



ESTONIAN QUALITY AGENCY  
FOR HIGHER AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Assessment Report on Fulfilling the Requirements of  
the Secondary Condition of Institutional Accreditation

# Yerevan Haybusak University

2021

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# Introduction

## Background and aim of the assessment

**‘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 expert 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.

Educational institution must undergo institutional accreditation at least once every seven years based on the regulation approved by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education (hereinafter EKKA Council) [Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation](#).

The institutional accreditation of Yerevan Haybusak University took place in September of 2019. EKKA Council decided at its meeting on 30.06.2021, to establish a new secondary condition to the Institutional accreditation decision of the Yerevan Haybusak University on 22.11.2019

**The task of the current expert panel was to evaluate whether the requirements (secondary condition) set by the EKKA Council have been met by the Yerevan Haybusak University.**

The composition of the expert panel was as follows:

Helen Thomas	Freelance Education Consultant, the UK
Jacques Lanares	University of Lausanne, Vice Rector, Switzerland

## Assessment process

The higher education institution sent its progress report on the fulfilment of the requirements of the secondary condition to EKKA on 29 October 2021.

The members of the expert panel wrote the report based on the written materials presented by the HEI and the information obtained in the interviews held (electronically) on 22 November 2021.

In the following sections, the expert panel summarises their findings regarding the fulfilment of the secondary condition.

The institution submitted its comments to the report on the 22 December 2021. The panel submitted the final report to EKKA on 30 December 2021.

The current report is a public document and made available on EKKA website after EKKA Council has made its decision.

## Report on fulfilling the requirements of the secondary condition

At its meeting on 30.06.2021 EKKA Council decided that the institutional accreditation of Yerevan Haybusak University will be valid until 22.11.2022 but set a secondary condition that the University must meet in 5 months.

The following are the requirements set by the EKKA Council to be met by Yerevan Haybusak University, and the expert panel's assessment on the developments the University has made in this regard.

YHU should review and revise the strategic plan to reflect common practice so that it focuses on goals, high level objectives and KPIs for the five-year period. YHU should develop a separate operational plan that details the sub-objectives and activities with clear responsibilities, time frames and deadlines which can be reviewed on at least an annual basis. YHU must develop KPIs that are specific and measurable and that clearly relate to the goals.

**Assessment of the expert panel:  
the secondary condition is substantially met**

### Evidence and analysis

Yerevan Haybusak University (YHU) developed a new strategic plan (SP) in the period between June 2021 and October 2021. The plan was developed in the context of continued political unrest in Armenia and of the global Covid-19 pandemic.

The SP starts with the mission and vision of the University, then states the goals and objectives of the plan, followed by the values and a SWOT analysis. The plan ends with 'Result Areas' which is set out in tabular form.

The Panel noted that the mission, vision and values of YHU had been revised since the previous Strategic Plan 2021-2025, which already included a revision to the mission, vision and values from the previous plan. The Panel learned in discussion with senior managers that YHU had taken a different approach to the whole process of developing the strategic plan. The underpinning philosophy of the approach was for it to be a participative process and to start from the question of what the world would be like in 15 years' time and what YHU should aim to be like within that world view. This in turn led to a revision of the mission, vision and values.

YHU established a large group which included former and current PhD students, staff, senior managers and other beneficiaries so as to gather a wide range of views and ideas for the SP. The Panel learned that, through a series of meetings, consensus was reached on the mission, vision, values and goals. This process marked a significant change from the approach used to prepare the previous SP. YHU is commended for initiating a new approach to the development of strategy, which it is hoped will lead to greater shared ownership of the strategic plan. To reach consensus on a strategic plan within such a short timescale is a significant achievement.

It was not clear to the Panel how the SWOT analysis included in the SP had been used. For example, the Panel could not establish whether the SWOT analysis had been undertaken at the very start of the development process and had informed the mission, vision, values, goals and key strategic objectives, or whether it was undertaken to inform the key strategic objectives. The senior managers could provide an explanation for some of the threats in the SWOT. For example, for *'The imperfect legal system of Armenia in the field of higher education'*; or *'Unstable social-economic environment and geopolitical situation'*. However, they were not able to provide a clear account of how the threats had been taken into account in developing the objectives, nor could they outline how the weaknesses had been used to develop objectives. The Panel could identify some links between the weaknesses and some of the lines in the Key Result Areas and Performance Targets; however, these were not always clear.

The SP has two strategic goals: Goal 1: *To create a harmonious enabling environment for the academic and professional development of the students and faculty*; and Goal 2: *To develop conditions for nurturing the students' civic responsibility as an expansion of the University's impact in the transforming world*. Goal 1 has two sub-objectives, each of which has what might be described as key strategic objectives, a total of 7 in all. Goal 2 has four sub-goals which are, in nature, more like the key strategic objectives of goal one.

The majority of key strategic objectives are focussed on 'creating' or 'developing', so that there is potential for a specific and measurable way of evaluating the attainment of the objective. This is less the case for the objective prefaced by 'expand' or for the objective *'implement innovative information and communication technologies.'* The goals and objectives are largely reasonable.

The Key Result Areas and Performance Targets are set out in tabular form with columns for objectives, results and targets. The ordering and numbering in the table is consistent with the goals and objectives, and is easy to follow. The results include hardware and capital estate improvements, such as re-equipped dental clinic, bacteriology laboratory, or stationary cabinets for distance learning; and programme developments including, for example, problem-based learning and competency-based learning incorporated into teaching methods, or elaboration of additional general education programmes for the formation and development of environmental literacy. These are reasonably clear, and the associated targets are relevant, expressed in numbers of programmes or usage of the new hardware or estate. Less clear are those results which relate to research, for example, *Recovery of motor control in neurorehabilitation*; or *general and specific changes of the salivary glands of the oral cavity during Covid-19* where the results are expressed in terms of publications. The Panel learned that the numbers are not per staff member but for the topic or project. The table also included some objectives with results and targets which were not clear. In particular, for *Development of academic mobility*, the results column quotes Appendix 2 and also states the targets for numbers of staff and students, including *distance learning students*. Appendix 2 is a list of institutions which YHU intends to engage with in terms of mobility. There is no indication of how the development of academic mobility will be effected. The Panel learned that the very specific numbers of 62 for academic staff and 54 for students were based on an analysis of data that YHU has collected. The Panel gained a confused picture of objective 1.2.2 *Develop a student-centred education management system*. The associated results are *Association of the graduates* and *Improving the cooperate governance system* for which the targets were 300 members and 150 students respectively. Discussion with senior managers suggested that the objective related to the methodology of educational programmes; however, the targets do not make sense in that context. The majority of the targets are expressed in numbers. However, these are not necessarily reflective of the qualitative differences aimed for. The Panel concluded that some of the results and associated targets would benefit from review and refinement

to ensure they are clearly expressed, will be consistently interpreted and reflect both qualitative and quantitative changes.

The Panel also reviewed an Operational Plan for 2021/2022 academic year. The plan, presented in tabular form, had columns for Results, Responsible Person, Deadline, Performance Indicator, and Objective. Some of the results have a deadline of 'continuous', some a specific deadline and some no deadline at all. There was not always a clear link between the performance indicator and the result, and most of the results were linked to several objectives. For example:

Result: *The basic issues of ensuring quality of higher education*; deadline: continuous; performance indicator: 2 articles; linked objectives: 10.

Result: *Clinical diagnostic laboratory*; deadline: September 22; performance indicator: designed for 150 people (daily); linked objectives: 6.

Result: *Heighten the academic decency of the students*; deadline: none; performance indicator: Academic decency code; linked objectives 3.

The Panel learned that individual departments would develop their own annual operational plans that would feed into the overall plan. The Panel recognised that the SP had only recently been finalised and that it was too early to expect completed departmental operational plans. However, given the lack of clarity found in the operational plan, the multiple objectives for different results and the sometimes vague deadlines, it was difficult for the Panel to see how the overall operational plan would provide departments with the clarity needed for developing their own plans, reporting them and thus facilitating the overall monitoring of progress within YHU.

Senior managers confirmed that the strategic plan has been costed.

## Conclusion

YHU has developed a strategic plan that focuses on goals, high level objectives and performance indicators for a five-year period. YHU undertook a participative approach, which was new to the institution, and produced the plan in a relatively short space of time. The goals and high-level objectives are reasonably sound, though may not be fully and consistently understood across the University. YHU has not used fully the outputs from the SWOT analysis in developing the results and objectives. YHU has produced Key Results and Targets for the SP and an Operational Plan for 2021-2022. There are some inconsistencies and lack of clarity in both of these which would benefit from review.

## Strengths

- The participative approach taken to the development of the new strategic plan.

## Areas of concern and recommendations

- The Panel could find some links between the weaknesses identified in the SWOT analysis and items included in the Key Result Areas and Performance Targets; however, these were not always clear. It is recommended that YHU reviews how they have addressed the threats and weaknesses identified in the SWOT analysis in the development of the strategic plan.
- Some of the objectives do not easily lend themselves to the measurement of their achievement. It is recommended that YHU reviews the objectives to ensure that their attainment can be measured or clearly evaluated.

- The Panel gained a confused picture of objective 1.2.2 *Develop a student-centred education management*. YHU is recommended to review this objective and ensure that there is a shared understanding and that the associated targets are relevant to that understanding.
- The Panel found some inconsistencies and lack of clarity between targets and objectives within the operational plan which made it difficult to see how the overall operational plan would provide departments with clarity for developing their own plans and reporting. It is recommended that YHU reviews the operational plan 2021-2022 so that it is clear and consistent and thus facilitates the development of departmental plans that can be monitored, and which can feed into the overall evaluation of the operational plan.

### Opportunities for further improvement (if applicable)

- It is suggested that YHU could usefully review how they have used all aspects of the SWOT analysis to ensure that the full benefit of the SWOT is realised and make it clearer how the SWOT analysis informs the strategic plan.

YHU must further develop a strategic approach to the development of its research capacity which clearly articulates priority areas and serves as a basis for identifying key objectives and related KPIs. YHU should include the requirement to undertake research in the contracts of full-time academic staff.

**Assessment of the expert panel:  
the secondary condition is partly met**

### Evidence and analysis

The new SP contains objectives related to the development of research. Specifically, research is part of sub-goal 1.1 *to create a modern educational process containing advanced scientific research programmes and corresponding to the world and national labour markets*; and a focus of the key strategic objectives 1.1.1 *Create contemporary and innovative education and scientific research programs*, and 1.1.2: *Create own modern laboratories and research centers*. The latter includes a dozen projects, about 50% of which are devoted to medical fields. They consist of clinical infrastructure, polyclinic, general surgical services, for example, or laboratories such a Bacteriology Laboratory. The plan does not include deadlines or resources for these projects. However, targets are set, mainly regarding the outcomes of the projects. These include: *Receiving 150 patients daily for clinical facilities, or 44 simulators for the Expanded simulation center*.

The operational plan for 2021-2022 contains “*educational and research programs*”<sup>1</sup>. The table includes 18 professors and mentions research topics for each of them. These are mainly noted in terms of publication targets which link with the objectives of the strategic plan. The links are, however, rather loose as, in most cases, multiple objectives are mentioned, with one case having 11.

<sup>1</sup> Table 1, Appendix HAYBUSAK\_University-Operations\_2021-22

The introduction to the strategic plan states that “*there is no clear-cut development strategy*”<sup>2</sup> for a research strategy but rather an “*action plan for ... scientific projects*”. In discussions with senior staff, the Panel learned that this action plan is in fact the aggregation of all the individual projects which have been accepted and approved by the Scientific Council. It was clear to the Panel, both from the documents and discussions, that YHU has not defined priority areas of research. Whilst research is included as a weakness in the SWOT analysis in the SP, there was no evidence of a specific SWOT analysis for research which would help in the development of a research strategy.

The Panel learned that YHU takes a bottom-up approach to the organization of research. Academic staff develop research projects which are evaluated by the scientific centre. This centre assesses the project on the basis of a number of criteria such as novelty, theoretical and methodological relevance, potential for application and/or commercialization of results, and available funding. When a decision has to be taken on which projects to reject or postpone, priority is given to those projects on the basis of the capacity and competences of the researcher as well as on the involvement of students in the project. The Panel learned that all the projects should be aligned with the strategic plan. The final decision on whether to approve a project or not is taken by the Scientific Council. The Panel noted that, whilst YHU has clearly adopted a bottom-up approach for the development of research, it has not developed a vision for research which elaborates such an approach.

The Panel was unable to establish the key areas of research for YHU. The bottom-up approach appears to encourage research equally across the University, and the Panel could not discern any selection and choice geared to increasing critical mass and visibility, a common practice in many institutions. The development of research is, in the Panel’s view, also hampered by the annual revision of research plans which runs counter to the time necessary to run research projects from elaboration to publication or application.

YHU has taken some steps to improve conditions and resources for research. A number of laboratories are being developed. Some targets have been set for publications, though the quality of publication, whether it should be in national or international journals, for example, is not mentioned in the targets. Senior managers explained that reaching the target is not really compulsory but rather more of a suggestion. YHU has increased training opportunities for research methods, particularly for PhD students and in the area of medical sciences. YHU listed 51 universities for international cooperation agreements. However, on enquiry the choice of these partners in relation to research interests was far from clear and not evidenced.

The expectation for all full-time academic staff to undertake research is specified in their contracts. The time allocated is at least four hours a week. Additionally, bonuses are given to reward publication.

## Conclusion

It is clear that YHU has taken some actions to support the development of the research infrastructure, including contractualised time for research, bonuses, and a process to “filter” research projects. It is also investing in clinics and laboratories. The need to develop research is made explicit in the SWOT analysis which forms part of the SP and there are some objectives designed to tackle this issue.

However, an overall research strategy based on key research areas is still missing. From the information available, the Panel understood that the current main priorities for research are to create better conditions, develop collaborations and support a bottom-up process. This is only implicit. Were this approach to be made explicit, it could form the first step in the development of a research strategy

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<sup>2</sup> Introduction page 1,



but would still be insufficient according to the current trends in the EHEA. The annual planning for research is not favourable. Whilst a bottom-up approach to research is a valid one, there is no vision which articulates this approach, and the process fails in having no discernible key research priorities which would enable the development of critical mass and visibility. Whilst improving the conditions for research is a critical aspect of the research endeavour in a university, it is not as effective as it could be if it were driven by a strategic approach. The Panel were unable to confirm that there has been any significant development since the last review regarding a strategic approach to research. YHU demonstrates willingness to support the development of research, but the strategic approach and project management still require more attention.

### Strengths

- General improvements in conditions for research including the development of infrastructure, training in research methods, time for research in staff contracts and bonuses for publication.
- A well-established process to assess bottom-up research projects.

### Areas of concern and recommendations

- The links between the research activities and the strategic objectives are rather loose as they mostly refer to multiple objectives. YHU is recommended to review this link and ensure it is unambiguous and realistic.
- It was clear to the Panel, both from the documents and discussions, that YHU has not defined priority areas of research. YHU is recommended to develop a strategy for research which clearly identifies the key priority areas for research and to ensure that these are widely disseminated across the University. The number of key priority areas is likely to be few.
- Although research is included as a weakness in the strategic plan SWOT analysis, there was no evidence of a specific SWOT analysis for research. It is recommended that YHU undertakes a SWOT analysis focused on research as a first step in developing its research strategy.
- YHU undertakes an annual revision of its research plans which, given the time needed to elaborate research projects and publish or apply their results, hampers research. YHU is recommended to reconsider the annual revision of research plans and develop a monitoring process that is consistent with the needs and demands of research.
- The expectation for staff to publish appears to be rather weak and it is not clear what level of publication staff should be aiming for. YHU is recommended to strengthen the requirements for publication and to specify what the expectations are in terms of the level of the journals.

### Opportunities for further improvement

- YHU maintains a list of 51 institutions with which it holds cooperation agreements. YHU should identify those institutions which are active in YHU's key research areas and prioritize those agreements.