU provided additional data on employment status of staff, which indicates two categories: Full-time/part-time faculty, and permanent/non-permanent staff. It is the Panel's understanding that the first category refers to the number of teaching hours per week and the second refers to the length of the employment contract.

Hiring for elected academic positions is based on selection procedures and follows the YHU policies and regulations for faculty hiring and promotion [SER, M]. The student-faculty ratio is acceptable (SER gives a ratio of 12:1) and is improving over time [SER].

Table 1: Teaching staff sufficiency in 2022-2023

	No. of teaching staff	Percentage of teaching staff with PhD	Percentage of full-time teaching staff	Percentage of permanent teaching staff
“Roslin” Academy of Arts and Humanities	55	30.9	83.6	50.9
Institute of Economics, Management and Informatics	13	46.2	76.9	53.8
Institute of Law & International Relations	22	36.4	59.1	18.2
Institute of Medicine	111	36.9	65.8	29.7
Total	205	36.6	69.3	35.1

Source: Data submitted by the YHU in April 2023 [Additional Materials 2].

The teaching load for members of teaching staff depends on their contract, but also on the number of teaching hours in the study programme [M, T, SER]. For example, in a newly introduced study programme, the number of teaching hours available is lower, because the programme is not yet in full operation [M, T, also see, for example, Management Study Programme, below]. Research work is not part of the employment contract, and there are no specific requirements for faculty research performance, nor for their development.

About one-third of the teaching staff has a Ph.D. degree. The percentages of full-time and permanent faculty vary across institutes. Both indicators have the lowest values in the Institute of Law and International Relations, where 60% of the staff is full-time and less than 20% has a permanent contract. The inclusion of part-time staff professionals for whom this employment is in addition to their regular job improves the transfer of knowledge to students. However, such practice should be kept within limits. The same benefit is obtained by involving guest lecturers from the field, but this possibility is hardly used. When part-time staff is utilised, the YHU should make sure that they receive necessary pedagogical training.

The interviews [T, M] revealed that in some study programmes (see Psychology SP) a high percentage of teaching staff work under hourly-paid contracts, which raises several concerns. First, in the modern higher education landscape, study programmes must be constantly updated and adapted to changes brought about by technological and social advances. Programme development is not possible without a stable core of full-time faculty who are also engaged in research. Second, there is a need to ensure consistent quality in programme delivery. Relying too much on contracted, hourly-paid teaching can lead to high variability in teaching quality. To mitigate this risk, clear policy on pedagogical training has to be put in place. Third, teaching staff does not only deliver a certain number of lecture hours but play a much larger role in the overall development of students. By having the opportunity to develop their professional, teaching, digital, and other skills and share best practises with each other, faculty members not only benefit themselves, but are also able to provide better services to students. Fourth, teaching staff is responsible for supervising student work, and to do this effectively and efficiently, faculty must have the opportunity to improve their supervisory skills. In summary, members of the teaching staff should have the opportunity to engage in various development activities and be paid for doing so. Therefore, these concerns are best addressed in the context of a full-time employment contract.

The YHU mentions having a career model [SER, p. 28], but the Panel found no evidence for it. There is some evidence of advancement through the ranks [M, T], but there is no systematic approach to transparently outline and support the advancement path.

Teaching staff are routinely evaluated through annual student and graduates' surveys. Some input is also collected through the Student Council. Survey results are submitted to the Quality Assurance Office and the appropriate Chairs. The Panel learned that classroom observations are conducted on a regular basis [SER, T, M]. While the instrument used for this purpose is appropriate, it is not clear whether the classroom observations are used to develop teachers or to evaluate their work [See Standard 3, Quality Culture, above].

Teaching staff performance is evaluated annually by self-assessment using a scoring model. The evaluation form was made available to the Panel upon request. The scoring sheet includes 38 measurement items and is used to rank teaching staff [SER, M]. Teachers report on their teaching, research, work with students, public service, etc. According to SER, the results of the ranking are available to all professors in the department (the Chair), "...which ensures a transparent and unbiased evaluation" [SER, p. 12]. The top ranked faculty receive an incentive in the form of a salary increase or a certificate of recognition. Those faculty members whose scores fall below the minimum threshold may receive professional mentoring and retraining [SER], but the Panel has had no such examples presented to it.

While such a ranking system could, in principle, provide incentives for staff development and advancement, this particular tool in its current form, does not serve that purpose. Several items relate to prior professional accomplishments, such as level of education attained, professorial titles, etc. In order to use this instrument as a means to measure the annual activity level, performance of faculty members and reward their progress (which also contributes to the achievement of YHU's strategic goals), the measurement points need to be reconsidered. In its current form, the ranking system does not provide incentives for young academics, who can never rank at the top because their past academic achievements are not comparable to those of senior teachers and researchers.

Each member of teaching staff prepares an annual work plan, which is approved by the department head and the director of the institute. At the end of the academic year, the work

plan is reviewed and compared to actual performance. Any gaps and possible remedies are discussed at the faculty meeting and, if possible, incorporated into the work plans for the following academic year. Faculty members were not able to explain to the Panel what happens if work plan goals are not met [T, see example study programmes below, e.g., Management BA]. International mobility of faculty is very low [see Standard 5], and faculty also rarely participate in research projects outside of applied projects conducted at the institute level. [see Standard 11]

The YHU has taken some steps to support systematically the development of its teaching staff. The Staff Development and Training Unit was established in late 2022 and has since designed and launched several development initiatives. The unit has created a comprehensive list of training activities and introduced English courses [see Standard 5, Internationalisation, above]. The Panel also learned of collegial help in developing digital skills among staff. A professor of computer science provides advice and assistance to colleagues once a week [M, T]. (see also Standard 2)

Formal support in the use of information technology is provided by the IT department, which also supports faculty in the use of Moodle. However, despite access to the learning management system platform, Moodle is not fully utilised [R] nor is it developed to serve as a learning and teaching tool. On the other hand, teaching staff have very limited access to academic resources, such as databases of scholarly journals, textbooks, etc. (see Standard 2)

There is no formal requirement for teaching staff to participate in scholarly research, although YHU's strategic plan specifies research goals (see Standard 11). Teaching staff participation in academic research is very weak. On the other hand, the institutes have good connections with companies, especially through their alumni [E, A], and are also actively involved in activities at the government level, e.g. participate in processes for drafting national legislation [see Law Study Programme]. The institutes focus on a few (agreed) research areas in which they conduct applied research projects [M, T]. They may also involve students within the scope of coursework. The YHU has recently established a start-up company (producing electrical panels), and students have the opportunity to participate in its activities (mostly via internships).

## Conclusions

Overall, there have been some positive developments in establishing a support system for teacher development, but training and capacity building activities are still in the process of development. The YHU has also implemented a teacher evaluation system (called the ranking system) that includes measurement points for activities outside the classroom. However, the Panel still has several concerns and shortcomings. Workload is set only for teaching, research is not institutionally supported, and faculty mobility is very low. These concerns are exacerbated by the YHU ambition to develop several new degree programmes, where there is a significant risk of over-reliance on part-time faculty and hourly contracted staff. Consequently, the Panel finds this Standard to **partially conform to requirements**.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- Workload is specified only in terms of teaching hours. YHU should adopt a holistic system that takes into account teaching, research, and administrative workloads and specify all work commitments in employment contracts. (see also Standard 2.)

- There is some concern about the sustainability of employing part-time, non-permanent and hourly-paid staff, which could jeopardise the quality of academic programmes. The YHU should limit the scope of hourly paid faculty and employ key faculty on long-term (permanent), full-time contracts. (see also Standard 2)
- The University uses a ranking system (based on self-evaluations) to assess annual performance. Although most key components of academic work are monitored, this system has several shortcomings. The YHU should rethink the measurement points so that they capture current performance and outcomes, link the system to workload allocation, and establish feedback loops to close the gaps in meeting the goals set in the annual plan as well as address their root causes.
- Academic support related to access to scholarly literature does not meet the standards of higher education. The YHU should significantly improve library resources by providing access to online scholarly databases.

### **Opportunities for further improvement**

- While part-time faculty bring specific expertise, YHU could improve the transfer of state-of-the-art expertise by engaging more visiting lecturers and guest speakers (both domestic and international) on a regular basis.

### 3.7 Study programme

#### Standard

**Study programmes are designed and developed while taking into account the expectations of stakeholders, higher education and professional standards, and trends in the relevant fields.**

**The objectives of study programmes, modules and courses and their planned learning outcomes are specific and coherent.**

**The study programmes support creativity, entrepreneurship and development of other general competencies.**

#### Guidelines

In planning and developing study programmes (incl. programmes conducted in a foreign language), the HEI is guided by its objectives, its competence areas and the needs of the labour market and takes into account national strategies and the expectations of society. The study programmes are based on up-to-date sectoral know-how and research.

The planned learning outcomes are in accord with the requirements for the corresponding level of the Qualifications Framework, and in planning them the HEI has taken into account the future needs, among other things. In developing study programmes, the HEI has conducted a comparative analysis of similar programmes in leading foreign higher education institutions.

The objectives of the study programme and its modules, the planned learning outcomes, theoretical and practical learning, the proportion of independent work and internship, and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes form a coherent whole.

The development of general competences (incl. creativity and entrepreneurship) and speciality-related digital competences as well as support for the development of a self-directed learner is a natural part of the study programme, and these are integrated with speciality studies.

Expected student workloads defined in the study programmes are realistic and consistent with the calculation that, on average, 1 ECTS credit equals 26 student learning hours. The study programme offers sufficient challenge for learners with different levels of knowledge and skills.

#### Indicators

- Number of students per study programme
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

### Evidence and analysis

The institution has developed an approach to designing, developing and reviewing its programmes [SER,12]. (see Standard 3). A central element is that 'Study Programme Working Groups' will be created within Institutes to review programmes when necessary [SER,7, 12]. The Panel welcomed this innovation, noting that it also requires development to ensure that programme reviews are carried out regularly and systematically and that they are fully documented [SER,12].

As noted above (see Standard 3), programme reviews are typically conducted in response to external events rather than in accord with an internally set, fixed timetable [M]. The institution's internal drive to enhance its programmes is thereby limited, which is a risk to quality. The panel welcomed hearing that there is a recognition that the time between reviews should not normally be *more than* five years.[M] However, no evidence was found of a corresponding regulation ensuring that the time between reviews is not normally *less than* five years. This creates the risk that programmes are changed too soon or too frequently, leading to a failure to implement change effectively before further changes are proposed.

The Panel welcomed the recent approval of regulations governing evaluation, revision, approval and closure of professional study programmes [YHU REGULATION for Evaluation, Revision, Approval, and Closure of Professional Study Programmes, approved Dec 2022]. This includes the use of 'Study Programme Working Groups' (SPWGs) [SER] as a mechanism for undertaking programme reviews that take into account stakeholder expectations. The Panel confirmed that a number of these groups exist, hearing that the policy for the use of SPWGs applies across all study programmes [M]. The Terms of Reference and Membership that apply to all SPWGs requested by the Panel were subsequently approved and provided separately as well as being incorporated in the Regulation document [Study Programme Working Group Terms of Reference, approved 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2023]. These regulations, taken as a whole, represent a welcome step towards systematising the work of SPWGs. However, the Panel observed that SPWGs are presently formed by providing 'opportunities to participate' rather than specifying minimum *requirements* for the membership of an SPWG that ensure that the expectations of all stakeholder groups *must* be represented before it can be approved to do its work. [Annex 4. Study Programme Working Group Terms of Reference, approved 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2023]. The Panel could therefore not be confident that SPWGs will always incorporate the necessary stakeholder groups and that they can consistently draw on the expertise needed to fulfil its role.

The Panel heard that SPWGs in different institutes work in isolation and could benefit from learning from one another [M]. The Panel welcomed this concern for enhancement and confirmed the need for it through other meetings that demonstrated varied levels of understanding of SPWGs and engagement with them across programmes [T, S]. The regulations document includes information about 'Cyclic Review'. This includes details of SPWGs, the overarching objectives of cyclical review, the matters considered in a review, the purpose and potential outcomes of review, the items to be reviewed, indicators for assessment, and assessment methods. The document also provides some details of the quality assessment process itself, and policies for revising expected learning outcomes, as well as closing or suspending programmes, and – as noted above – includes the Terms of Reference for SPWGs (separately approved in April 2023) [YHU REGULATION for Evaluation, Revision, Approval, and Closure of Professional Study Programmes]. The Panel recognised this as an important step towards formalisation of processes. However, at this stage, regulations are stated at a very general level. This creates the risk of excessive inconsistency and inadequate control of review processes, resulting in inconsistent judgments about programmes across institutes and programmes. A further risk at this stage is that the regulations have been approved only recently and so the Panel has not had opportunity to confirm the effectiveness and consistency with which the institution has been able to apply them.

The institution indicated that there is a task leader across all SPWGs who is an experienced member of the Quality Assurance team [SER,6-7], however meetings indicated that this role is more advisory, if solicited, rather than an oversight and monitoring role. As the University seeks

to mitigate the risks in the current system highlighted above, the importance of effective oversight increases. This includes not only identifying a leader for the work of each SPWGs, but also defining the properly constituted Committee to take overall responsibility for study programme development, including the SPWG terms of reference and membership, policies, and processes, implementation and review. There is a risk that programmes will not be systematically and successfully enhanced over time without clear lines of responsibility to committees that are constituted by those who have the expertise necessary to provide oversight. (This general risk is considered in more detail under Standard 3).

Discussion with students across multiple programmes provided mixed evidence of understanding of SPWGs and involvement in them. The Panel heard from students on one programme that SPWGs are fruitful, bringing together stakeholder groups that were previously separate [S]. However, the level of understanding across most programmes was low and there was no evidence of any training to enable students to contribute effectively. In most cases students had little or no awareness of the existence of SPWGs, or confused them with other types of engagement with the institution [S].

It was evident that the institution is working to involve employers in the design and development of its study programmes [SER, E]. However, the Panel noted a reliance on the overlap between the category of 'employers' and that of 'internship providers' and a confusion of their roles. Typically to involve employers the institution turns to internship providers. This is because internship providers are already involved with the institution and so have an existing (informal) relationship. The institution was able to give examples of changes made based on feedback from these 'employers' through the 'internship profile' and survey [SER 30]. However, in its meetings with these 'employers' (internship supervisors) the Panel noted that many were not people who make employment decisions or are responsible for graduates who are employed in the organisation. They are thus not the people who can reflect helpfully on the characteristics that employers expect of graduates and whether graduates of YHU possess these [TAE]. Without this understanding the institution cannot develop its programmes to ensure that graduates possess the required characteristics. The institution's approach to employer engagement therefore risks failure to identify the ways in which study programmes should be developed to ensure the employability of its students.

The institution indicates that many alumni have become employers and so engagement with alumni can provide very helpful feedback for study programme development [SER, e.g. 6, 7, 17]. However, in two programmes, alumni chosen by the university to meet with the Panel were in fact students of the institution. They were Master's students who were alumni only in the sense of having recently graduated from the BA [AE]. Such 'alumni' are unable to provide feedback on the value of their studies for subsequent employment because they have not yet moved on from the institution into an employment context. This suggests some uncertainty in the institution about the purpose of alumni feedback for developing study programmes. Most important is the feedback of those who have left the institution and who are able to advise on how programmes might prepare students better for subsequent employment. Without this there is a risk that study programme development will fail to be responsive to the needs of graduates. In another programme alumni noted they would be delighted to participate in programme development but had not been invited to do so [AE].

Meetings with students, alumni and employers indicated that the institution depends on its internship scheme not only to prepare students for employment and to receive feedback from 'employers', but also as one important means to create employment opportunities for students.

The process of review, however, should focus on identifying the characteristics of employable graduates in order to ensure that the programme nurtures these in *all* students. Without this there is a risk that students will be disadvantaged if they do not find a job with their internship placement. To the extent that students are only prepared to be employees of those organisations that provide internships, opportunities for students will be limited. The University would like to provide an academic environment that provides opportunities for 'professional dreams to be realised' [M], however this desire will not be fulfilled without the effective use of employer and alumni feedback to shape programmes.

The University would like to reach European standards and so it is gradually developing its strategy and operations to reflect this. This includes working towards a culture in which all of its activities are enhanced on an ongoing basis [SER, M]. However, while programme management teams were aware of the standards of the ministry of education that apply to their programmes [TM], they were generally unable to explain how the University's desire for European standards and continual improvement could be expressed [TM].

The Panel found that staff are generally *concerned* to ensure that students are well prepared as professionals [TS]. However, there is a limited grasp of the place and importance of professional *standards* in the institution's programmes to ensure that this is the case. Reference is made to professional standards from the Republic of Armenia Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport [e.g., SER, 55], and to a quality assurance manual that makes only general reference to 'professional abilities specific to their profession' [Manual of the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance, 2015, section IV]. The source of detailed professional standards in some areas is not clear. In some cases it is not clear that there are external agencies in Armenia that define detailed professional standards. The Panel found that this issue exists across multiple disciplines and programmes. A general lack of understanding of professional standards is indicated by the evident confusion of staff about the difference between educational and professional standards [T].

In the absence of clearly stated professional standards relating to a given programme there is a risk that the desire to prepare students as effective practitioners will not be fulfilled adequately or consistently. Such standards are often defined by national bodies responsible for governing and/or supporting the profession. The institution can adopt such standards from Armenian bodies where available, or can identify professional standards from other sources. For example, professional standards adopted in other countries may be considered. Good practice within Armenian contexts can also be explored and articulated as part of a process of identifying suitable professional standards.

The objectives of cyclical review and the policy for revising learning outcomes include statements that implicitly suggest a concern that programmes should be responsive to trends in the relevant field, but the references are not clear and explicit about it [YHU REGULATION for Evaluation, Revision, Approval, and Closure of Professional Study Programmes]. In order to avoid the risk that programmes will become out of date, the regulations need to be clear and explicit and staff need to be supported to maintain a grasp of the full breadth and current state of the field. The panel observed that the learning resources available to staff and students, including library resources, are inadequate to sustain this awareness of the breadth and current state of the field in at least some disciplines [RT].

The Panel observed that bibliographies for some courses are out of date, and some compulsory readings are in languages that are not required by the admission requirements. More seriously, the Panel observed that the library was unable to provide examples of core texts for some

programmes with a smaller number of students, and could not demonstrate access to any online databases to enable access to internationally recognised journals [RT]. A lack of awareness of such databases and standard academic resources was subsequently found in discussion with teachers and students [TS]. Up to date texts and journal databases are required to give access to information about recent trends in the discipline, without which there is a serious risk that staff will be unable to engage in scholarship of a sufficiently high standard to enable programmes to be developed in a way that is responsive to the relevant fields.

The Panel found a general lack of attention to learning resources that pervades the institution from students through to staff research. This shows itself in various ways, including the academic level of Masters theses, which the Panel judged is lower than that typically found in European contexts. The Panel also observed training techniques that are not addressing the full breadth of the discipline as well as practical (as opposed to clinical) components that need to be reviewed and increased in order to stay in line with current trends. It also shows itself in staff scholarship and research (See also Standard 11). Several things are required to avoid the risk that programmes become unbalanced or out of date. These include a well-resourced library with an acquisitions policy for each programme to ensure that the institution systematically provides up to date core texts for each discipline, and has sufficient copies (electronic or physical) to ensure that they are available for staff and students (See also Standard 2). It also includes effective academic staff management to ensure that the depth and currency of staff scholarship and professional practice are continuously developing (See also Standard 6). The library should also ensure that the institution has subscriptions to the standard electronic databases that give access to up to the most up to date international research in the field [RTS].

The Panel read and heard that the institution intends to increase the number of programmes from 12 to 60 in order to reflect the range of specialisations that it would like to address.[M; Strategic Plan, table 3] In light of the range of issues highlighted above the panel judged that there would be a very serious risk to the quality of the institution's teaching if it was to do this (See also Standard 1).

The Panel also noted the very substantial discrepancy in the numbers of students on different programmes and recognised the risk to both quality and sustainability of smaller programmes. There is a risk that smaller programmes will remain under-resourced in comparison to larger ones. It is also less likely that teams leading small programmes will have a natural concern for individualised options for learning. In general it is more challenging to provide a high quality student experience where the numbers are small. To mitigate this risk requires careful investment in existing programmes. Ultimately smaller programmes may prove unsustainable if student numbers do not grow and so a programme may need to be closed [SER, MTSAE]. The institution should remain open to the real possibility of closing smaller programmes either because they are financially unsustainable, or – more importantly – because they are too small to ensure a sufficiently high quality student learning experience.

The Panel found some evidence that the institution provides objectives for each of its programmes and articulates learning outcomes at programme and module levels, with some elementary mapping to modules [SER, Higher Professional Education Study Programme Documents: Psychology (2022), Dentistry (2021), Management (2021), Law (2021)]. The Panel heard that there is increasing awareness among teachers of the importance of learning outcomes and the need to align these with teaching and assessment methods [T]. However, the institution has further to go to ensure that objectives and learning outcomes define study programme content adequately.

It was not clear to the Panel how learning outcomes are written to enable progression from one academic level (typically from one year) to the next [SER, Higher Professional Education Study Programme Documents: Psychology (2022), Dentistry (2021), Management (2021), Law (2021)]. Many learning outcomes are articulated in terms of knowledge and it is not clear how the curriculum moves students through towards understanding, application and analysis of knowledge and then on to critical evaluation and creativity. Failure to embed progression in the curriculum clearly represents a risk to academic standards and standards of achievement.

The Panel read and heard examples of creativity and entrepreneurship across programmes [SER, SEAT] as well as the development of general competencies, principally through internships. The Panel heard that students typically value their internship experiences and the flexibility that they have to select internship placements that are convenient and attractive to them. However, the Panel also heard that there is in general a lack of governance of internships from YHU and concluded that this may place students at risk. In many cases YHU does not select placement providers and does not inspect the premises before a new placement is undertaken. YHU does not have contracts with all internship providers. Typically, the relationship is only with the students who must take responsibility for terminating an internship if they believe it is inadequate. There is no direct monitoring of internships by YHU, but only feedback after an internship is complete that may influence whether or not work continues with the provider. This means that activities at internship may or may not contribute directly to the learning outcomes of any given programme.

Overall, YHU has made progress in the management of its study programmes in line with the standard, but has significant issues to address to ensure that academic governance is properly structured, documented, and applied, and that programmes are regularly and effectively reviewed and properly resourced. With substantial work to be done in this area the strategic objective to build up from 12 to 60 programmes should be revised to focus on programme quality rather than quantity. As such, and importantly, the University should focus first on increasing the quality and size of its existing programmes in various ways, including developing its regulations and processes for review and resourcing. Only when significant progress has been made in this area should it consider growth in the number of programmes, and this should be gradual. Smaller programmes should receive investment to grow student numbers (see also Standard 1).

## Conclusions

The University has taken steps to enhance its programme development and review processes, making use of Study Programme Working Groups. The systematic organisation, operation and management of these groups now needs to be developed further to lift them to a satisfactory level. The involvement of external stakeholders should be reviewed to ensure that only those who have the characteristics required to provide advice from an employer or alumnus/alumna perspective are involved. Internship placements are an important part of study programmes, but they are relied on too much and for too many purposes. External stakeholder feedback should enable identification of graduate characteristics that can be developed during the programme for the sake of employability. Professional standards need to be identified for each programme and staff should be facilitated to remain conversant with the full breadth and depth of their disciplines. Attention should be given to learning resources and to the academic standard of assessment tasks set in the final year of the programme (e.g. assessments at level 6

in a BA programme). All these matters of quality should be considered as part of a systematic review process and addressed before any consideration is given to the addition of new programmes. Consequently, the Panel finds this Standard to **partially conform to requirements**.

### Areas of concern and recommendations

- The Panel is concerned that study programme review policies and processes are not developed and applied in a way that is sufficiently systematic and consistent across the institution. Therefore, YHU is recommended to ensure that governance of study programme review, and the study programme working group system is part of a larger committee structure that has responsibility for and authority over the academic functions of the university. (see also Standard 1).
- The Panel is concerned that policies and processes for study programme review are not being updated, improved, and documented as part of a continual process of enhancement. Therefore regulations governing study programme review should themselves be reviewed on a regular, fixed schedule. The institution should aim to bring continual improvement in the effectiveness of programme reviews across the institution. These reviews of the review process should lead to developments in the regulations that indicate an increasingly coherent, detailed, and shared institutional understanding of how an effective review should be conducted. The regulations should include increasingly precise and detailed requirements for review schedule, composition of working groups, required study programme documentation and data, and decision processes. These regulations should be applied consistently across the institution to ensure consistency in judgments and review outcomes.
- The Panel is concerned that the gap between programme reviews can be too short to allow changes recommended in earlier reviews to be implemented and embedded. Therefore, as part of the revision to working arrangements for SPWGs (see also Standard 3), regulations governing study programme review should be updated to show that all programmes are subject to review on a fixed schedule ensuring that reviews are carried out after a period that is neither shorter nor longer than five years, providing periodic review that allows sufficient time for recommended changes to be implemented successfully.
- The Panel was concerned that it is *possible* for a SPWG to begin its work without sufficient stakeholder representation. Therefore YHU is recommended to update the Terms of Membership of the SPWG to ensure that it is impossible for groups to be approved to undertake their work without sufficient representation from both internal and external stakeholder groups.
- The Panel was concerned that students involved in SPWGs may not understand their roles and the contribution they can make. Therefore YHU is recommended to include within the policy for programme approval and review requirements for training for students involved in SPWGs so that they are aware of (among other things): (i) the purpose of the exercise; (ii) the aspects of the programme and institution on which they should comment; (iii) how to consult with and represent all students taking the programme in order to bring forward a corporate view.
- The Panel was concerned that YHU does not benefit sufficiently from high quality employer feedback. Therefore YHU is recommended to improve the use of employer

feedback in study programme development. This includes stating clearly in the regulations the purpose of involving employers in programme review. Principally, this purpose is to identify the qualities that employable graduates should possess so that the programme can be designed to develop these qualities in students. It also includes ensuring that employers who are involved in study programme review are those who are: (i) involved in making hiring decisions, and (ii) aware of the essential and desirable qualities of employees in the profession. (Some internship supervisors will not meet these criteria.)

- The Panel was concerned that YHU does not understand the main purpose of alumni feedback in developing its programmes. Therefore YHU is recommended to ensure that alumni who provide feedback for study programme development are those who have moved on from the institution (i.e. not students continuing studies at the institution). These alumni will be people who can comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the programme in light of their subsequent experience in the world of employment or further study elsewhere.
- The Panel was concerned that YHU does not make use of explicitly defined professional standards in all its applied programmes. Therefore, the institution should develop an approach that enables it to define professional standards for each of its applied programmes; that is, the standards required of professionals employed to work in that area. These can be adopted directly from national professional bodies where these exist to govern a profession, or defined on the basis of a combination of international standards and the articulation of local good practice.
- The Panel was concerned that the institution does not take responsibility for ensuring that its staff are up to date with trends in their disciplines. Therefore YHU should ensure that its staff have an ongoing awareness of the breadth and latest trends in their fields. This requires development in policies for provision of learning resources and policies for the management of academic staff. These must ensure that staff have access to the relevant information and the time to engage in scholarship and professional practice. Documented programme development processes should indicate how these trends are taken into account in programme development.
- The Panel was concerned that the process of study programme review should include an evaluation of the extent to which learning outcomes ensure that students progress in their understanding and intellectual and practical skills as they move from one level (year) to the next. Therefore, learning outcomes should be worded consistently to reflect the level of study and learning, teaching and assessment methods should align with level to help students progress effectively.
- The Panel recognised that YHU is not adequately protected against the risk of inadequate internship providers. Therefore, it is recommended that YHU establish contracts with all providers. Internship providers should normally be inspected by YHU prior to students undertaking an internship and there should be ongoing monitoring during the internship by the University to ensure that it is proceeding successfully and the provider is meeting its contractual obligations.

### **Opportunities for further improvement**

- The University may wish to document the ongoing application of the regulations to provide evidence of their effective implementation.
- The University may wish to gather feedback routinely, not only from employers offering internships or from those presently employing alumni, but also from others.

### 3.8 Learning and teaching

#### Standard

**Admission requirements and procedure ensure fair access to higher education and the formation of a motivated student body.**

**The higher education institution systemically implements a student-centred approach that guides students to take responsibility for their studies and career planning and supports creativity and innovation.**

**Graduates of the higher education institution, with their professional knowledge and social skills, are competitive both nationally and internationally.**

#### Guidelines

Admission requirements and procedure are fair and impartial. In the admission process, student's ability for academic progress on the chosen programme is assessed.

The academic recognition of foreign qualifications is based on international conventions, agreements between countries, and the Armenian legislation.

Learning and teaching process takes into account students' individual abilities and needs and supports their development. Learning offers sufficient challenge for students at different levels. Students participate in planning and implementation of the learning process. Organisation of independent work and face-to-face teaching motivates students to take responsibility for their studies.

Teaching methods and learning aids used in the learning and teaching process are modern, appropriate and effective and support the development of digital culture, contributing – among other things – towards the development of a self- directed learner, creativity, innovation and the development of digital and other general competencies. The HEI has a Code of Good Learning and Teaching (including online) and it is applied in practice.

The internship is integrated with speciality studies, the requirements for the internship are defined and the student's supervision ensured.

Students are motivated to learn and contribute to improving the quality of their studies by providing meaningful feedback on both the learning and teaching process and the organisation of studies.

Doctoral students plan their studies, as well as their research and development activities, in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting specific objectives for each year and assuming responsibility for achieving those objectives.

#### Indicators:

- Student satisfaction with the content and organisation of studies
- Alumni satisfaction with the quality of studies
- Employer satisfaction with the preparation of the graduates
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## Evidence and analysis

The Panel noted the previous EKKA/HAKA recommendation that YHU should ‘ensure that admissions criteria and the processes of applying them are consistent, clear and transparent across all faculties and for all stakeholders’ [SER 13]. In response, YHU stated that it will move from having two sets of entrance procedures (YHU and RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports) to one (RA Ministry), which is being updated and will not be available until May 2023, which is subsequent to the review visit. The Panel is, therefore, able to confirm that the institution is concerned to develop an effective admissions policy. However, the Panel could only consider admissions arrangements in place in 2022-23 and therefore cannot confirm that requirements and procedures for 2023-24 and later admission will ensure fair access and sufficient transparency.

The Panel was provided with YHU’s current admissions policies [Regulation on Admission of Learners to YHU, Approved 2012; Regulation on Admission to Master’s Degree of YHU, Approved 2006]. (The approval dates on these policies are a concern. Policies should be revised regularly and documents should be presented consistently with the dates of any updates recorded.)

The BA policy refers to a written admission examination organised by the “Assessment and Testing Center”. Applications are received in particular periods and considered by an admissions committee consisting of the Rector and Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs who appoint ‘technical staff’ to do the work, and a secretary who checks applications and organises the entrance examinations. There is evident concern in the regulations for the security of this process, although implementation could not be checked. Alternative arrangements are facilitated for those who cannot attend the examination for good reason, although legitimate reasons are not specified. The Panel heard that an English test is taken prior to admission [M]. Previously all applicants were interviewed, but currently a student can decide whether to apply by general examination, university examination or university interview [T]. In future students expect the examination to be required, with results determining potential fee discounts. The examination may be waived for those who are judged to have sufficient credits from previous college study, but those with lower grades are likely to be interviewed [S]. The panel found that while there is some metric for selection, this is not consistent across study programmes [TS].

Overall the impression given is that the admissions process is in transition, driven by a concern for fair access. The current system is complex because there are different admission methods. The current regulations are stated briefly and generally. This creates the risk that the admissions will not be effectively governed and may fail to control the composition of the student body effectively. The Panel was concerned to hear evidence of this from senior management, who were confident that no student applications were rejected in the 2021/2022 application cycle [M]. This indicates that the admissions policy and process is probably failing to distinguish suitable from unsuitable applicants and to have any influence on the composition of the student body. This also leads to the risk of more students dropping out during the study programme, as they identify reasons to believe they are less suitable for the programme. The Panel, therefore, judged that the policy is unlikely to be fit for purpose. The Panel heard that YHU is proud of the value that it adds to students and its ability to bring a diverse range of students up to a standard. However, despite this, the effective absence of a discriminating admissions policy creates significant risks for the formation of a motivated student body. If the ability range within a cohort is too wide then there is a risk that the most and least able will become demotivated or judge themselves unsuitable for the programme.

The Panel also considers the English language requirement for international students as being too weak. The Panel heard that the institution recognises a general weakness in the area of English, estimating that 1/3 of staff do not speak English at any level and many of the rest have a modest command of English. The Panel was pleased to see that the institution is taking steps to address this, while noting that the lack of English creates a challenge for internationalisation (see also Standard 5), and this includes communication with international students who do not speak Armenian [MTS]. This emphasises the importance that incoming international students should have a sufficiently high standard of English to enable them to engage with teaching and learning and other university services. The Panel examined the bespoke English language test created by the institution to test language competence, and found it to be inadequate for academic purposes [English language test]. A more secure approach to assessing competence is to use the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, with standards set at minimum B1, but ideally B2, for BA students and minimum B2, ideally C1, for MA students and appropriate for the specialisation, with recognition of the fact that some specialisations may require higher levels of English language competencies. The Panel finds the level of English to be best assessed by standard tests, such as CPE, CAE, IELTS, or TOEFL.

Considering all that it read, heard, and observed, the Panel was concerned that a proportion of students are accepted on degree programmes before they are ready, whether due to an inadequate academic background or language skills. It may be that for some or all programmes the institution would benefit from introducing a 'Foundation Year' that is available to students prior to embarking on a degree-level programme in order to ensure that they are fully prepared and meet the admission criteria for subsequent degree-level study.

The institution has recognised the need to take a student-centred approach, adopting it as a strategic goal [SER, 4]. The Panel noted that the idea of student-centredness was often referred to in documentation and in meetings with staff, and judged that staff are willing to listen to students' concerns and address their needs [e.g. SER, 19 mentions of the phrase; MTS]. The Panel was pleased to see that the institution has described what it means by a student-centred approach in a Quality Assurance Concept Paper [SER 13, Education Quality Assurance Concept]. The Paper mentions the principle of quality assurance that the 'needs and expectations of students' should be taken into account. It also notes that curricula should 'encourage the active role of students in the creation and continuous improvement of the educational process.' And holds that a student-centred approach is 'vital to the development of admission, assessment, elaboration of graduation procedures' and to mobility. Finally it notes that 'student-centred education assessment require careful consideration of study programme development, implementation, evaluation of results and student engagement practices. It creates the conditions and caring support mechanisms that ensure students' academic and professional progress' [Education Quality Assurance Concept]. The Panel welcomed this paper and noted frequent references to a student-centred approach, from a policy perspective [MTS].

While the paper articulates a clear commitment to student-centredness, it does not provide a clear operational definition of what student-centredness means across the institution, or a strategy for its systematic and consistent implementation. Meetings with staff and students indicated to the Panel that this can lead to some uncertainty about how student-centredness should be expressed [TS]. In meetings with students the Panel found a relatively low awareness of how the student voice can be represented in decision-making and how to be an effective representative [S]. This included those on the Student Council and 'monitors' (students who are given general responsibility to interact with the University on behalf of the student body). A

clearer, operational definition of the institution's understanding of student-centredness combined with a strategy would mitigate this risk. The involvement of students across the institution is quite uneven and often ad-hoc [STM]. Student-centredness will be enhanced by ensuring that there is student representation on each Committee and that students are provided with training so that they remain aware of the wider student voice and how to express this constructively. This will be particularly valuable as the institution's governance structures develop (see also Standard 1).

The Panel heard from students that internships are generally successful and that students feel they have benefitted from them, enabling them to take responsibility for their studies. Students also felt that they were aware of career options, although there were challenges in finding employment, especially for those who were unable to find employment with their internship placement provider.[S]

There were some concerns that students did not always have resources available to them in the correct languages. The Panel heard conflicting claims from different staff about the language requirements for students on their programmes [T]. The Panel did not find a clear and effective policy that has been implemented to ensure that resources are available and accessible for all students who meet the admission requirements.

The institution has developed some capacity to provide hybrid and online teaching, making use of this and developing it through the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the end of the pandemic, the same online learning facilities have continued to be made available. . However, the Panel heard differing descriptions of the purpose and use of hybrid learning from staff [T]. There is potential for this capacity to be helpful to students, but also to hinder learning if not used consistently in a way governed by a clear strategy. Policies at institutional and programme levels for hybrid and online learning would typically establish why it is being done, how it is implemented, and how it ensures that the student experience when engaging in online learning is of a high standard. This includes considering whether students have the equipment and networks to receive streamed and recorded lectures without network disruption. Such a policy would be supported by staff development to ensure that all teachers are able to teach in a hybrid way effectively. The Panel observed rooms equipped with cameras and projectors that could not be positioned to enable a similar quality experience for students online and in-person [R]. The Panel recognised that the institution is developing a potentially useful mode of its learning and teaching, but that it must be governed by a student-centred policy if this potential is to be realised.

The Moodle system, which is a welcome aspect of the institution's learning technology systems, requires more effective governance. The Panel was able to inspect the Moodle virtual learning environment and to see that empty pages had been set up for various courses and programmes [R]. This made it clear that there is presently only limited use of the Moodle system. From a student-centred perspective it is a concern that, without a consistent approach, students will not know what information they can expect to be available via Moodle for each of their courses. Thus, the potential benefits of this system may not be realised for them, or there may be resources that they fail to see because expectations are not set clearly. This risk can be mitigated by establishing policies for the use of Moodle within courses at institutional and study programme levels.

The Panel observed a variety of teaching rooms and noted that many existing rooms require upgrading in order to modernise them to enable the use of learning technology and to make them appropriate for group work. In particular, a number of rooms used fixed benches rather than having flexible furniture that can be re-arranged to suit different types of learning.

Taking into account all that it read and heard, the Panel judged that YHU's students are competitive in a national or regional context, but would not be considered internationally competitive (see also Standard 9). A high proportion of learning outcomes are articulated in terms of knowledge rather than analysis, critical evaluation or creativity, and learning and teaching methods are aligned with this limited approach. A greater focus on the development of these intellectual skills as well as a corresponding high level of practical skills, and a deeper engagement with research methods and recent trends in the relevant discipline and professions are required to take the institution further. Despite claims to the contrary,[T] the Panel did not find evidence that rigorous research methods were being brought into the classroom through study programme curricula and syllabi. A more systematic approach to incorporating these higher-level elements into curricula and syllabi would facilitate this development, which could be part of an institutional learning and teaching strategy. The institution's work towards internationalisation in general should also interact with its work in learning and teaching to ensure that there is a consistent, high quality experience (see standard 5).

## Conclusions

The institution is concerned to develop an admissions policy that ensures fair access and the formation of a motivated student body, and is in a time of transition. The current policy fails to establish clear and precise criteria leading to the rejection of applicants who are not in a position to benefit from the programme. General criteria, process, programme-specific criteria, and language requirements all require further development. The panel was encouraged that the institution has recognised the need for student-centredness, but it needs a clearer operational understanding of what student-centredness means. Internships are a valuable part of the institution's programmes, but require better management to ensure they are always fit for purpose and effectively resourced. Moves towards hybrid and online teaching, as well as the use of a virtual learning environment, need to be governed by clear and effectively implemented policy to ensure a high quality student experience. All teaching rooms should meet a minimum standard to ensure fitness for the intended purpose. Minimum standards should be set from a student-centred perspective, ensuring, for example, that hybrid or online facilities provide excellent visual and auditory experience for students outside the teaching room, or that seminar rooms are furnished with furniture that can be moved to facilitate small group work. Taking all of the above into account, the Panel finds this Standard to **partially conform to requirements**.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- The Panel was concerned that the current admissions policy does not result in the rejection of unsuitable candidates and risks forming a student body that is not sufficiently coherent or motivated. Therefore, it is recommended that the admissions policy and process should establish clear standards and requirements for admission for each programme, along with effective processes for determining which candidates meet these standards and which do not. The institution should expect a proportion of applicants to be rejected each year, and should track the proportion of applicants accepted and rejected on each programme.
- The Panel was concerned that the institution should have a means to bring prospective students up to the level required for admission. Therefore it is recommended that the institution consider carefully whether to introduce a Foundation Year in one or more programmes to provide an opportunity for prospective degree students to gain the

necessary academic and/or language skills to meet the admission criteria for successful degree study.

- The Panel was concerned that the institution does not maintain a high enough level of English among students and staff to enable effective learning and teaching. Therefore YHU is recommended to adopt the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in order to assess the level of English among students and staff. The minimum level for incoming international students should be at least B1/B2 for BA, with the institution putting development in place to bring them to at least B2. At MA level incoming international students should be at least B2/C1, with the institution putting development in place to bring them to at least C1. The institution should work rapidly towards a typical level of B1 among all admin staff required to communicate with students, with a mid-term goal for this to be raised to B2. The standard for teaching staff should be at least B2/C1, with a mid-term goal to raise this to C1/C2.
- The Panel was concerned that the student voice is not intentionally strengthened and represented systematically across the institution. It is therefore recommended that the institution ensure that the terms of membership for all committees specify a student representative and that students are provided with training and support to enable them to represent the wider student voice and contribute to decision-making.
- The Panel was concerned that due to the poor management of language requirements the institution's admissions policy enables students to enter who cannot make use of all the learning resources required to complete their programmes successfully. Therefore YHU is recommended to create a written, implemented policy to ensure that all learning resources are accessible to all students admitted to a programme. For example, all core texts included in reading lists should be readable by all students who have met the language requirements and been admitted. If necessary, texts should be available in multiple languages to ensure this. There should also be sufficient learning resources to provide for all students on the programme. For example, there should be sufficient copies of books that students are required to read to ensure that they have the opportunity to do so.
- The Panel was concerned that the institution does not manage the use of hybrid and online learning to ensure the best outcomes for students. Therefore, it is recommended that YHU should work with students and staff to develop and approve a written, student-centred policy for online and hybrid learning. This should establish the purpose of online and hybrid learning and should control the extent and manner in which such learning can be used within different programmes to ensure that students are able to achieve the learning outcomes. It should also include minimum standards for teaching rooms that can be used in a hybrid way to ensure that the online learning experience is of a high standard. The policy should give consideration to students who have limited or poor-quality internet access.
- The Panel was concerned that the institution does not have a student-centred approach to the use of the Moodle VLE since there is no consistent approach for its use across courses and programmes. It is therefore recommended that the institution should work with students and staff to develop and approve a set of minimal standards for the use of the Moodle VLE in courses so that students will have clear expectations of what information they will be able to find there, and these expectations will be met as the policy is implemented effectively.

### **Opportunities for further improvement**

- The University may wish ensure that all policy and regulatory documents include a section detailing when amendments are made and approved.
- The University may wish to develop and approve a policy establishing the minimum requirements for a standard teaching space furnished to support different types of learning (lectures, seminars, group work, etc), and various learning technologies (projectors / smart boards, effective cameras and microphone systems for hybrid learning, etc).

### 3.9 Student assessment

#### Standard

**Assessments of students, including recognition of their prior learning and work experiences, support the process of learning and are consistent with expected learning outcomes.**

**The objectivity and reliability of student assessments are ensured.**

#### Guidelines

The assessment criteria are understandable to students and students are informed about them in a timely manner. Members of the teaching staff cooperate in defining assessment criteria and apply similar approaches.

Assessment methods are versatile and relevant, assess the degree of achievement of learning outcomes (including general competencies), and support the development of a self-directed learner.

If possible, more than one staff member is involved in the development of assessment tasks and student assessments. Along with assessments, students receive feedback that supports their individual development.

The HEI develops the teachers' assessment competence and supports the solid application of digital technologies in assessment.

Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support the development of doctoral students, to assess the effectiveness of their current work and to evaluate their ability to complete the doctoral studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.

When recognising prior learning and work experience towards the completion of the study programme, results obtained through the studies and work experiences (the achieved learning outcomes) are assessed. Students are aware of their rights and obligations, including the procedures for challenges regarding assessments.

#### Indicators

- The number of credit points applied for and awarded under the accreditation of prior and experiential learning scheme (APEL)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

### Evidence and analysis

The institution's self-evaluation report provides a brief description of the systems in place for assessing achievement of expected learning outcomes [SER]. From the description, the focus of these systems is on assessing the teacher's performance rather than the learning process and the extent to which the expected learning outcomes and minimum expected levels have been achieved.

The institution claims that the issue of consistency between learning process design, assessment and expected learning outcomes has been addressed [SER]. The Panel explored this. For example, course syllabi [D] provided to the Panel contain the general description of the subject, expected study outcomes, content of topics and timetable, references to mandatory and additional material. However, learning methods (e.g. seminar, group work) are provided under the heading “assessment method” in the syllabi.

Limited criteria for thesis assessments are provided in the “Regulation on checking and assessment of learning outcomes of students of Yerevan Haybusak University”. This consists of stating the maximum points for various criteria. Based on that it is easy for everyone to understand what needs to be presented to gain the maximum points, but not what would be enough to receive B, C or D. Descriptions of the expected outcome for each criteria on each grade-level would ease the understanding on how final grades are formed. In the same regulation document, more detailed criteria are provided for assessing general and professional knowledge and transferable competences. It remains unclear how these general criteria are applied in the context of specific courses as the provided syllabi did not reflect how these skills and competencies will be acquired and by what methods they will be assessed.

The importance of assessing skills and competencies is stated. The Panel read that “According to the regulation, knowledge, skills, and competencies are assessed separately” [SER]. The reasoning behind such decision and how this is achieved in day-to-day assessment processes remained unclear [M, S]. Interviews conducted by the Panel [S, T] indicated that the assessment is more focused on reproduction of factual knowledge and less on applying, analysing, evaluation or creating knowledge. The Panel found no examples of assessments focused on competencies or teaching practices aimed at supporting the students development into self-directed learners.

In order to create an “open, impartial, and [...] understandable” assessment system [SER], YHU has developed a regulation on assessment and rotation [D]. The content of this regulation partially duplicates the regulation on checking and assessment of learning outcomes and the part of “rotation” remained unclear to the Panel. The regulation on assessment and rotation was approved in July 2022 and contains a review system for appealing grades. In interviews the Panel learned that staff and students were informed about the changes to the appeals system in the beginning of the ongoing academic year [M] and the students were aware of the process and were able to describe it [S] with deviations from the written regulation. For example, when the exam would be retaken (in how many days) and who would need to be present for the retake, or that the grade could be improved by receiving a different set of questions. Unfortunately, there were also cases where students did not understand the need for appeal even in cases of unfair assessments or the staff and students were unaware of the existence of the appeal process indicating that the communication might was insufficient.

The Panel confirmed that students are made aware of the assessment criteria from the beginning of their studies” [SER;S] which is a good example of implementation of the new regulation.

YHU’s self-evaluation report provides an overview of the components and their relative contribution to the achievement of a grade. It implies that the general assessment structure is the same for each course in YHU. The formulas contain components named Outcomes (Outcome A-C) that in reality reflect different components of the grade (participation activity, gradable assignments, and individual work). The Panel finds that the use of the term “outcome” here creates confusion with actual expected “learning outcomes” of the subject. Furthermore, the

report does not describe the methods or criteria actually used in assessments. The Panel also learned [S] that in some cases students are expected to do course work (e.g. essays) that are not graded, provided feedback to, but affect the final grade in an unknown quantity. This practice lacks any formative purpose, contradicts statements made in the SER (“Teachers provide feedback during an assessment that supports students’ development and motivation”, p34), and should be avoided.

The Panel learned [D] that the baseline for passing a course is 40 points based on the grade formation formula. It remains unclear how the achievement of expected learning outcomes is evaluated using the formula since participation alone does not ensure learning and it is pedagogically difficult to formulate exams that ensure the evaluation of learning outcomes using point-based approach. For example, let's imagine a course with 5 expected learning outcomes, exam that is providing 100 points in total and questions that are put forward in a way it is possible to receive 20 points for presenting knowledge and skills for each of the 5 expected learning outcomes. In this case, it would be possible to receive 40 points and pass the course with achieving only 2 of the 5 expected learning outcomes. Therefore a more complex approach is needed that would require presentation of achievement of all the expected outcomes for passing the course.

Focused evaluation on sufficient level of expected outcome achievement would be more appropriate where the 40 points presents the minimum acceptable level of expected learning outcome achievement and differentiated grade is based on everything above the minimum level.

YHU aims to increase the objectivity and transparency of assessments. To achieve this, more than one expert and teacher is involved in assessments [SER]. The Panel found that, indeed, this is a widespread practice at YHU for evaluation of theses [T], but no examples of course assessments. In case of thesis assessments experts from labour market are involved in some of the study programmes, but not in all[T].

YHU acknowledges the importance of developing teachers' assessment skills [SER]. However, in practice there are no training activities provided on this topic [M] or planned in strategies [D]. The application of digital technologies in teaching and learning is supported by IT-support services [T, S]. As the understanding of assessment varies among staff [S] it is important to highlight that strategic plans and staff training are needed in order to make sure teachers are aware of the qualities of effective feedback for a high-quality student learning experience.

For essay-type assessment YHU aims to apply plagiarism detection software [SER, T, M]. It is acknowledged that currently this is only available in English, although there are efforts to make use of software in Armenian. The responsibility for plagiarism detection and control therefore relies largely on the teachers, which is not a sustainable and fully reliable method. (see also Standard 4)

The Regulation for recognition of prior learning and work experience is being developed. The Panel was provided with a general description of the process [M] which is not yet formalised. There was also no universal understanding among management about how new regulation will be implemented once finished.

The storage of assessment information was a matter of concern for the panel. Assessment bulletins are being digitized instead of issuing physical cards in which students learning outcomes are registered [T, S, R]. The Panel was concerned to find that there were component grades missing from some records, but a final grade was nevertheless provided [D]. This is an insecure process that potentially threatens the validity of grades and awards. The Panel

observed that assessment bulletins are stored in unlocked cabinets leaving them accessible to anyone. This is wholly insecure and places the reliability of grades in doubt. This situation may be part of a wider misunderstanding of the notion of transparency. It should not be possible for assessment bulletins to be modified, and assessment bulletins for each student should be kept confidentially. It is critically important that this information is stored securely.

## Conclusions

The Panel recognised improvements in harmonising the final grade formation formulas and assessment criteria across courses and curricula, but the applicability to specific courses remained unclear and no examples were provided as assessment methods and assessment criteria were not described in syllabi provided to the Review Panel. Student-centred and outcome-based education requires alignment between expected learning outcomes, teaching methodology, subject content, and assessment to fully support students' development. In addition, the need for a system to recognise prior learning and work experience has been acknowledged but understanding of this area is limited and there is no plan for implementation. Consequently, the Panel finds this Standard to **partially conform to requirements**.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- The current template for course syllabi does not direct the teachers to describe course-specific assessment methods and criteria and lacks alignment between the elements. All learning outcomes, teaching methodology, subject content, and course-specific assessment methods and criteria need to be detailed in the syllabi. A selective quality control of the syllabi is recommended to facilitate the implementation of described alignment. (see also Standard 3)
- Currently the assessment of knowledge, skills and competencies is separated and assessment focuses on the reproduction of factual knowledge. The Panel recommends providing teachers with topic-specific training on assessment methodologies that will allow the combined assessment of knowledge, skills, and competencies.
- The grade formation formulas are not ensuring alignment between expected learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The baseline for passing a course is 40 points based on the grade formation formula, but it remains unclear how the achievement of all expected learning outcomes is evaluated. The Panel recommends reviewing the final grade formation formula to ensure that it measures the level of achievement of expected learning outcomes and development of assessment matrixes/rubrics.
- YHU currently has no system for recognition of prior learning and work experience. The Review Panel recommends developing guidelines for acceptance, communicating these clearly within the institution, ensuring implementation, and monitoring the process.
- As paper-based assessment bulletins are accessible to everyone and lack consistency it is recommended that assessment reporting be digitised to ensure the confidentiality and security of student assessments.

### 3.10 Learning support systems

#### Standard

**The higher education institution ensures that all students have access to academic, career and psychological counselling.**

**Students' individual development and academic progress are monitored and supported.**

#### Guidelines

The HEI assists the student in developing an individual study programme based on the student's special needs as well as educational abilities and preferences.

The HEI advises its students (including students with special needs and international students) on finding internship places as well as jobs. Students are aware of where to get support in the case of psychological problems.

The HEI has a functioning system to support and advise international students (including psychological and career counselling) which, inter alia, helps them integrate smoothly into the membership of the HEI and Armenian society. The HEI analyses the reasons students withdraw from studies or drop out and takes steps to increase the effectiveness of the studies.

In order to carry out studies and research, development and creative activities, the availability of up-to-date study and research literature, other study materials and tools (including those for independent work) and access to research databases is ensured. Study literature, materials and other teaching aids are of equally high quality.

To support study activities, timely and relevant information and communication

technology solutions have been planned, including the study information system,

document management, online learning environments, analytical tools for teaching

and learning. Support for online learning and IT is available to students.

The HEI supports student participation in extra-curricular activities and civil society initiatives.

The HEI monitors student satisfaction with the counselling services, the online learning and IT support provided and makes changes as needed.

#### Indicators

- The average duration of the study by levels of study
- Dropout/withdrawal rate (during the first year and the whole study period)
- Students' satisfaction with the support services
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## Evidence and analysis

YHU aims to ensure access to academic, career, and psychological counselling to all students. Although students receive “*support from Deans’ Offices, the Student Council, Career Centre and other structural subdivisions*” [SER] the exact expected supportive functions of some of these structures remain unclear.

The Career Centre has a well-developed portfolio of services focusing on finding jobs and internships for students [M]. In addition, CV-writing support is provided. In a year, around 100 students receive support from the Career Centre which is only a small proportion of the student body. The services are available in Armenian and English.

The Panel was unable to visit the Psychology Clinic or to interview the staff providing psychological support to students. Referral to mental health support involves various management-level contacts [M, S], meaning that the students have to describe the existing problem to a staff member who will refer the student to the head of the chair or head of institute who will then finally refer the student to counselling. Additionally, counselling service is provided by staff from the Psychology Institute [M]. This raises concerns about confidentiality, accessibility, and comfort of the service for users. Also, there is no systematic approach to caring for student mental health [M].

Academic support for learning and research skills development is provided by the Research Resource Centre [M, S]. Given the need and tendency to use more digital solutions in the learning process, support is provided to by the IT-support office [S]. In addition, a strong and stable internet connection becomes increasingly necessary as the proportion of online learning grows, and in-classroom activities are streamed to students at home. The IT infrastructure must develop to ensure sufficient internet access and access to appropriately equipped computers for all staff and students (see also Standard 8, Learning and Teaching).

The information on the use of the Legal Clinic was confusing to the Panel. From some meetings, it was presented to the Panel as a student support service [M], but in others it was promoted as a service to society with most service users from outside the student body. It was also noted that the Legal Clinic is used for some practice activities for Jurisprudence students (see also Jurisprudence MA study programme), although in none of these cases confidentiality agreements are in place.

The availability of various student support services is communicated to students via the YHU webpage and by staff [M, S]. Student satisfaction data for the careers service [M] was made available to the Panel, but not for other services.

The Panel also heard that any last-minute changes to schedules or other activities are communicated to students via personal phone-calls by staff [T] or the Dean’s office. The Panel agrees that this approach is individual and fosters relationships between staff and students. However, the Panel also expresses concern about the sustainability and reliability of such an approach in the future, with a large student body. The Panel considers such an approach to all put increased pressure on teaching staff. Fast notifications via digital platforms used in teaching and learning (e.g. Moodle) could be used instead. The rationale behind phone calls was related to students’ limited access to the internet, but, of course, if students cannot connect to the internet to pick up a notification, they also cannot join an online course for which changes are communicated via phone.

A sizeable proportion of the student body consists of international students even though only few study programmes have international students enrolled. (see also standard 5) YHU acknowledges that international students require special attention when it comes to student support services [SER]. The English language level of staff is sufficient for career services [M]. For other services, the approach is reactive meaning the staff expressed willingness to learn English if any of the international students would require support [M]. The Panel judged this approach wholly unsatisfactory. To develop sufficient language competence to deliver such services takes significant time and so many international students would be left without necessary services. The Panel also learned that international students need additional support with accommodation [S]. Currently they rely on “agents” who mediate admission and travel information for high fees or acquaintances who already study in YHU. (see also Standard 5)

According to the SER, staff are responsible to provide support to students with special needs [SER], if physical special needs are evident or disclosed [M]; however the facilities in the building do not offer access for special needs students[R] and YHU has confirmed that they have not accommodated any special needs students, so far. Still, the Panel found YHU needs to be prepared for this eventuality; however currently, there is no system for students to notify YHU of their special needs and requirements [M, D]. Raising awareness of physical and psychosocial special needs and learning process adjustment opportunities could create a positive atmosphere for student's support and should be considered.

The SER provides the nominal duration of different curricula. Average duration of studies is 3-4 years, and less than half of students graduate within nominal time [M]. *“The withdrawal, drop out and re-admission of YHU students are registered in the University, ...”* [M] with the most dominant reason being inability to pay tuition fee due to financial difficulties. Negotiating an individual payment scheme was presented as the common solution in such circumstances [M]. The Panel learned that supporting students in resolving financial issues is also the most frequent reason for seeking support from the Student Council [S].

Monitoring of students individual development and academic progress is done using Assessment bulletins [SER, M]. The digitisation of assessment bulletins is ongoing and currently physical cards are being used (see also Standard 9). Monitoring of academic progress is done by teaching staff and management [T, M] and no agreed indicators exist to identify students who are exceptional or in need of extra support [M]. This kind of monitoring process is not sustainable or standardised and could lead to higher drop-out, underperformance or loss of talent. The Panel found some examples of how low-performing students are identified and supported on study programme level, but no systematic approach across the institution (see also study programmes).

The Panel visited the library [R] which aims to provide students and staff with a range of materials, database accesses, learning environments and equipped computer classrooms [SER]. The library lacks funding to acquire updated handbooks and therefore to support the learning process. Collections presented to the Panel were outdated, single-copied and not covering full curricula. (see also Standard 2) The library staff is digitising materials [M] to provide wider access to mandatory literature which supports students who do not have the ability to buy literature, but this has been identified by the Panel to also be creating copyright issues (see Standard 4).

The Student Council is described as one part of the student support system [SER]. The Student Council organises community events for local and international students and councils, and represents students in resolving tuition payment problems. It also voices students' opinion in

HEI decision-making bodies [S]. Student representatives are elected from the student body each year. The description of the process by which students become study programme representatives varied between institutes [M] and students were unaware of their role as representatives (other than through the system of 'monitors'). Students also did not know what a study programme working group is. Based on this the Panel concluded that the process for electing and appointing students into councils is not standardised or well communicated inside the organisation, and that students are not sufficiently trained to undertake effective roles (see also Standards 3 and 7). The exact role and level of involvement of students in YHU management processes remained unclear to the Panel.

## Conclusions

YHU strives to offer comprehensive support to its students, including academic, career, and psychological counselling. However, there are concerns about the clarity and effectiveness of certain support structures and services. The accessibility and confidentiality of mental health support raises serious concerns. Additionally, there is a need for improved communication, standardised processes, and better resource allocation to address adequately the needs of international students, students with special needs, and those facing financial difficulties. Consequently, the Panel finds this Standard to **partially conform to requirements**.

## Strengths

- Commitment of the university staff in providing comprehensive support to students is appreciated and creates a trusting environment.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- There is no systematic approach to address student mental health, and referral to counselling involves multiple managerial contacts. The Panel recommends hiring a separate psychologist to provide psychological support to students. This will ensure confidentiality and implement a "one door" approach with no referral needed from teachers or management, while keeping the existing referral option still available.
- Monitoring of students' individual development and academic progress is unsystematic. It is recommended to develop standardised and sustainable process for monitoring students' advancement and criteria for intervention for high- and underperforming students.

## Opportunities for further improvement

- International students are vulnerable to exploitations by "agents" who promise to organize accommodation and other services for comfortable settling into YHU and Yerevan. The international students experience will be improved by accommodation being organized by YHU.

### 3.11 Research, development and/or other creative activity

#### Standard

The higher education institution has defined its objectives and focus in the fields of RDC based on its mission, as well as on the expectations and future needs of society, and assesses their implementation and the societal impact of its RDC activities. RDC supports the process of teaching and learning at the higher education institution. Support services for RDC are purposeful and support implementation of the objectives of the core process.

#### Guidelines

The HEI places a high value on the role and responsibilities of the field of RDC in society and evaluates the results of its RDC activities, their international visibility and societal impact.

The HEI responds flexibly to the current needs of society and the labour market in terms of its research and plans its research in collaboration with enterprises, public sector institutions and organisations of the third sector.

Members of teaching staff introduce students to their research results as well as the latest scientific achievements in their areas of specialisation and involve students in their R&D projects where possible.

The organisation and management of RDC take into account the profile and the mission of the HEI.

The HEI applies digital tools for the administration and re-use of research data.

#### Indicators depend on the specificities of the HEI

- Numerical data:

- (1) scientific publications by classifiers;
- (2) public presentations of creative work; recognition from international competitions; reviews in professional publications, etc.;
- (3) patent applications, patents;
- (4) textbooks, study aids of various formats, etc.;
- (5) system development solutions; product development solutions; environmental applications solutions;
- (6) contracts concluded with enterprises;
- (7) spin-off companies, etc., in line with the profile and priorities of the HEI; etc.

- Number of scientific publications / creative works per member of academic staff and per employee with the requirement to do research (FTE, by areas)
- Number and volume of externally funded projects of RDC activities
- Proportion of projects with a positive financing decision out of the submitted project applications.
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## Evidence and analysis

Since the previous institutional accreditation, YHU has made several efforts to enhance its research and development activities. The importance of developing research capacities of the YHU is emphasised both in the SER and the 2021-2025 Strategic plan of the University. It is one of the 10 main goals of the institution.

In 2022, YHU has created a Research Resource Centre with two strategic directions. The first is “To ensure the strengthening of the university's research potential, to contribute to the development of an inclusive and creative environment” and the second is to “Establish strategic collaborative relationships with national and international stakeholders to support research, education and workforce development”. Both strategic directions are accompanied by strategic goals.

The recommendation from the previous institutional accreditation was to develop strategic plans for each core area that align with the main goals, based on an evidence-based analysis, with specific targets to ensure that priorities are clearly identified, that goals are measurable, and their achievement is clearly demonstrated. The University claims in the current SER [p.10] that as a response the research, internationalisation, quality and the overall YHU strategic plans for 2021-2025 were developed/reviewed, however the Panel found that the research strategy is quite basic and falls short of the criteria for a comprehensive strategic research plan aligning with the expectations of contemporary higher education.

The second recommendation from the previous review was to increase the budget for research and to establish formal collaborations with research institutions in Armenia in order to increase research output and thus, visibility. YHU claims that as a response the research strategy for 2022-25 was developed. The SER asserts that it includes collaboration with ministries, research institutions, and other stakeholders. The SER refers to a research strategy which the Panel requested from the YHU; the evidence was provided in the form of a Research Resource Centre strategy and the Panel concluded that the document titles are used interchangeably. The Panel noted that YHU has crafted a strategy, but it lacks rigor and often deals with tactical rather than strategic aspects of research.

The SER emphasises developing research capabilities of the university and there is a high ambition of becoming a leading research institution in Armenia. The vision of the school is “thousands of talented, knowledgeable, and caring professionals and scientists educated in a free academic space who consistently improve the well-being of people and communities and care for the environment”. The University claims to aspire to become a leading educational institution and research centre in Armenia with internationally recognised education quality. The current ambition regarding research is set at a high level; however, it is somewhat unrealistic in its attainment.

Although the institution acknowledges the importance of research both in written documents and staff interviews, the Panel concluded that the institutional level research objectives and focus of YHU are not clearly defined. Various strategies and documents describe research-related topics, but the Panel was not able to identify either a clearly formulated research focus (many research projects are initiated ad-hoc by teaching staff) or specific and measurable objectives.

The Goals and Objectives of YHU strategy 2021-2025 (2022 revision) addresses research with the goal: (1) “To create a harmonious enabling environment for the academic and professional development of the students and faculty”. One of its sub-goals (1.2) is to “Develop research

directions and capacities of the University". The strategy states that the "University aspires to become a leading educational institution and research centre in Armenia with internationally recognised education quality". These two goals address only the conditions of research but do not provide goals for research output or impact.

The 2022 strategic plan defines YHU's values that enable it to strive for responsible research. The YHU:

- advances research and makes its results more accessible, promoting knowledge sharing and re-use
- advances academic integrity, strengthens the fight against plagiarism, misrepresentation, and falsification, and protects the right to privacy and the confidentiality of information
- makes research more open to participation, review and improvement and citizen science

These values are very relevant, but the Panel could not find evidence that they are reflected in actual research activities.

In the TOWS matrix of the same document the university has acknowledged "Insufficient scientific research capacities and activities" as a weakness. This weakness is paired with an opportunity to "Expand research partnerships with local and foreign universities and research centres will help to enhance YHU's scientific research capacities and expand research activities". The documents and interviews highlighted efforts to increase the number of outputs in several fields, but the Panel recommends that the focus should be on quality and not quantity. The level of internationalisation is very low, and to increase the number of partners does not solve the underlying problems.

The key performance targets for research to be achieved by the 2025/26 academic year are presented both in the YHU Strategic Plan 2021-25, rev 2022, on page 6, and in the 2022-2025 strategic plan of the Research Resource Centre, pages 3-7. There is a mismatch between the performance targets in these documents, both in terms of content and numerical targets. As the strategy of YHU is a higher-level document it is justified to include a condensed version of targets, but some of the targets from YHU strategy are simply missing from the RRC strategy, e.g. targets on the International and local conferences, seminars, and webinars.

In the RRC strategy the table of result areas and targets is a complex system of directions, goals, and outcomes. Some targets specifically pertain to research activities, while others address various aspects of the university's operations beyond research (e.g. developing research skills of students in various courses, publishing training manuals, competitive selection of chairs, advancing academic mobility in general). Several performance targets address not research outcomes but necessary preconditions for conducting research (availability of databases, providing training, creating ethical framework).

The University has established its main research programmes (topics/projects) on the level of the Institutes (RRC Centre strategic plan p 2), but it lacks overarching research priorities and focus areas that apply to the institution as a whole. Through interviews with university representatives [M, T], it became evident that the selection of research focus is primarily driven from the bottom up. Faculty members within each institute have the autonomy to choose research areas based on their expertise and interests. These selected areas are then formulated and subsequently approved by the University Council. While it is important to consider staff expertise and interests, this approach contradicts the approach described elsewhere and lack of

a clear direction from senior management which can guide research decision strategically means that the University cannot present a unified approach to achieve its research mission.

The SER (p 38) states that studies are regularly conducted to identify the current needs of society and the labour market, and the results are used to make the connection between the university-labour market-employer more relevant. The Panel discovered through interviews that sometimes research topics are aligned with the priority areas established by the government of the Republic of Armenia. This strategic alignment enables the University to pursue external research funding. Additionally, research topic selection occasionally caters to the needs of external stakeholders, such as businesses or local communities. However, it is important to conduct these activities in a more systematic manner, following clear procedures. Implementing robust and transparent processes considering stakeholder needs will not only enhance the university's credibility but also foster stronger collaborations and effectively address the current needs of various stakeholders.

The SER claims that the procedures for monitoring, evaluating, and supporting research programmes are included in the strategic plan for research but the RRC strategic plan does not present any info on support services. There is some description of control mechanisms, e.g. monitoring research with the monitoring template, but this tool does not enhance research and support services in general are missing. SER claims that incentive awards are given to professors involved in scientific and research work/conductors of scientific seminars and professors who have provided professional support to the Students Scientific Society (SSS) [p 39]. The institution was unable to provide the Panel with a convincing and clear description of how the incentivisation system works.

The financing of the research activities, including the formation of budget and allocating resources to different activities and projects remained unclear to the panel. The previous IA report recommended to increase the budget for research and as a response, YHU reported developing the research strategy for 2022-25. Unfortunately, the strategy fails to address any budgeting topics.

There is no clear understanding among faculty what is the requirement of research output and workload dedicated to research. Research outcomes are measured with the monitoring template, if the faculty member fails to do research his/her rating decreases but this has no consequences [M, T].

The previous IA report (SER p 10) suggested that YHU should ensure that current research systematically informs the development of study programmes. The school has acted upon this by making research skills, research activities, and service to society mandatory for each study programme. The Panel found that research skills training has indeed been incorporated into the study programmes. Although the inclusion of a research course in each program is a commendable step, it should be noted that this alone does not guarantee a higher degree of integration between the study programs and the research conducted by the faculty. The YHU is also active in service to society, but these activities are rather ad-hoc and not linked to research (e.g. working with orphanages, planting trees, etc) [M, S, T].

The incorporation of research into study programmes is currently limited to individual subjects, where teachers who conduct research share their findings with students [T]. However, the Panel was unable to identify a substantive general connection between research and the development of study programmes. (see also Standard 7) Students are not introduced to the latest achievements in their specialisation as the university does not have access to databases of

international scientific publications [R] and most of the faculty members lack language skills to follow current international debates in their fields [T].

The SER (p 38) lists various agreements with universities and other organisations but there is no clear evidence that these agreements have any bearing to research. It is not clear how the partners for the agreements are selected and what are the real outcomes of these partnerships. (see also Standard 1 and Standard 5)

The list of key research targets and current list of research output needs revising (RRC Strategy p 3-7). The research publication targets are quantitative and quality indicators, such as publishing in high-impact journals or number of citations, are missing. Training manuals, textbooks and methodological manuals are important for the university but should not be counted as scientific outputs. It is not clear what are the “priorities, directions/topics” listed as performance targets both in the RRC strategy and YHU Strategic Plan. Annual courses, seminars and workshops can be counted as scientific activities when a clear research focus is present, otherwise they should be counted as teaching or faculty training. Publishing its own journal would add scientific value only if the journals are peer reviewed and have at least some international exposure.

The list of publications by the staff members of YHU is long but the distribution between institutes is highly uneven and the level of most publications is very low in international comparison. The largest share of publications is in the category of medicine and natural sciences where the list features a few Scopus indexed articles. However, most of these articles do not show author affiliation to YHU. The papers originating from the other institutes are from low quality publications and it is not possible to assess their impact.

The YHU Roslin Academy students and professors have showcased their creative works in exhibitions. The YHU has obtained one patent during 2020-2022, 2 grant applications were submitted in 2022, and there are two externally financed projects that have some research relevance (SAFEMED and project on body balance and muscle mass improvement) in the area of medicine.

The majority of conferences attended by faculty members of YHU have been held within Armenia. It is evident that the internationalisation of research and staff at the university remains limited. One of the key obstacles hindering YHU staff from effectively publishing and presenting internationally is the language barrier. Overcoming this language barrier is crucial in expanding the university’s global reach and facilitating greater participation and recognition in international scientific community.

The Panel discovered that the Students’ Scientific Society (SSS) has been established as a means of strengthening the research capabilities of the university. Currently, the main focus of the SSS is to provide support to students in their thesis research. While the SSS is a welcome initiative, further development is necessary to fully realise its potential.

The Panel acknowledges that the endeavour to establish a Research Resource Centre is important for YHU, however, the Panel considers it an initial step in the direction of providing the necessary support and direction to enable YHU to fulfil the accreditation criteria for research. There is still considerable progress to be made before YHU can fully meet the accreditation criteria for research.

## Conclusions

The YHU has made efforts to enhance its research and development activities since the previous institutional accreditation. The creation of the Research Resource Centre in 2022 was a step in the right direction, but the Panel found that the research strategy is quite basic and falls short of meeting the criteria for a comprehensive strategic research plan that aligns with the mission and vision of the university. The Panel recommends that the focus should be on quality rather than quantity of research output. The key performance targets on research have a mismatch in terms of content and numerical targets between the YHU Strategic Plan and the Research Resource Centre's strategic plan. Overall, YHU needs to focus on developing a clear research focus and specific, measurable objectives to achieve its ambition of becoming research led institution. Based on the analysis, the Panel concludes that the Standard **does not conform to requirements**.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- The Panel observed the absence of clear and systematic definition of research goals and areas of focus at the institutional level within the University. YHU should clearly and systematically define research goals and areas of focus at the institutional level.
- Research funding lacks systematic approach. In order to initiate and foster a thriving research culture, YHU should provide targeted funding to support research projects that are closely aligned with the institution's positioning, vision, values, strategic goals, and other relevant factors.
- YHU claims to have an ambition of becoming a leading research institution in Armenia. The Panel finds this goal not achievable in the nearest future. Strategic research ambitions should be more modest in approach, setting realistic and achievable objectives. This will enable the university to focus its resources and efforts effectively and to make progress.
- The Panel found that currently there was lack of articulation between strategic ambitions and research goals. YHU should ensure alignment between strategic ambitions and research goals.
- YHU should consider using the SMART approach in setting its research objectives.
- The RRC strategic plan lacks information regarding support services. While control mechanisms like the monitoring template are described for research monitoring, they do not contribute to the overall enhancement of research, and there is a notable absence of comprehensive support services YHU should create a system of support services for research.
- The University has high numeric goals for partnerships. YHU should prioritise quality over quantity when selecting partners for research collaboration. Establish a rigorous filtering process that takes into account factors such as expertise, resources, reputation, and alignment with the university's profile.
- Currently the research at YHU is mostly of local importance and disseminated on conferences in Armenia or neighbouring countries. The University should make efforts to establish a link between their researchers and international research environments.
- Research assessment includes categories that are not considered as research output in the European higher education system. The research monitoring and evaluation system should exclude textbooks, methodological manuals, and articles published in popular press from its list of research outputs. While these have value as general scholarship, they do not constitute research. A transparent system should be established to

determine what qualifies as a research article, ideally using an internationally recognized impact system as a basis.

- Currently the RRC is focused on offering training and methodological support to students and faculty, but it does not advance the research agenda. If RRC will be the main body leading the research of YHU then its activities should be aligned accordingly.
- The current practice at YHU only specifies workload in terms of teaching hours, without allocating a specific proportion of working hours to research. YHU should specify the time allocated for research in its employment contracts and should link this to (realistic) targets for individuals (e.g. in a three-year period). If these targets are met, then incentives/rewards could follow.

### Opportunities for further improvement

- YHU may consider placing greater emphasis on building and fostering a research culture and climate, which involves demonstrating to its employees that research constitutes a crucial aspect of the university's growth and has a positive impact the personal academic development of the faculty. YHU could do this by inviting foreign researchers to provide workshops to YHU staff on how to design and implement research projects, how to publish in international outlets, etc.

## 3.12 Service to society

### Standard

**The higher education institution initiates and implements development activities, which enhance prosperity in the community and disseminate recent know-how in the areas of the institution's competence.**

**The higher education institution, as a learning-oriented organisation, promotes lifelong learning in society and creates high-quality opportunities for that.**

### Guidelines

The HEI contributes to the development of the community's well-being by sharing its resources (library, museums, sports facilities, etc.), by providing consulting and advisory services, participating in the development of non-profit sector and charitable activities, and by organising concerts, exhibitions, shows, conferences, fairs and other events.

The HEI involves alumni in activities aimed at the development of the HEI and the knowledge society.

Employees of the HEI participate in the work of professional associations and in other community councils and decision-making bodies as experts, directing society's development processes as opinion leaders. The impact academic employees have on society is taken into account when evaluating their work.

The HEI has clearly defined the objectives for in-service training, measures their implementation and plans improvement activities. The HEI plans in-service training based on the present and future needs of the labour market target groups. Evidence-based learning supports the learning and self-development of adult learners.

The HEI takes advantage of digital means in order to provide training and services to the public at large.

**Indicators**

- Number of people in continuing training and other privately financed open forms of study (by responsibility areas or structural units)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

**Evidence and analysis**

The need for the institution to give back to society was repeatedly stated to the Panel (M). YHU has a Service to Society Policy, as indicated by the SER, although the Panel was not able to see this. [The SER indicated this would be available in March 2023, but as of May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023 it remained inaccessible.] The institution states that serving society is one of its strategic goals. According to the policy, the University works to meet social, economic, technological, and environmental needs. The Standard clearly states two wider aims and set of activities.

YHU has initiated and regularly implemented several events not only for their own members but also for the general public. These events include exhibitions (Roslin Academy of Arts and Humanities), prevention projects (Institute of Law and International Relations), and volunteering in hospitals (Institute of Medicine). One of the most prominent of these events is the Starmus Festival. Still, it remains a bit unclear what exactly is meant when the SER states that “The University is a major partner and supporter of Starmus /---/” (p 42, 1<sup>st</sup> sentence in a textbox). The festival really has a global scope and taking part in something like this is undoubtedly inspiring. However, it is not clear how YHU is a major supporter of the Festival (<https://www.starmus.com/about-us>). Rather, in 2022 YHU apparently took part in the festival’s outreach programme (<https://www.starmus.com/banner-content/yerevan-haybusak-university>), with students being provided tickets to attend.

The Panel learned [S] that students have initiated several environmental projects, such as tree-planting or cleaning stations in rivers, that are certainly noteworthy initiatives the YHU could fully support. However, the SER also lists several activities, such as sending students into important and high-level professional places (such as Public Services Regulatory Commission of the Republic of Armenia, or visiting the City of Heroes). These activities seem principally to serve YHU rather than society. The real effect of these activities depends on the content and implementation of YHU’s Service to Society Policy. It is impossible to evaluate the extent to which community service activities are systematic or directed and systematically measured by the YHU as the Service to Society Policy is unavailable. However, since this document is very recent anyway (SER promises that it will be completed and available in March 2023), clear and measurable goals for serving society must be set for the future.

Some examples of service to society, in addition to providing opportunity for supervised practice for the students, and helping students with legal and psychological issues, are the Legal Clinic, and the Psychological Support Centre that are meant to help YHU staff and students, as well as the general public. Both report having clients outside YHU [M]. There is a question how these existing possibilities are communicated to society. The first sentence in the SER states that YHU is active in social media (Facebook, Telegram) to inform the community about its programmes and events. This is confirmed: <https://www.facebook.com/haybusakuniversity> has a set of posts available reflecting YHU’s activities, including a post about a “Psychological Centre” and a “Legal Clinic” (28.03.2023). The Legal Clinic operates 4x4 hrs a week, including 4 hrs on Wednesdays for vulnerable groups. It is still questionable how accessible such electronic channels are for the general public, and especially for vulnerable groups. However, for both the

Legal Clinic [M] and Psychological Support Centre, their ability to perform may be significantly limited by not having the legal authority to handle the cases or process the data. More needs to be done for confidentiality arrangements to be satisfactory.

Academic staff at the YHU have an impact on society as they hold positions in state and civil society commissions and professional organisations, and are active in social media and more broadly via a wide range of governmental structures (see also Standard 1 and Standard 6). This is important in both how YHU discharges its social responsibilities and also in how students are acquainted with national developments. However, the Panel found that not all such activity is explicitly recognised by the YHU as part of the Rating Assessment of the Professional Performance of the Teaching Staff.

The Panel formed the view [T, M] that the full importance and potential of lifelong learning has not been understood by YHU since lifelong learning possibility is not developed systematically, nor does it provide opportunities to complete the entire SP in the form of lifelong learning. YHU does arrange some occasional publicly accessible courses. Two examples provided were the First Aid course (that was very popular, unfortunately number of participants isn't available) and the Electronic Accounting course [SER].

## Conclusions

Overall, the Panel recognised that the institution is seeking to serve society, but found shared understanding of a strategic approach to be lacking. Consequently, the Panel finds this Standard to **partially conform to requirements**.

## Strengths

- Engagement of staff with governmental bodies to contribute expertise, advice and guidance to national authorities where national development directions are decided.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- Service to society was considered important but was not understood similarly at the YHU. YHU should work out guidelines and objectives for service to society. This should be done together with development of action plan and means for assessing the impact of these activities.
- The Panel found that development of important services suffers due to lack of regulations. YHU should work on establishing a legal framework that enables the provision of legal and psychological services to the wider society as well as their own members, particularly in matters of a sensitive nature.
- The Panel realized that lifelong learning was not understood similarly at the University. YHU should consider carefully its understanding of lifelong learning and how it will support this systematically.
- The Panel was concerned that activities done under Service to Society were not recognised when assessing the staff. Service to Society activities should be taken into account in assessment of the professional performance of the teaching staff.

### **Opportunities for further improvement**

- YHU should ensure that information about professional services in law and psychology is effectively communicated to the relevant target groups (e.g., vulnerable groups). This may require using other channels beyond the institution's web-page and social media.

## 4 Assessment findings of the sample of the study programmes

### 4.1 Dentistry DMD

The DMD course at Yerevan Haybusak University is a 5 year 10 Semester course of 300 ECTS credits, at NQF Level 7. The load for 1 academic year in full-time study is 60 ECTS credits [SER]. Provision of teaching, learning and assessment is provided by a range of academic and clinical staff including clinicians providing internal and external placements [M,T].

The student numbers of the programme are shown in the table below [SER]:

	<b>Admissions</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Graduates</b>	<b>Early leavers</b>
<b>2018/19</b>	146	662	117	25
<b>2019/20</b>	154	579	105	112
<b>2020/21</b>	171	521	98	137
<b>2021/22</b>	180	452	73	77
<b>2022/23</b>	118	393		

Whilst there is a significant reduction in student numbers year on year, much of this appears to be related to the COVID-19 pandemic which has strongly influenced universities admissions across the globe. International student mobility has decreased during this period with particular financial impact on Universities' with a strong reliance on overseas students. In some countries dental students did not qualify during the pandemic due to difficulties accessing and treating patients. The increase in early leavers reported above linked to the pandemic and students returning home[S,M]

According to the SER and supporting documents, the goal of the programme is to: Prepare Diploma Specialists in the specialty of "Dental Physician", who will have comprehensive, systemic and in-depth professional knowledge, skills and competences in the field of Medicine in order to:

- carry out professional activity,
- carry out research activity,
- teach at higher and vocational education institutions,
- continue education in the following educational level.

Subsequent sections in the DMD report elaborate on whether the above is being satisfactorily met.

### 4.1.1 Planning and management of studies

The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).

The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.

The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

### Evidence and analysis

As part of the accreditation visit, the Panel met with Faculty groups ranging from the senior management team, senior clinical team, employers, and students [E,M,S,A,T]. All were open and transparent in their discussions and cross triangulation between groups highlighted key areas of strengths and areas for further development. The goals and objectives of the Dentistry programme are clearly described in the study programme document, and the modes of teaching, assessment and practical training allow learning objectives to be met. The curriculum provided and additional detail in the SER covered key areas and disciplines within Dentistry, and staff ratios and expertise were sufficient to meet delivery of learning objectives.

Practical skills are taught in a range of simulated environments [E,M,S,A,T] and staff and alumni explained that in their opinion upon graduation students could make transition to carry out procedures clinically based on their simulated training [T; A:]. This could not be verified or observed during the inspection.

A key area of discussion during the panel visit [E,M,S,T,A] was the lack of direct patient care during the students training. This is something staff were keen to deliver though due consideration of financial implications of supervision ratios and access to sufficient patients would need to be closely considered if this became legislatively feasible in future.

Having joined the Bologna Process, the University notes that it has adopted a three cycle education system and has consistently followed European standards. Whilst Armenia is not a member of the European Union the most relevant standard to Dentistry is Article 34 Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament, which gives a good indication of what can be reasonably expected from a basic dental training:

*Basic dental training shall provide an assurance that the person in question has acquired the following knowledge and skills:*

*(a) suitable clinical experience under appropriate supervision.*

*This training shall provide him/her with the skills necessary for carrying out all activities involving the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of anomalies and diseases of the teeth, mouth, jaws and associated tissues.*

Similarly, Annex V of Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council sets out in clear terms requirements for individual disciplines that require to be taught in a basic dental curriculum.

The curriculum provided, SER report, and panel interviews demonstrated a range of teaching and assessment modalities with sufficient coverage of key clinical disciplines within Dentistry. However to align more closely to the EC directive the course would be strengthened, nationally and internationally if students could perform a range of procedures on patients under supervision, rather than observing. This was something acknowledged by staff, accepting legislative change in Armenia would be required to facilitate this.

University clinical placements are mainly external to the main campus building and students requested access to clinics more centrally. This will be accommodated in the soon to be completed integrated clinic. In order to align with EC Directive 2005/36/EC, integrated, multidisciplinary care of patients should be considered in this facility in order to future proof Dental Education at YHU. Similarly consideration should be given to placement of a Digital Intra Oral Scanner (DIOS) in this facility to future proof student education.

A recurring theme across all groups the Panel met [E,M,S,A,T] was the lack of availability of Post Graduate training at YHU, be this Continuing Professional Development or Masters level/ specialist training courses. The EC directive defines Specialist training as follows:

### **Article 35 Specialist dental training**

- 1. Specialist dental training shall comprise theoretical and practical instruction in a university centre, in a treatment teaching and research centre or, where appropriate, in a health establishment approved for that purpose by the competent authorities or bodies.*

*Full-time specialist dental courses shall be of a minimum of three years' duration supervised by the competent authorities or bodies. It shall involve the personal participation of the dental practitioner training to be a specialist in the activity and in the responsibilities of the establishment concerned.*

*The minimum period of training referred to in the second subparagraph may be amended in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 58(2) with a view to adapting it to scientific and technical progress.*

Given the criteria above, YHU with its Educational infrastructure would appear to be in the ideal position to lead nationally on Post Graduate training to support the profession. This would foster improved alumni relations, upskill the profession across Armenia, and act as a training environment for future academics at YHU.

## Conclusions

### Strengths

- A well-structured curriculum delivered by experienced academics and clinicians with a student centred approach to planning and management of studies.

### Opportunities for further improvement

- Students and Alumni reported that they would welcome opportunities to carry out Post Graduate Training at YHU, given the expertise available in the Faculty. YHU may wish to review Post Graduate offer to support the wider profession in Armenia, and develop Alumni relations.
- Students and Staff reported very limited opportunity to carry out treatment on patients under supervision. YHU should pursue legislative change to allow students to carry out direct patient care in a range of Dental disciplines.
- Students reported an enthusiasm to have more clinics on main campus. YHU to complete build of multidisciplinary clinic (currently ongoing) and consider availability of Digital Intra Oral Scanners (DIOS) in this facility for demonstration and future proofing of clinical education.

## 4.1.2 Learning, teaching and assessment

Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.

A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.

Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.

The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Armenia and internationally.

Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.

Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

## Evidence and analysis

The Panel scrutinised documents, held discussions with staff and students, both Armenian and international, and observed some student led group discussions which were supported by clinical staff[S,T]. It was clear from observations and discussions that the relationships between staff and students are excellent and students clearly understood professional boundaries. In every contact with students they praised the availability of staff with regards to learning, teaching, assessment and pastoral care.[S]

Student support services are largely based on informal relationships with academic and administrative staff, however the students felt these were effective and they knew who to contact with academic or pastoral care difficulties[S,T]. Students felt that staff consistently acted on their feedback and student involvement in committees was a positive cited by all concerned [S; T]. Students reported that financial support is available for students to help with their fees, if they face difficulties [S; T]

The assessment strategy according to Faculty members allows transition points between year groups and if students are unsuccessful at these transition points, they are able to seek support. With regards to the assessment strategy staff explained including future innovations with regards to assessment and use of Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs) for Final Year Assessments. The course format would be well suited to this form of assessment, given much of the practical training is simulated and would align YHU with modern assessment methods in Dentistry.

Staff, students and Alumni reported high satisfaction rates with regards to external clinical attachments. Alumni who provided such external clinical attachments reported that they would like more involvement with University academics, and regular meetings to discuss individual student progression. Similarly, providers of external placement providers would like clearer feedback mechanisms on not only how they feel students are performing clinically and professionally, but also student satisfaction with such placements. A proposal by Alumni was a termly meeting with Lead Academic staff to feedback on students and suggest recommendations for improvement of teaching during such attachments. The panel supported greater collaboration and integration of external placement providers-in this case Alumni's Dental practices.

Armenian and International students reported that they heard about YHU from advertisements, social media, and Indian students reported agents promoting YHU[S]. This strategy seemed effective given the positive increase in international students, though concerns were raised regarding use of unreliable agents who students reported committed financial improprieties [S]. (see also Standard 5 and Standard 10)

The DMD degree has a wide range of International students enrolled across year groups and the Faculty appears to manage a blended approach to teaching with regards to use of English Language and Armenian. [S; T] With regards to admissions strengthening English language requirement for entry by international students was raised and similarly international students suggested that the level of English of staff members could be improved [S; T]. (see also Standard 5 and Standard 8)

YHU is fully aware of employment opportunities on graduation with students and alumni reporting good employability levels on qualifying[S,A]. Alumni reported that Dental practices

look very favourably on YHU graduates due to the quality of their training[A]and there are clear mechanisms in supporting graduates into employment. Alumni reported that they had seen constant improvement in the quality of graduates completing their studies at YHU [A]

A similar demand for dentists internationally was reported and graduates from YHU were reported to fare well on returning to home countries [S; T]. The foreign students at YHU are principally from India, Iran and Iraq [M]. Of the foreign students whom the Panel met[S] most aspired to sit international statutory exams in order to register in their home country or other foreign jurisdictions. The international students whom the Panel spoke to felt YHU was preparing them well for such exams, based on YHU alumni success rates in such exams.

## Conclusions

### Strengths

- The Panel observed on numerous occasions [S,T,M] a fully engaged student body, who were consistently complementary about staff's level of support for them academically and pastorally. Student involvement and engagement in a wide range of academic and management committees was observed by the panel as a particular strength of the Dental Faculty.

### Areas of concern and recommendations

- International students reported that agents in India had not fulfilled their side of the contracted agreement leaving YHU students at a financial disadvantage. The Panel recommend that YHU should fully review use of agents in recruiting students from India and risk to students at YHU of utilising such agents.

### Opportunities for further improvement

- Staff Reported aspirations to include Objective Structured Clinical Examinations[OSCE] as part of the assessment strategy at YHU. The panel considered the YHU Dental curriculum well suited to such an assessment modality, and this should be implemented as a priority to strengthen Clinical assessment.
- Alumni providing practice based experience requested closer collaboration with YHU Faculty. The panel recommends termly meetings with external placement providers(Practice owners) and improved feedback mechanisms as to student and provider satisfaction with such placements.

### 4.1.3 Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff

Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.

Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.

Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programmes which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Armenian society.

The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

### Evidence and analysis

Staff profiles provided [SER] and meetings with staff [T,M] revealed a committed and highly experienced group of clinical and academic educators. Many were actively involved in clinical practice on a daily basis and the panel observed this clinical knowledge being utilised in lectures and teaching sessions. All Dental disciplines demonstrated appropriate expertise and a sufficient range of clinicians to deliver the curriculum.

The Panel met with a wide range of international students[S] who felt that teaching in English was at times limited by level of English language skills of some staff. Similarly, some staff reported[T] that their English language skills could be improved upon and had proactively sought support from the Human Resources Department who had facilitated this.

Human Resource colleagues [M] discussed the newly set up learning portal with specific examples given around English Language teaching and Digital learning. To assess levels of English and target development of English language, peer review of teaching by a fluent English speaker could be considered and suggestions then made in collaboration with HR as to how improvements could be made. This would support the wider Universities internationalisation agenda, ensuring the quality of Dental Education for English speaking students at YHU.

Internationalisation opportunities via the Erasmus scheme are available to students though perhaps due to COVID uptake appeared limited[S,T]. In discussion with students the panel were advised that many Armenian students[S,T] were happy to stay in Armenia due to family support networks, and similarly international students who had already left home to study in Armenia were more inclined to stay in Armenia, so uptake may remain low though should be encouraged by the Faculty who reported being supportive[T,M]

Internationalisation of teaching staff was reported to the panel as being facilitated by attendance at International conferences[T]. Staff reported that attendance in recent years had been mainly online. As more international conferences are delivered face to face YHU staff

should be encouraged to attend international conferences or present abstracts to increase staff profile internationally and indeed the profile of YHU more generally.

## Conclusions

### Areas of concern and recommendations

- International students reported some staff struggling to deliver lectures in fluent English. YHU should continue to support Academic staff with development of English Language competences via the online portal developed by YHU Human Resources Department

### Opportunities for further improvement

- Due to COVID staff reported limited attendance at international dental conferences. The panel recommends encouragement of academics to attend international conferences face to face in order to raise profile of YHU in line with internationalisation agenda, and present research abstracts as appropriate

## 4.2 Management BA

The Management BA programme of YHU is a 4-year (8 semester) programme corresponding to the 240 ECTS workload. The BA in Management is delivered in Armenian, and no international staff are involved in teaching. The faculty of the Management programme comprises of a total of 22 teachers, 12 of them hold a PhD or equivalent degrees.

The student numbers of the programme are shown in the table below:

	<b>Admissions</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Graduates</b>	<b>Early leavers</b>
<b>2018/19</b>	34	89	19	7
<b>2019/20</b>	37	88	18	24
<b>2020/21</b>	28	61	6	19
<b>2021/22</b>	32	68	12	15
<b>2022/23</b>	22	62		

There has been a slight decline in the number of new students starting in the programme in the academic year 2022/23. The numbers of graduates have been quite low in recent years, only 6 students in 20/21 academic year and 12 students in 21/22 academic year. However, it should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has strongly influenced universities with student numbers heavily fluctuating worldwide.

According to the programme description, the purpose of the undergraduate Management study programme is to prepare specialists with a managerial mindset, universal values, innovative, organisational, and entrepreneurial skills, who will meet the requirements of both the national and international labour market with their professional abilities, skills and ability to take responsibility. The programme document states that the objective of the bachelor's degree programme in "Management" is to educate specialists who can plan, organise, motivate, and control.

### 4.2.1 Planning and management of studies

The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).

The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.

The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

## Evidence and analysis

The BA in Management study programme was revised and updated in 2021. The SER [p. 68] claims that the staff, students, employers and alumni are involved in developing the programme and that the programme corresponds to the standards of national strategy. The Panel found that the programme is compliant with national strategies and legislation. The study programme is designed with the participation of students [S, M], ensuring that their perspectives and ideas are incorporated into the curriculum. Labour market needs and trends are monitored and acted upon [E]. The University cooperates with an employers' union to get their perspective on programme development [SER] and valuable feedback is given by employers after students complete their internships [E]. For example, the programme is currently planning to introduce a course on Social Entrepreneurship, which has been identified as a key area of interest by employers. In response to employer feedback, the SP working group has proposed introducing courses on analytics programmes to ensure that students are equipped with the necessary skills to work in data-driven fields. [SER p. 70, section 1] The Panel concludes that stakeholder interests are taken into account sufficiently in the process of programme development.

The SER section on the management programme [SER p 68] claims that the research topics “The investment environment of the essential branches of the Armenian economy” and “Problems of agrotourism development in Armenia” are the key research fields linked to programme development and teaching, but their explicit influence and input to the programme remained unclear to the Panel. During 2020-2022, the teaching staff of the bachelor's programme in management published two educational/methodological manuals, three methodological guidelines, and 14 scientific articles, one of which was published in an international journal and two presented at international conferences [SER]. The level and volume of RDC activities is very low but considering that it is a bachelor's programme in a well-established field it is possible to develop, manage and deliver the BA in management based on benchmarking other programmes, acting on stakeholder interests, and integrating existing knowledge. (see also Standard 1)

The system of programme objectives and outcomes and module/course outcomes in SER and the programme document is somewhat confusing. The study programme document lists a set of outcomes on Table 1 on page 5-6, categorized into A, B and C; page 12-13 of the same document presents an alternative set of outcomes, similarly in categories A, B and C, but the ILO categories and outcomes themselves differ between the two versions. Specific subjects are interchangeably referred to as courses and modules and the programme is not divided into smaller units/modules. The Panel would advise to structure the programme to logical thematic modules and create a comprehensive system of programme ILOs, module ILOs and course ILOs that are clearly linked. (see also Standard 3 and 7)

The Management BA study programme is characterized by a large share of general courses (e.g. extensive courses on History of Armenia, Armenian language and literature, physical education, economic history, etc) and lacks some contemporary components of a typical management study programme, like international business, digital marketing, innovation, business ethics and corporate social responsibility (CSR), etc. Considering that some of the programme objectives touch directly on the topics of ethics and innovation these topics should be more prominent in the programme. (see also Standard 4)

All of the sample syllabi had the knowledge of foreign languages (Russian, English) as entry requirements for the course. Considering the level of English that the Panel witnessed during the interviews, requiring a good command of English does not seem a realistic prerequisite.

The SER states that the study programme aims for development of entrepreneurship and innovative capabilities but there is no evidence to support this claim. According to the SER [p 69] the research component was added to each course to support creativity. The connection between the research component and creativity was not clear to the Panel. Also, looking at the list of courses it is questionable how the creativity-supporting research component will look in courses such as physical education or civil defence. The list of strengths mentions “availability and support of favourable conditions for the student’s independent creative work (students’ creative works are presented at conferences and published in collections of scientific works)” but no evidence was provided to support this claim.

The SER claims that the university has allocated necessary financial and material resources for the programme. The programme description document includes Table 6 presenting the physical and technical resources for delivering the Management BA programme. The list consists of basic furniture and computer software. The Panel visit to the study premises showed that the equipment of the classrooms is very basic – stationary tables and benches and chalk blackboards. Only the classroom for the demo teaching had a video projector for displaying slides on a screen. The library was very small and had limited resources. Although it was explained [R] that it is possible to access databases of academic literature via the national library gateway, the Panel did not get a convincing demonstration that the access is functional. The material resources for the delivery of the programme, specifically the digital tools like video projectors and screens and access to databases, needs improving. (see also Standard 2)

During the demonstration of Moodle pages for courses, the Panel did not find any relevant content or materials that demonstrated the effective utilization of Moodle support. As a result, the Panel was left with the impression that the usage of Moodle is merely an option that teachers may use at their discretion, rather than an integral part of the courses. (see also Standard 8)

## Conclusions

### Areas of concern and recommendations

- The system of programme level, module level and course level ILOs is not clear. YHU should revise the programme learning objectives and create a coherent system of module and course objectives that are clearly linked to the programme ILOs.
- While the program includes conventional management courses, it falls short in offering courses in rapidly evolving areas that are essential for contemporary business practices. The programme needs updating with courses addressing international business, ethics and CSR, digital marketing, and other key components of contemporary management education.
- The availability of library resources is limited, and there is a lack of access to international academic journal databases. Access to international academic journal databases and contemporary textbooks should be guaranteed for faculty and students.
- A large share of the classrooms the Panel observed were equipped just with a conventional chalk blackboard and did not have projectors and screens. The classrooms need updating the equipment and technology to create a modern and student-centred learning and teaching environment.
- During the presentation of Moodle pages for courses, the Panel did not come across any relevant content or materials that showcased the effective utilization of Moodle support. The usage of Moodle for digital support to the courses needs to be standardized. All

courses should have functional Moodle pages with relevant content to support students' independent learning and support hybrid teaching and learning.

### Opportunities for further improvement

- YHU has been benchmarking the programme to other management programmes. The Panel suggests creating criteria for selecting schools and programmes for benchmarking, e.g. look at aspiring schools with international accreditations such as EQUIS and EFMD. (see also Standard 1)

## 4.2.2 Learning, teaching and assessment

Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.

A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.

Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.

The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Armenia and internationally.

Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.

Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

### Evidence and analysis

Admission of students is carried out according to the Regulation on Admission of Learners to Yerevan Haybusak University, approved by the Government of the Republic of Armenia. Local and international applicants for the bachelor's programme must have a full secondary general education certificate or a corresponding secondary vocational education diploma. Any applicant with a secondary vocational education, regardless of their major, can be admitted to the first year of studies.

The Panel learned via interview [S] that there are three routes to admission, and the student can decide which route to take. It is possible to get admitted via the united Armenian examination (this enables to apply for scholarship that covers the tuition fee), admission examination conducted by the YHU, or interview arranged by the YHU. Admission to the programme is not competitive, all students who pass the exams are usually admitted. This approach ensures easy access to higher education at YHU but may attract students who are not sufficiently motivated to handle the demands of a bachelor's programme, which can result in lower retention rates, suboptimal academic performance and low graduation numbers. (see also Standard 8)

YHU states in the SER that it has implemented a student-centred approach on numerous occasions. The SER [p. 41] describes that teaching staff direct students' independent learning through counselling and monitoring, provide feedback on identified errors through personal

meetings and e-mail, and check and evaluate the work at the end. The Panel learned during the interviews [S, T] that student-centricity is mainly interpreted as ease of communication between staff and students (see also Standard 8). Based on student interviews [S], both the teaching and managerial staff at the university are approachable and responsive to students' questions, ideas, and concerns. Students feel comfortable expressing their opinions and raising issues, and they appreciate the University's willingness to listen and engage in dialogue. A culture of open communication and receptiveness helps to create a positive and supportive learning environment, where students feel valued and taken care of. However, the Panel did not find conclusive evidence about the systematic support of independent learning via counselling.

The BA programme in management has a fixed sequence of courses, which means that students do not have the option to choose different study tracks or have much responsibility in designing their individual learning paths. Students can influence the content and organization of studies through optional/elective courses and modules. The documents are somewhat confusing regarding the volume of elective courses. The study programme document [p 9] states that the volume of elective courses is 35 credits from which a student can choose 1 course. Table 3 in the same document states that the volume of elective courses is 35 credit points and to gain the required 240 credit points a student has to take 35 credit points of elective courses. The programme documents need more clarity and accuracy in this respect.

According to the SER, there is a unified system of assessment components and their value (Table 4.1-4.3 on page 46) in YHU, and the Panel learned that students were aware of this system [S]. The students explained that for a typical course, the final grade of 100% is composed of 2 midterms, each 20% of the grade. 10% is allocated for presentations and papers, and 50% for the exam (30% is knowledge and 20% for skills). Following the recommendation from the previous report, YHU has discontinued using presence in class, i.e. mere attendance, as a grading component and now uses as part of the grade active participation in class.

The system of appealing the grades was somewhat confusing as reflected in the interviews regarding the Management programme [S, T]. The students did not understand the potential need for appeals if the grading has for example not been fair. However, they explained that if a student is not satisfied with a final grade of the course there is a possibility to retake the exam with a different set of questions shortly after the first attempt. This possibility is agreed with the teacher [S].

The programme includes 2 internships, each of 4 weeks. Educational internship is in the 3rd year and production internship is in the 4th year. A working student can do the internship at their current job. The organisation of internships was regarded highly by the students, alumni, and employers [S, A, E], and the Panel concluded that internship regulation and process are well managed in the Management BA programme.

After each internship, employers provide feedback to the school on the strengths and weaknesses of their interns, as well as suggestions for improving the courses [E]. This feedback is analysed and incorporated into the curriculum, ensuring that the content remains relevant and up-to-date. As a result, students are better prepared for the workforce and have the skills and knowledge needed by employers. YHU assists students in finding internship placements if needed [S].

Mobility is addressed in SER p 69: "To ensure the national and international mobility of students, the components of the SP are compared with the RA and foreign SP, introducing such changes that are acceptable and applicable within the framework of the RA legislation. The SP's

national mobility is ensured entirely, but the results of the international mobility are yet to be studied. Some of our students continue their studies in foreign institutions”. The Panel learned during interviews that student mobility is non-existent in the management BA programme [S, A]. The school should make efforts not only to make mobility available but actively promote and support it, e.g. via giving additional grants or making efforts to have first students going on exchange who could then work as mobility ambassadors in the institution. It is important to create the first few positive examples in the school so that other students can follow the lead. (see also Standard 5)

According to SER p. 60, one of the strengths of the Management BA programme is the “professional young educational support staff who participate in the organization of the educational process and support students during their studies”. However, the Panel was not provided with a clear understanding of the nature of this support, and therefore cannot fully evaluate its effectiveness.

Furthermore, SER p. 61 states that diagnostic work is used to identify individual student abilities and needs, as well as their educational interests. However, the Panel was not given enough information to understand the specifics of this diagnostic work, including its methods and outcomes. Without a clearer understanding of the diagnostic process, it is difficult to determine how effective it is in meeting the needs of the students.

Individual development and progress of students is mainly supported by faculty members who are in a close contact with each individual student and truly oriented towards helping them to succeed [T, S, A].

## Conclusions

### Strengths

- Students and employers were satisfied with the organisation of internships.
- The students feel appreciated and supported by the staff.

### Areas of concern and recommendations

- There is almost no student mobility. YHU should take measures to increase student mobility
- The system of elective courses in the programme and their credit value was unclear in the documents. The system and list of electives needs clarification. Electives should be clearly marked in the study programme.
- Students exhibited a limited understanding of the appeal procedures, and the available documents regarding appeals primarily focused on a narrow range of appeal grounds. YHU should create a more comprehensive grade appeal policy outlining different grounds of appeal, including but not limited to mistakes in grading, errors in grading or assessment procedures, biased evaluation. Students should be aware of how they can confidentially initiate an appeal.
- There is no admission threshold for the programme. In order to achieve a motivated student body YHU should create an admission threshold (see also Standard 8)

### 4.2.3 Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff

Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.

Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.

Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programmes which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Armenian society.

The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

### Evidence and analysis

The teaching of the Management BA programme is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent teaching staff. 22 faculty members are listed as teachers of the management bachelor programme. Their average age is 50 years. 5 teachers are 30-39 years of age, 6 teachers 40-47, 4 teachers 50-59, 6 teachers 60-69 and one teacher 74 years old. 11 teachers hold a Ph.D. degree. The Panel learned [M] that it is difficult to recruit new teachers and the pool of candidates is limited.

While the situation with staff at YHU is good given the local context, the University needs to work hard to recruit younger staff with strong foreign language skills (besides Russian) who can bring an international perspective to teaching and develop international connections. This will help to enhance the quality of its programmes and prepare students for global careers.

During the Panel's meetings with students and alumni, it was frequently mentioned that the staff of the Management programme at YHU is highly supportive of students throughout their studies and also after graduation.

In case of problems, the student can contact the Director of the Institute, the Vice-rector for Academic Affairs, and the Ethics Committee. If the issue is not resolved through these structures, they can apply to the Rector [SER p 71]. YHU has a Code of Ethics and an Ethics Committee that deals with solving relevant issues and providing support to the faculty members. (see Standard 4)

The SER states that “the goals of the international mobility of the academic staff defined by the University are the exchange of teaching experience, improvement of scientific research activities, improvement of social environment, and development and improvement of the SP”. During the visit and interviews the Panel learned that the teacher mobility is extremely low [T] and only a few people participate in any sort of mobility. The main reasons for that were lack of language skills and apparently also no tradition for mobility. The Panel believes that international mobility is crucial for providing an international perspective to the school and its

programmes, and as such, it is important to ensure that teachers have the opportunity and motivation to visit other universities. (see also Standard 5) There has been only one guest lecture by a foreign teacher recently [S] and while this is a good initiative, it is clearly too little to ensure true internationalisation. The Panel learned [M, T] that the YHU is organising English language courses for the staff and this is clearly an important step towards enabling mobility and internationalisation.

Staff evaluations take place mainly via the rating system and monitoring template [SER, M, T]. Each faculty member has an annual work plan, and the outcomes are compared to plan but the faculty members were not able to explain to the Panel what happens if the work plan targets are not met [T]. The evaluation is based on self-reporting via a predetermined format that is approved by the chair and dean. The Panel learned from the Rating assessment document that the teachers must report their teaching activities, research, methodical work, peer and student evaluation, work with students, public services, etc. The Panel concluded that while most of the crucial components of academic work are monitored, the system lacks clarity when it comes to workload allocation for specific purposes and what happens if a faculty member does not meet the pre-agreed targets. (see also Standard 6)

## Conclusions

### Areas of concern and recommendations

- The Panel found that despite the high number of international partners the teaching staff is not participating in international mobility. YHU should increase teacher mobility by incentivising being mobile.
- The workload specifications within the employment contracts only consider teaching hours, neglecting to allocate a specific proportion of working hours to research, administration, training, and other essential activities that form an integral part of a faculty member's responsibilities. YHU should allocate clear proportions of workload for different activities of faculty in employment contracts.

### 4.3 Law MA

MA Programme of YHU LAW/Jurisprudence is a 2-year programme (4 semesters) corresponding to the 120 ECT workload. It is full-time studies. Awarded qualification is Master of Law. The MA Programme LAW/Jurisprudence is delivered in Armenian, and no international staff are involved in teaching. In the Institute of Law and International Relations there are 15 teachers.

The admission numbers to the programme are shown in the table below:

	<b>Admissions</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Graduates</b>	<b>Early leavers</b>
<b>2018/19</b>	11	7	29	6
<b>2019/20</b>	7	8	22	3
<b>2020/21</b>	19	1	43	4
<b>2021/22</b>	4	8	18	2
<b>2022/23</b>	9	4		

There has been a slight decline in the number of new students starting in the programme in the academic year 2022/23. The numbers of graduates have been quite low, only 1 students in 20/21 academic year, 8 students in 21/22 and 4 students in academic year. However, it should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has strongly influenced universities with student numbers heavily fluctuating worldwide.

According to the programme description, the purpose of the SP is to prepare lawyers with knowledge, abilities, and skills in accordance with the requirements of the national and international labour market, by increasing the interest of students in the fields of science, education and research.

#### 4.3.1 Planning and management of studies

The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).

The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.

The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in

achieving their learning outcomes.

### Evidence and analysis

The Jurisprudence MA SP (SP) was revised based on the procedure for development, approval, monitoring and periodic review of SP, courses/modules of YHU. In this revision, students and stakeholders were involved [SER 83]. The documentation received [SER] indicates that legislation, university policy, needs of internal and external stakeholders and the labour market were taken into account in developing a new iteration of the SP. This revision process also considered specific documents serving as the basis for the development of SPs in the University, e.g. the manual of the National Centre and Professional Education Quality Assurance [2015] and the ECTC guide [2015]. According to the SER [83] the SP was revised based on benchmarking with 2020 curriculum and 15 European MA programmes. The process entailed first the undertaking of a self-assessment followed by a renewal of the SP in 2019-2020. Results were introduced and discussed at the institute level and evaluated by the Vice-Rector for Development and Education Quality Assurance. [SER 83] The approved version of the curriculum is the one the Panel evaluated. Despite the formal correctness of the procedure for developing of the programme, the Panel found that the resulting new programme demonstrates many ambiguities.

The Panel understands that SP Working Groups are in operation across the institution, however for the SP it was not clear how the SPWG is discharging its role and who forms the membership of this Working Group. If such a structure is in place, it is important that its responsibilities are clear and that the relationship with the programme management is active. (see also Standard 3 and Standard 7)

The purpose of the Jurisprudence MA SP is to prepare lawyers with knowledge, abilities, and skills in accordance with the requirements of the national and international labour market, by increasing the interest of students in the field of science, education and research. However, the Panel found that the SP gives a random list of courses with explanation [SER 83] that new courses replaced the old ones based on “benchmarking/.../, conferences/.../, and requirements of labour market“. The Panel could not discern a clear meaning to the term “module” which was sometimes used interchangeably with the term “course” and found that there are no optional courses, all courses being deemed compulsory, as part of the curriculum. The Panel could not understand the fact that benchmarking with 15 European MA programmes did not raise a question of specialisation of the SP, especially considering that currently in the EU the trend is to offer SPs with clear specialisation to develop advanced skills, rather than having a multitude of elements which form only a generic profile. (see also Standard 1) The Panel found courses from many areas of law, with no logical division of the modules based on the branches of law, for example public law, civil law, national law, international law and others. This makes the SP less coherent in structure and fails to demonstrate a logical succession and clear progression of subjects being tackled. Indeed, the approach taken is to cover a little bit of everything; however, this demonstrates misalignment with current European and international practice and would require consideration by programme management for future revisions.

The Panel learned that, in general, the design and development of study programmes at YHU takes into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and labour market needs. However, based on the fact that the trend in law is currently to specialise in one specific branch, the Panel could not understand how labour

market expectations may have been captured and addressed, and when probed the programme management could not provide any examples in this respect. The Panel also finds it difficult to understand how students may use the MA degree towards employability and if the Armenian labour market can and does accommodate non-specialised legal roles.

The objectives of the SP, the modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes need some changes to be concrete and coherent. (see also Standard 3 and Standard 7) Table 2 in the SP document provides educational outcomes for the programme. The Panel found it difficult to establish the logical link between the courses in the SP and some of the declared educational outcomes: A1 – *“narrowly specialised branches of law is taught in an interdisciplinary context”*; A3 – *“will have comprehensive knowledge of national security/legal, military, economic, informational, cyber security, health, ecological, cultural/doctrine orientation of the professional educational programme”*; A5, B4 – reference to the *“specialisation”* but there is no specialisation in the SP; B2 – *“foreign language is used in solving the problem in specialised field”*; C3 – *“able to work effectively in a multicultural environment”*. Also the components of qualification [table 1 in SP] refer to a narrow specialisation, but the SP does not have a clear specialisation. This also refers to the ability that a student *“can write clear, well-structured text on professional topic in a foreign language”* but no course is taught in English, there is only a Foreign language course (8 ECT) in the programme. In the meeting with students, the Panel learned that this foreign language is English and that all students learn in the same group without any consideration of their proficiency in English at the start of the programme making this a language learning environment less conducive to language competence development. The Panel argues that such a learning environment where students with different levels of English are taught together is not efficient. The Panel also found that the SER [91, appendix 4.3.3] does not list all the learning outcomes of the SP [table 2]. The Panel concludes that the learning outcomes require a reformulation to align with European practices and to reflect programme content accurately. Once the programme learning outcomes are revised, the programme management should scrutinise the course learning outcomes and create a mapping grid to ensure that they directly contribute to the achievement of programme learning outcomes. Learning outcomes need to guide the content chosen for delivery, the teaching methodologies, as well as the assessment procedures proposed. In the absence of clear and coherently aligned learning outcomes, the SP runs a strong risk that the objectives of the degree will not be met. Additionally, in the formulation of the learning outcomes, key words indicative of Level 7 qualifications need to be captured, as per the Dublin Descriptors for master’s level education used in the European Higher Education Area, i.e. specifically in reference to independent learning and research, critical analysis. Where learning outcomes do not prioritise these higher-order thinking skills, the Panel is concerned that the teaching and assessment may not be commensurate with Level 7 and, hence, the achievement of students may be less than expected from master’s level graduates across the European Higher Education Area. (see also Standard 3 and Standard 7)

In the SER [84] YHU explained that the curriculum of the SP is based on the principle that the final results of one course provide the necessary base for easy assimilation of the next course, thus providing a logical sequence of courses, and that interdisciplinary connections are also provided. However, the Panel couldn’t find a logical transition from one course to another since the courses are very different in their content and there is a mix of courses of national law in limited form and random international law courses. The Panel also couldn’t find interdisciplinary connections between the courses. In the meeting with students, it was confirmed that students found the content helpful and dealt with each individual course as one package of expectations, without any focus on their interconnectivity. The fact that no unified

concept of the curriculum was evident did not seem a problem to students, the Panel observed. Based on the SER [85] and the course information attached to the SER, the Panel found that, in general, the teaching content and methods support students in achieving some level of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competences. However, compulsory materials for every lecture appeared in rather large amount, with questions arising as to how so many items of recommended reading could, in fact, be made use of in the teaching and learning process. (see also Standard 7 and Standard 8)

The Panel did not find evidence that YHU has a multi-component assessment system [SER 87] and modern approaches to assessment [SER 86]. Course programmes attached to the SER had only exams as assessment methods. Also in the meeting with students, the Panel learned that exams are mainly used in assessment and that where essay-based assignments are provided students are not always clear how these fit into the final marking scheme. When asked if such assessments carry a purely formative purpose with no stakes in the final grade, students explained that essays are deemed compulsory and that if these are not submitted they will see a penalty in the final grade, but they could not say how much of a penalty and whether the information regarding any other types of assessments (not final examinations) was included in the documentation or the briefings at the beginning of the course. (see also Standard 9)

The Panel found that the administration of materials and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the SP is partly purposeful, systematic and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support, need some improvement. In some of the course rooms which the Panel visited the desks were exclusively appropriate for lecture-style teaching, with no possibilities to organise group work and the use of the whiteboard was not possible due to the way the desks were placed. The rooms had projection equipment and staff confirmed they used this, however, a broader discussion arose on permitting students to join in hybrid delivery mode, in which case the Panel observed that the rooms were not equipped to accommodate such delivery as there were no mobile cameras or sound devices to ensure the student following the course online would benefit from a comparable experience as the student in class. The Panel found it problematic to have the laptop moved around to create some visual for both the projection, the staff member teaching and any notes on the whiteboard. (see also Standard 2, Standard 8 and Standard 10)

A more general concern was raised in relation to online/hybrid delivery which lacked policy, and hence was randomly offered and guaranteed no consistency for the student teaching and learning experience. (see also Standard 2 and Standard 8) The Panel learned that in the course “Legal ethics and writing” the main study books for the course are from the years 1902, 1917 [SER 31], other books are too old, as well. Legal ethics has changed and developed in these years, new principles and challenges have come up. The Panel could not find clear answer to the question whether and how many learning materials in English are used. In the meetings with students, the Panel learned that all materials are translated into Armenian language, but in the meeting with teachers it was stated that some materials are in English (suggested additional materials). In the meeting with teachers the Panel learned that in some courses the textbooks are in Russian. But, Russian language is not prerequisite in the admission. It is important that all compulsory bibliography is in the language of teaching and where other languages may be used extensively that potential candidates to the programme are informed, during the admission process, of the need to have a given level of foreign languages.

According to the SER [84] the development of creativity and useful skills for labour market has been granted by the research, teamwork, discussions and debates, and also by the internship,

Legal Clinic and Moot court are tools which also support the development of student's skills. Forensic Laboratory is planned to create to support students to carry out professional research. There is ICT course in the SP. The Panel learned that *"SP contributes to developing independence, initiative, creativity, entrepreneurship and research and other skills among students through seminars, practical training, essays, term papers, writing individual papers, learning courses, trial games and other means provided by the curriculum."* [SER 84]. Panel could not find proof that entrepreneurship skills are taught more than just in business law course which is a law course and does not consist of content which could focus on the elements of how to start and manage a business. Panel also learned that the course "Legal ethics and writing" does not cover the topics included in the YHU Ethics Code rules.

The Panel learned [SER 84] that the management of materials and financial resources for the SP stems from the goals of the Universities Strategic Plan and that YHU constantly updates the material and technical base to adapt it to the changing needs. The Panel found that there exists a Legal Clinic and mock courts are organised (a new courtroom is built) [SER 84], however, university explained that there is a need for attorney-coordinators to help students in the Legal Clinic to develop the studies there [SER 84 and meeting with Legal Clinic]. The Legal Clinic's activities were somewhat unclear to the Panel. Staff stated that the Legal Clinic helps YHU students with legal advice, more so than it does externals. For confidential reasons, it is then understandable that the Legal Clinic can serve less of a developmental purpose, via shadowing and mentoring, to existing students and that it remains a Legal consultancy service offered to YHU students. There are plans to intensify the external reach of the Legal Clinic and, when this happens, the potential to use it as a teaching and learning adjunct will be evident.

Students have access to YHU's library, the National library, and the library of the National Academy of Sciences. In the meeting with students they confirmed that they use materials which are either printed or accessed by their own computer. One day a week is a library day, which means that students do not have lectures and can learn alone [SER 84; courses timetable]. YHU provides access to databases such as LexisNexis [SER 84]. However, the Panel couldn't see the databases and electronic materials students can use online because there was no internet connection at the time the Panel visited the library.

YHU has stated that it uses the online learning environment Moodle to support learning and teaching, but the Panel probed this claim while randomly verifying some SP Moodle courses and could not find evidence of Moodle being anything more than a repository, with frequently just a title representative of a course. There was no evidence that Moodle is actively used as a virtual learning environment to support teaching, learning and assessment activities. (see also Standard 8)

The Panel learned that according to the SER [85] surveys about the social environment, infrastructure and resources demonstrate a good degree of satisfaction. However, the Panel found that furniture in the classrooms was uncomfortable and did not allow for contemporary learning and teaching methods like group work and discussions around a table.

Currently, students with special needs cannot be fully accommodated. According to the SER [SER 85] YHU plans to create a necessary infrastructure for students with special needs as part of its recognised social responsibility to enable and support students with disabilities to learn at the university.

## Conclusions

### Areas of concern and recommendations

- The SP is composed of courses from many areas of law with no logical division and sequence and with no clear specialization demonstrating misalignment with current European and international practice. The SP should be revised and the prospect of offering a specialisation should be considered. The revision should also strive to present a curriculum in logical sequence with an interdisciplinary connection between the courses.
- The Panel learned that it is not clear how the SPWG is discharging its role and who forms the membership of this Working Group. Clarify the role and responsibilities of the SP Working Group and its relationship with the programme management
- The Panel found that the learning outcomes are not coherent and concrete and did not accord to the requirements provided by the European Higher Education Area (level 7 qualifications). Learning outcomes should be revised to ensure full compatibility with Level 7 requirements so as to constitute a relevant guide for teaching, learning and assessment practices, and these in turn should be revised to be in alignment with the learning outcomes proposed.
- The Panel learned that an assessment system was not clear and mainly exam was used in assessment, the role of other assignments regarding assessment was unclear. The programme management should develop clear assessment strategies to ensure consistency across the programme. Any assessment requirements should be clearly stipulated. As part of this it is likely that the management will want to distinguish formative and summative assessment methods.
- The Panel learned that online/hybrid delivery was randomly offered and guaranteed no consistency for the student teaching and learning experience. The programme management should develop a policy and clear implementation guidance on online/hybrid options for delivery and, where such delivery happens, this should be supported by technological arrangements which can provide a comparable student experience for the students who are joining online.
- The Panel found that in some courses the materials were outdated, and some were in Russian, Moodle courses were just repository. The Panel could not find clear answer to the question whether and how many learning materials in English are used. Learning materials should be reviewed in relation to the languages required and they should be developed accordingly. Bibliography lists should be updated with more modern titles. Moodle courses should be developed to provide an integrated component for learning and teaching interactions, rather than a repository of minimal course information.
- The Panel could not find proof that entrepreneurship skills are taught more than just in business law course. Studies of entrepreneurship should be added to the SP and their presence should be clear and explicit.
- Learning environment where students with different levels of English are taught together is not efficient. English courses need improvement to be responsive to the aims of the university provided by the strategy documents.
- The Legal Clinic serves less of a developmental purpose, via shadowing and mentoring, to existing students and remains a Legal consultancy service offered to YHU students. Student participation in the Legal Clinic should be increased.
- The course “Legal ethics and writing” does not cover the topics regarding YHU Ethics Code rules. Topics regarding the YHU Ethics Code should be added to the SP.

### 4.3.2 Learning, teaching and assessment

Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.

A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.

Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.

The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Armenia and internationally.

Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.

Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

### Evidence and analysis

The Panel found that in principle the conditions and organisation of admission would ensure fair access to education and a motivated student body. However, in practice there are ambiguities in this area. The Panel found that students are chosen for the SP based on their previous study results [SER 85; Regulation on Admission to Master's Degree of YHU]. However, the Panel could not find the threshold for admission, nor the limits on the number of students that can be accepted. Also, the Panel could not find that the applicant's motivation to study is evaluated in the admission procedure. In meetings with teachers and management it was not clear when and how admission exams are administered, i.e. whether for all or just some students. It was explained that a student can come to study law from a specialisation other than law, in which case the applicant does have to take admission exams. The admission process also does not have any requirements for English or Russian, yet some items of compulsory reading in bibliographies are in these languages. (see also Standard 8)

The SP does not have a clear specialisation, however in the meeting with students, the Panel learned that the choice for an internship place and for the topic of the thesis can be based on a concrete branch of law, resulting in some level of specialisation, although this would not be formally specified in the qualification documentation.

According to the SER [85], the YHU student-centred approach is confirmed by the results of diagnostic work (individual conversations, surveys, activities of the educational consultant), students' skills and learning interests, which are considered in decision-making, and evidence of their support for improvement by the use of active and interactive methods in the learning process. In the meetings with YHU staff student-centredness was often emphasized. YHU

explained that students are important subjects of the learning process, so they have direct participation in its organisation and content. Their wishes are considered in the syllabus design, coursework etc. [SER 85] In the meeting with students, the Panel learned that if they need to suggest something regarding the SP they should turn to the Dean's Office or use the Suggestion Box. According to the SER [85] students participate in several events like summer schools, seminars, moot games, and exhibitions. However, the Panel could not find data about participation in those events in the evaluation period, except participation in the STARMUS Festival.

The Panel learned from the SER [85] that there are regular meetings with students to talk about their education and opportunities for work. In the interviews, the Panel could not find evidence that such meetings actually take place for this SP. Also, in the meetings with SP representatives it was not clearly evidenced that a student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of SP. There is some ambiguity in the SP learning outcomes and also in the provided competencies. However, according to the SER [85] teaching staff use active, interactive, student-centred, cooperative, traditional and modern teaching methods in education. A methodological toolkit is used during lectures, practical and independent works (seminar, presentation, essay, data collection, comparison, analysis, trial, report, practice). Teachers have professional training activities. In the meeting with students it was confirmed that in the lectures they have presentations, group discussions, project work, and round table discussion. This demonstrates that there are steps being taken towards student-centeredness, but these need to be consistently supported via all quality assurance mechanisms and in the teacher-student relationship.

In theory, student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students in achieving the declared learning outcomes for the current version of the programme, especially around knowledge components. However, the Panel found some issues with the assessment process. Firstly, it was unclear how or if any formative components are included. Secondly, students did not know how some assessment components contributed to their final grade. Thirdly, marking is done by the teaching staff member without any moderation or second marking. Fourthly, assessment grids do not seem to be in general use, hence each exam paper works with its own purpose-built grid. All these aspects impact the potential for assessments to be fully objective and reliable. Students did, however, confirm that the feedback they received if they were dissatisfied with the grade was sufficiently detailed to give them a full understanding of areas they need to improve in, and they also confirmed that they could re-take an examination to increase their grade or appeal the grade where they believed there might have been some grading mistake. However, a clear description of these process was not provided, as students stated they had not used them.

It was also noted that the completeness and security of assessment results was in question. This is because the Panel found evidence of incomplete assessment registers for results which had already been a few months old. When asked about how the assessments results were kept, the Secretariat indicated that these were not kept locked and no arrangements had been made to avoid the risk of anyone tempering with these. (see also Standard 9)

The Panel found that *"teaching staff manages the process of students' independent work through monitoring"* [SER 85] but could not find the proof how this is organised. According to the SER [85] the feedback on the self-management process is provided based on students' applications and opinions, which refer to their satisfaction with the education process. The Panel learned

that there are several surveys but couldn't find clear evidence regarding the activity of students to participate and how this feedback to self-management process is organised. The organisation of studies including practical work and training is partly based on specificities of students' needs and forms of study and partly supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. The Panel learned that [SER 86] since 2019 conferences have been regularly organised where "many" SP students have presented their reports, However in SER [86] only 2 conferences are mentioned. The Panel learned that internship organisation in the SP is good [SER 86, S; A; T]. In the meeting with students, the Panel learned that more practitioners could be invited into the lectures.

The opportunities for mobility within Armenia and internationally are not sufficiently established. The Panel learned that student mobility is absent. YHU also considers this as an area of development. Certainly, the number of students in the SP plays a role in mobility – in the meeting with students they say that they do not want to go abroad because of personal commitments such as family or work, and they do not miss the value of such an experience. (See also Standard 5)

Support services for students are in place and available for students. The Panel learned that university career centre provides regular feedback to graduates and monitors their professional developments [SER 87]. However, the meeting with alumni proved that not all alumni participate in such surveys or are involved in an development activities at the University.

The SER [87] notes that graduates of the SP are competitive, both in national and international institutions. It was indicated by the employers that graduates of the SP are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills nationally. However, the Panel found no evidence of information about relevant career opportunities outside Armenia.

## Conclusions

### Areas of concern and recommendations

- Panel found that admission rules did not consider the motivation of the applicant and no specific threshold for admission. Also, there was no admission rules for those who apply from another SP than law. It is unclear whether there are admission exams or not. Admission rules should consider the motivation of the applicant and a specific threshold for admission. They should include additional rules for those applying from another SP than law. It should be clear whether there are admission exams or not.
- Panel was concerned about the protection of data regarding assessment results. Assessment results should be kept secure and complete at all times.
- The admission process also does not have any requirements for English or Russian, yet some items of compulsory reading in bibliographies are in these languages. The admission rules should require a specified level of competence in all languages that are required in order to read the materials included in compulsory bibliographies on the programme. There should be an effective system for assessing language use for academic purposes.
- Panel found it unclear whether and how exactly student-centred approach is articulated and disseminated. The concept of a student-centred approach should be more clearly articulated and disseminated and its implementation should be consistent and coherent.

- Student mobility is absent. YHU should identify opportunities for mobility, develop the principles for international mobility for its students in the SP and support students to study abroad.
- The number of students in the SP is very small. The institution should reflect on the minimum number of students that are required to ensure that the programme is sustainable, and should increase student numbers accordingly.

### 4.3.3 Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff

Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.

Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.

Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programmes which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Armenian society.

The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

### Evidence and analysis

The Panel found evidence that, in general, teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of teaching staff who support student development. Positively, some teachers are also practitioners. The Panel learned that there are several training activities for teachers [SER 85; meeting with management], however, it was evidenced by the meetings that teachers are not active in participating in training activities. Teaching staff follow the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in cases of non-compliance. The Panel found little evidence that teachers have participated in international mobility programmes which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Armenian society. (see also Standard 5)

The effectiveness of studies, RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of each member of staff. There is a special form with aforementioned elements by which teachers are evaluated every year. However, the Panel could not find clear evidence how this actually takes place, where the analysis is conducted and what are the main disadvantages or problems regarding teachers, e.g. mobility, which the SP has identified. This is important in setting the

developmental goals for the SP and deciding on what types of activities could be funded to achieve such goals. (see also Standard 6)

It was noted initially that one international student is enrolled on the SP, with confirmation that this student had had a parallel schedule designed and was being taught exclusively by staff members with English language competence. Later in the visit, this information was retracted and it was indicated that the student actually never had a registered status as their visa had not been approved. Firstly, this raises a question about the records of students and their accuracy. The SP management should not be unaware of the status of the students it has enrolled on the programme. Secondly, the programme is a small programme anyway, raising questions of sustainability even for the Armenian group. To introduce a parallel structure to accommodate one international student is highly risky as it stretches resource capacity and increases workload for the few members of staff. Thirdly, the content of the courses is not calibrated for international students with many legal topics based exclusively in the Armenian context and its legislation. This raises the question of validity and relevance of the content for international students and their possible career prospects. Fourthly, the programme management indicated that there are actually few teachers on the programme who are confident English language users and it was indicated that one of the priorities for the SP is to build English language capacity. As such, it became clear that there was no capacity for a parallel delivery structure in English, as had been originally claimed. (see also Standard 5)

The Panel could not find evidence that the SP could be taught in English if a foreign student wanted to study on the programme, mainly because of teachers, management and support staff lack English proficiency. However, the programme management indicated explicitly that admitting foreign students on the programme was a strategic objective for the programme and that if in the next academic year 20 foreign students were to enrol, the SP would be able to successfully deliver the programme in English. It was unclear to the Panel where this confidence came from as the evidence was clearly pointing in the opposite direction. The Panel noted that it would take time, effort and resources before the SP could propose English-medium delivery, which needs to come with awareness of specific teaching and assessment methodologies appropriate for learning approaches integrating content and language. The SP management suggested they could, initially, rely on invited speakers from different organisations in Armenia. However, this, too, poses a number of problems, as invited practitioners may be experts in their field but are not teaching staff and would require teacher training before such an arrangement may be deemed viable. As such, the Panel concluded that the SP management needed to realistically ascertain the risks which come with internationalisation and English-medium delivery and only propose such arrangements when it can demonstrate preparation for a robust educational experience and the support is fully in place. (see also Standard 5 and Standard 8)

The Panel was told that 15 international university programmes had been reviewed to allow for changes to the SP to be implemented. However, no further evidence was received in respect of any collaborations with these institutions, which could demonstrate an international dimension. (see also Standard 1) Furthermore, the Panel heard that staff and students are more reluctant to travel for mobilities abroad. In this respect, the SP could explore more intensely options for internationalisation-at-home activities, including guest lectures hosted by YHU, to ensure the international dimension of the programme and present students with additional valuable perspectives. (see also Standard 5)

## Conclusions

### Areas of concern and recommendations

- There is no mobility for teaching staff. YHU should encourage mobility among its teachers, developing exchanges. In the absence of international activities, YHU should intensify internationalisation-at-home initiatives.
- English language skills of teachers is low. English language skills of teachers need improvement, especially if English-medium teaching is envisaged. This would require a strategic decision by the SP and should be underpinned by a specific action plan.
- Teachers do not participate in development trainings. Teachers should participate more actively in training activities.

### 4.4 Psychology BA

The Psychology BA is a relatively young SP at the YHU, Roslin Academy of Arts and Humanities [M, T, since 2017]. It is a full time SP lasting 4 years (8 semesters, 240 ECTS) and is taught in Armenian [if needed in English or Russian, SER p 94]. It is also stated that Psychology BA Programme is taught in English [Table 3.4 in SER p 26] that is really confusing as the Panel did not find any evidence neither for English language proficiency of the staff nor study materials in English required for teaching during the visit.

According to the SER and the Panel visit materials, the total number of students in the Psychology BA is hard to determine because the total number of students for all 4 years is presented jointly for Pedagogy and Psychology BA (Table 1.4 line 15 in SER), and, comparing 2018/19 to 2022/23, it has apparently decreased from 55 to 36. Even the joint number appears to the Panel to be fairly small so as to be economically and pedagogically optimal. Admission numbers still show a rise from 12 to 18 during the same period. Some difficulties with these numbers (especially graduations) are understandable given the COVID-19 pandemic, and a recent reorganisation into a separate psychology SP might make student choices easier. During the visit, the current number of psychology students was reported as 33 (for 4 years) [M, T]. This is concerning given the number of students on the joint degree above, but it is expected to increase for the Psychology BA SP.

The Panel acquainted itself with documents (including two master theses), met with students, staff, alumni (not really employers, see Standard 7), as well as university management and administration during the visit, and visited the university library and a psychology teaching demonstration in the classroom.

#### 4.4.1 Planning and management of studies

The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).

The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.

The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

#### Evidence and analysis

The development of the separate Psychology BA SP is a current topic as it is relatively young and small, having been initiated in 2017 by the Ministry of Education [M]. The development of the Psychology SP has followed national educational standards [M, evidence request 20.04.2023]. However, there was almost no reference to any professional standards in terms of how the Psychology SP is developed or taught (see also Standard 7). This is a serious flaw, as without reference to professional standards, the programme's development will lack the necessary breadth and depth, leaving students without a comprehensive education. Nevertheless, there are signs of improvement, as a staff member with previous contacts at a European university has transferred the experience to YHU [SER, p 93, M]. Also, comparisons have been made with Psychology SPs at universities in Armenia and abroad [SER, p 94]. Unfortunately, it is hard to believe that Psychology SP at the YHU is in line with Psychology SPs in Europe and North America. (see also Standard 1) In these regions, the rules of the American Psychological Association and/or European Federation of Psychologists' Associations, as well as the Professional Psychology Diploma EuroPsy ([European Certificate in Psychology | EFPA](#)), are widely recognised. The most significant differences between these and Psychology SP at the YHU, in terms of education, concern methodological and cognitive knowledge and competencies, and the use of evidence-based practices. Contemporary RDC activity at the international level are virtually absent, with only one Scopus/WOS article 2020-2022, [6-YHU\_publications]. This indicates that the Psychology SP is not supported by active research. (see also Standard 11)

It appears that alumni, or at least fresh graduates, are regularly contacted with surveys to complete, and students feel that they can suggest changes in the Psychology SP, including themes, topics and even hours spent on certain topics [S]. (see also Standard 3) There are examples, such as a military psychology course, where students' wishes [S] and societal needs [SER p.93] have been taken into account. The relatively small number of students, that certainly is a problem for sustainability and teaching quality, is not seen as a drawback, but rather as an advantage of being in the focus of the YHU [S]. However, the situation is a bit more complicated

for employers and other stakeholders, as there are not many of them, and thus, it is difficult to do any statistics. It can be challenging to assess the effectiveness of the SPWG in developing the Psychology BA SP due to the limited number of members in the YHU psychology community. Thus, the roles of SPWG members might have been fuzzy and they might have been holding multiple roles (alumnus, graduate student, internship provider, employer, etc.). The Panel also observed that employers were confused with internship providers or organizers (who are regularly asked for feedback about the internship holders). (see also Standard 7)

Psychology SP [6-YHU-Psychology\_BA-EN] has six objectives that are based on the practical needs of work. The outcomes of the Psychology SP are divided into knowledge, skills, and competencies, which are expected to be achieved through appropriate teaching methods [6-YHU-Psychology\_BA-EN, Table 2]. Without seeing the content, it is difficult to assess the suitability of the methods. In general, the number of contact hours in teaching [6-YHU-Psychology\_BA-EN] is too large and may even prevent independent and active learning. This could helpfully be reduced considerably. The seminar on Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) that was demonstrated to the Panel members corresponds nicely to what is reflected in the table, but it remains incomplete without a critical discussion of its place in modern psychology (e.g. scientific status or whether it is evidence-based). Doubts about achieving the goals of the Psychology SP are mainly fuelled by shortcomings in the resources that are used (including literature, textbooks, databases). The qualifications of teachers of practical subjects and internship supervisors are probably at least good (as they perform as practitioners), but there may be problems in achieving learning objectives in methodological subjects, as the teaching staff lacks ongoing practical experience in research (i.e., in the field they teach). This threat of low research quality was realised in two master's theses provided to the Review Panel.

The Psychology SP offers numerous opportunities for comprehensive education including Armenian history, mathematics, philosophy, and more. The SER promises also entrepreneurship capacity development at the Psychological Counselling Centre [SER, p 94]. How the Centre functions in the reality was not made clear. (see also Standard 10)

It appears that YHU claims to provide sufficient physical and financial resources for the Psychology SP, including up-to-date literature [SER, p 94], but the Panel observed serious shortcomings in terms of resources such as use of Moodle, literature, and access to scientific databases, experimental apparatus or data analysis software. Contemporary literature and scientific data-bases typically mean barely as a *"link to a website of articles written by our students and professors."* [S, R]. Financial support in terms of salaries for hours were stated to be competitive or even a bit higher than in the other universities [M, T]. (see also Standard 2 and Standard 8) On the other hand, a considerable proportion of the teaching staff works on an hourly basis, which may be a threat to the sustainability of the Psychology SP (as academic work in all its richness isn't easily divided into separate hours).

Furthermore, the study materials used in courses are mostly in Russian and Armenian, and only rarely newer than ten years [6-YHU-Psychology\_BA-EN]. This is a rather clear sign of not being up-to-date and contradicts the claim that the Psychology BA is fully taught in English [0\_answers.docx] [SER p 94, Table 3.4 in SER p 26] and poses a threat to internationalisation efforts. (see also Standard 5)

## Conclusions

### Areas of concern and recommendations

- The Panel is concerned by the fact the Psychology SP does not conform to international professional standards. The psychology SP development should be managed according to international standards for psychology curricula. First, the Psychology SP at the YHU should become familiar with the international standards of the profession, and second, use them as a basis for developing its curriculum. A systematic programme should be developed for this purpose, and the ample of opportunities offered by open cooperation with the other universities and international professional organizations (such as APA or EFPA) should be utilised.
- The Panel found that study materials are mostly outdated. The curriculum should increase access to modern professional knowledge in psychology. It is essential to use more up-to-date materials, including those in English. The fastest and most accessible way to start is to use open science resources (databases, software), but some areas of work will also require additional resources (textbooks, laboratory equipment, analytical software).
- The Panel found that there was no research that meets international standards. The number of personnel active in psychological science needs to be increased to provide the necessary criticism and methodological strength in the Psychology SP.
- The Panel saw that the YHU does not take the direction of professional development in the society seriously enough. The Psychology SP at the YHU should take a more active role in the development of the field of psychology in Armenia. If there are no local psychology standards in the country, they should be developed. It is also a responsibility of the university and education system to establish professional standards and objectives. Through this it is possible to guide expectations among society, employers, and students. Simply taking feedback into account may reinforce expectations that cannot be met or direct the development of the field into the wrong direction.
- There were almost no international contacts, It is important to take the university's internationalisation strategy seriously (i.e., work out an action plan for Psychology SP), as it can help to raise the level and demands of education through international contacts.

### 4.4.2 Learning, teaching and assessment

Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.

A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.

Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.

The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Armenia and internationally.

Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.

Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

## Evidence and analysis

It appeared to the Panel that YHU has a somewhat liberal approach to admission, accepting all applicants based on national exams without any sign of rejections. Supporting this is the fact that the YHU offers individualised starting points based on these results [T]. However, this approach may lead to a decrease in the quality of education as students may not be demanding enough in terms of the material being taught. The separation of psychology from the former pedagogy and psychology curriculum is seen as a positive development, as it allows students to make a clearer choice of specialisation. Student feedback is considered as an important indicator of student-centeredness [M, T] in the University, and there is a risk that the lack of demanding students may affect the quality of education (see also Standard 8).

The Panel finds that student-centeredness is understood and implemented too narrowly, mostly taking into account friendly relationships, and the needs and feedback students are able to express [M, T, S], although some recognition of learning as an active process was also reflected [M]. The Panel recommends that the YHU should take a more proactive approach in providing students with the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful in the field of psychology. This can be achieved by implementing a more structured and rigorous curriculum that includes courses on contemporary research methodology and cognitive psychology, as well as other essential topics in the field. In creating such a curriculum, it's not enough to rely on students' self-management of their studies and career choices, especially if their international contacts are not very numerous.

The Panel considers that the amount of contact time in the curriculum is too large [6-YHU-Psychology\_BA-EN.]. With the students' future in mind, it would be beneficial to reduce it and increase students' responsibility for their studies, i.e. give them significantly more opportunities for independent skill and particularly knowledge acquisition. Of course, this process must be supported by the teachers.

Based on the information provided [M], the entrance criteria allow individual starting paths for the study and the written procedure for appealing grades [S] do meet this standard. However, the lack of evidence of appealing grades being used [S] could suggest that the assessment may not be entirely reliable or objective (although being student-friendly).

YHU arranges internship outside the University, and practical skills are also taught at the university [demonstrated to the Panel members in a seminar on Neurolinguistic Programming, NLP]. However, there are concerns about the relevance and quality of these learning outcomes being considered obsolete and not evidence-based [e.g. NLP is a controversial method within the psychological community; a fact not brought out by the team to the Panel]. The concerns are

also valid for scientific research and methodology [seen in two master theses]. Additionally, there is a lack of international mobility [S, T], but practical professional work outside the YHU was done by both, students and staff. This can be taken as a sign that YHU supports intersectoral mobility. It is noted that university intends to encourage academic mobility [e.g. for international teaching staff SER, p 94].

Students reflected repeatedly that they feel individually treated [S, also in SER p 95], get enough attention and have good relationships with teachers. Teachers and even higher administrative staff (up to the Rector) are easily accessible through personal contacts and also through social media [M, S] that can also enhance the student experience. Students are also supported by meetings and individual or group sessions arranged by the Psychological Counselling Centre, and get advice from the Legal Clinic or Career Centre if needed [SER p 95].

Information about the competitiveness of YHU Psychology SP graduates is not available in the sources provided. It can partly be challenged as graduates have been taught separately from internationally recognized professional standards and contemporary research results. The YHU collects feedback from internship providers and makes corrections into SP if needed [A, T, M] that should be a warranty that alumni will fit into the labour market.

## Conclusions

### Areas of concern and recommendations

- The view of student-centeredness was too narrow. The Psychology SP should understand student-centeredness more broadly, not relying primarily on student feedback and satisfaction. The goal should be an independent and critically thinking psychologist who has faced enough professional challenges during their studies. This also means that assessment procedures should be regularly reviewed accordingly.
- The SP did not contain any contemporary research. The Psychology SP should update the methodology section of the curriculum and create ways to involve students in various research and practical projects. This supports the development of independent critical thinking among students, and helps to transfer the research experience into future problems.
- The teaching excessively relies on contact hours. The Psychology SP should find more modern ways to support independent learning. In addition, there should be systematic support for students to gain international experience.
- The Panel found it very concerning that the suitability for the profession was not assessed upon enrolment. Entrance criteria should also take into account an applicant's suitability for working in the field of psychology.

### 4.4.3 Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff

Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.

Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.

Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programmes which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Armenian society.

The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

### Evidence and analysis

A considerable number of staff the Panel met was freshly recruited (since sept 2022). This proves that YHU can find staff confirming of being a popular place to work for academic staff [M]. Number of staff members (having different types of contracts) is more than sufficient being 1:1 [YHU\_student-teacher\_ratio]. Being noticed and supported was confirmed to the Panel by students [S] that can partly be explained by the small number of students. The Panel even finds that it is not optimal to run a SP with so few students because providing individual support can come at the expense of professional academic development of the staff. It is important for the Psychology SP to grow [M], and continue recruiting qualified and experienced staff, including those with expertise in contemporary problems in psychology, research and methodology. The inclusion of new strong practitioners can be valuable addition to the existing faculty. This can bring fresh perspectives and expertise, as well as provide opportunities for students to learn from different practical styles and approaches.

The YHU has a Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct (both approved 12.12.222). Several principles are certainly followed, the most serious is the situation with a science-based education that can certainly be strengthened in case of Psychology SP. Without improving science-based education serving to society, this important aspect in YHU's mission, remains suboptimal. (see also Standard 12)

It is important to mention that the Panel is not entirely convinced that academic staff is always fairly compensated for their work, including additional time spent on self-development or improving their skills. The Panel has an impression that several important aspects of academic work (like self-development and improving one's skills) aren't often counted to the paid working hours [T, M]. A considerable amount of academic staff appeared to work on hour-based contracts. If the YHU wants to take advantages of such "upgrades" of academic staff, it would be at least ethically fair to use more frequently monthly extended workload based contracts. The same is true for the international mobility that is much more complicated if not having a supportive contract. (see also Standard 6)

At the state and University level the Strategic Internationalisation is highly valued [M]. The Internationalisation Strategic Framework with numerous performance targets for 2025-2026 has been recently drafted 23.03.2023, Armenia is a member of the European Higher Education Area, and internationalisation is a national higher education priority [YHU\_Internationalisation\_Framework]. However, the Psychology SP appears to have a weakness in functional internationalisation, with almost no international mobility in either direction and no professional international contracts [SER, T, S, M]. However, there are couple of international conference participations [6-YHU\_publications.docx] that may lead to such contacts. (see also Standard 5)

It is also unclear how 240 ECTS from the Psychology BA [0\_answers.docx] are taught in English [Table 3.4 in SER p 26, SEP p 94], as all materials are either in Armenian or in Russian, and the teaching demonstration was translated for the Panel members. The Panel has realised that similar unrealistic claims are very common at the YHU (see also Standard 1, Standard 5 ). This is not only a problem of teaching language but also quality of teaching, and necessary adjustments in teaching that can't be done immediately but needs a careful preparation (e.g., materials, communication, working load of the staff etc). The solution needs joint efforts and management at the university level.

The YHU has provided free English courses for the staff [M] to support English language learning.

There is a discrepancy between the introduction of the assessment procedure for monitoring the quality of activities of the academic staff and the actual criteria used in the scorecard. The YHU has implemented an assessment procedure for monitoring the academic staff's performance [YHU\_Rating\_Procedure-EN]. According to it many things, like improving one's teaching, professional or research skills or else should be taken into account but in reality only a minor fraction of teaching, RDC and service to society activities score in the table. (see also Standard 6)

On the other hand, YHU supports self-development of the staff by offering free courses [M, T]. It is even required that staff members take part in professional training courses every two years [21-YHU-Staff\_Development-Regulation-EN]. This is an important development and one which can contribute to stabilising English language approaches. (see also Standard 2 and Standard 6)

## Conclusions

### Areas of concern and recommendations

- The staff does not do research. The Psychology SP should find ways to strengthen the methodological and scientific competencies of its staff and promote research.
- There were no effective international contacts. The Psychology SP should create an actual internationalisation action plan for its curriculum.
- The employee evaluation system did not support internationalisation activities. Regular assessment of academic staff should be developed to include also internationalisation in all its forms.
- The Panel found that a large portion of activities necessary for the professional development of academic staff are not covered by the employment contracts. It should be ensured that academic staff contracts include all aspects of academic work, including self-development, mobility and international cooperation. This means that number of full-time staff should be increased. Only then can the University expect to receive these from its staff.