

ANQA Self-Evaluation Report 2013



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1. Foreword

The current self-evaluation has been carried out to prepare the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA) for an external proof review against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), coordinated by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

The current external review was undertaken in accordance with the ANQA Board of Trustees decision, which stemmed from the importance to ensure ANQA's credibility, professionalism as well as recognition of its evaluation processes at both national and international levels.

The proof evaluation is organized by NVAO within the frames of ARQATA project to prepare ANQA for application to ENQA for a full membership.

2. Higher Education System in Armenia

The higher education system in Armenia consists of public, private, and intergovernmental higher education institutions (HEIs). Higher education is provided by two major types of institutions: universities and other institutions such as institutes, academies, foundations and a conservatorium.

	Public		Private		Intergovernmental ¹	
	University	Other institutions	University	Other institutions	University	Other institutions
Number of HEIs ²	11	10	26	14	3	1
Number of students ³	About 95000		About 20000		8700	

Table. 1 Higher Education Institutions and Students

	Public		Private		Administrative	Academic
	University	Other institutions	University	Other institutions		
Number of staff (not civil servants) ⁴	10647	Not available	1804	8843	10647	Not available

Table. 2 Number of Staff

Armenia joined the Bologna Process in May 2005 (Bergen Communiqué). Since then a “Development Strategy of Education for 2008-2015”⁵ has been developed and put into practice, with the main objectives of

- enhancing quality;
- widening access to higher education;
- developing international cooperation;
- increasing the attractiveness of the education system
- as well as ensuring effective governance and financial management of higher education institutions.

The Development Strategy of Education 2008-2015 was revised and reinforced through adoption of the Law on *the Republic of Armenia Education Development Strategy* in June 23, 2011. Thus, drawing on the Development Strategy, the shift to the two-cycle degree system has been completed and almost 95 % of students

¹ Intergovernmental universities are the ones established on the basis of agreement between two countries. For example,

² As of February, 2011 www.edu.am, <http://edu.am/index.php?numbRefArticle=1&menu1=93&menu2=145&topMenu=-1&arch=0>

³ Non official information obtained from the Ministry of Education and Science.

⁴ Non official information obtained from the Ministry of Education and Science.

⁵ <http://www.edu.am/index.php?id=-493&topMenu=15&menu1=-1&menu2=15&arch=0>

below doctoral level are enrolled in the two cycles. Most universities now issue Diploma Supplements and all higher education programmes implement the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) as of 2008, although with some difficulties. Furthermore, a National Center for Professional⁶ Education Quality Assurance was established in 2008 and after a series of pilots of the criteria, standards and procedures for institutional and academic programme accreditation, the external quality assurance framework was officially adopted and put into practice by the Armenian Government in 2011. At HEI level, initial steps to establish internal quality assurance systems have been taken. Future challenges include:

- overcoming discrepancies between state academic standards and labour market needs;
- move to learning outcome approach to teaching and learning;
- strengthening the financial management at HEIs;
- enhancing internal and external quality assurance systems,
- improving lifelong learning programmes;
- promoting the internationalization of HEIs as well as
- introducing joint degree programmes.

Armenia has submitted three Stocktaking Reports to the Bologna Follow-Up Group (2007, 2009) with the latest one dating to 2011.

2.1. National Qualifications Framework

In 2011 the Armenian Government adopted the *National Education Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Armenia (ANQF)*⁷ consisting of 8 levels, and the responsibilities for the operation and maintenance of the ANQF are within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES).

According to the ANQF, the higher education system in Armenia has a unified character, which implies integration of professionally-oriented and research-oriented programmes in terms of degrees, horizontal or vertical mobility and in types of institutions. The private HEIs, with the exception of some of the leading private HEIs, mainly offer bachelor programmes whereas the public ones offer bachelor and master programmes.

The third cycle still consists of two separate degrees: the Kandidat Nauk is obtained through an aspirantura programme. Candidates having obtained the Kandidat Nauk degree may continue toward the Doktor Nauk degree.

⁶ In the Armenian context the term “professional” stands for colleges, universities and other higher education institutions and includes both study programmes aiming to prepare for specific occupations and careers as well as research. The term refers to both regulated and non-regulated occupations.

⁷ <http://studyinarmenia.org/www/uploads/2011/08/QualificationFramework.pdf>

3. Introduction to quality assurance in Armenia

3.1. The Former System of Accreditation and its Consequences

The evolution of the accreditation system in the Republic of Armenia can be divided into two major phases: prior to and after Armenia's joining the Bologna Declaration in 2005. The first phase was launched in 1999 by establishing a unit within the Ministry of Education and Science that started the process of accreditation. While the accreditation process was mandatory for state universities, the private ones could apply for accreditation on a voluntary basis. Because of the nature of the accreditation process and its expected outcomes, including the right to issue a state diploma, none of the state universities actually applied for accreditation since they had already been granted that authority. On the other hand, what happened to private universities in their search for students and establishing their own niche in the labor market and education realm, almost all of them applied for accreditation and 45 universities were accredited by 2007. The criteria for accreditation were similar to those of licensing with a special emphasis on the final exam results and if 75% of academic programmes were successful the university was considered accredited. The accreditation granted had a lifetime nature and did not consider a cyclical approach to it apart from frequent monitoring visits organized by the Ministry. Further, in some of the cases the accreditation was granted through university appeals to court.

The consequences of the first experiences with accreditation could be considered partially successful since the way it was designed failed to attract the state HEIs that were supposed to undergo accreditation according to the Law on Education (1999). Even more, because of its non-cyclical nature the private universities that had undergone accreditation ceased to follow-up on the development and enhancement of a university quality management system that would provide impartial and objective data for further decision-making and effective management of institutions. Thus, the first attempt yielded lessons for developing and implementing a more viable and effective system.

3.2. The Current System of Quality Assurance

After signing the Bologna Declaration in 2005, Armenian tertiary education in general and higher education in particular entered a new phase of reforms and endeavors. One of the first endeavors was establishment of a national center for tertiary education quality assurance, which would meet the ESGs, thus promoting recognition of the qualifications awarded in the Armenian tertiary education system.

ANQA, was thus established in November 2008 and started its functioning in March 2009 after the official election of the Director by the ANQA Board of Trustees. An intensive process of external quality assurance development drawing on ESGs, and its installation has marked the last four years of the ANQA functioning. ANQA's activities evolved around the following major aspects:

- Establishing an external quality assurance framework and its operationalization;
 - Development of regulatory documents, including:
 - a quality assurance framework that includes mandatory institutional accreditation and voluntary academic programme accreditation;
 - criteria and standards for institutional and academic programme accreditations;
 - procedures for institutional and programme accreditation.
 - Conducting institutional and academic programme pilot accreditations.
- Guidance on the set-up of internal quality assurance systems at tertiary level institutions;
 - Organization of workshops and round table discussions;
 - Delivery of trainings and consultations.
- Professionalization of ANQA
 - Establishment of internal quality assurance system of ANQA;
 - Capacity building through
 - World Bank projects;
 - Other international projects (Tempus, Twinning).
- Internationalization of ANQA
 - Active participation in ENQA and INQAAHE activities;
 - Participation in Tempus projects: DIUS, PICQA, INARM, MAHATMA, ARARAT, HEN-GEAR aimed at establishment of both external quality assurance and internal quality assurance systems for higher education institutions, master programme in higher education management with a focus on quality assurance, establishment of cooperative links between HEIs and labor market.

3.3. ANQA Stakeholders

One of the key factors for success for ANQA is the quality of the stakeholder relations. ANQA has a wide range of external stakeholders:

- The Higher Education Institutions (especially its boards, its quality assurance officers and the academic staff)
- Students and prospective students of Armenian Higher Education
- The government, especially the Prime Minister, the Minister of Education and Science
- Employers and employee organizations, and agencies that bear responsibility for a proper functioning of the labor market
- Quality Assurance Agencies in other fields of Armenian society (health care, private sector, etc.)
- Quality Assurance Agencies in other European countries and in other countries of the world
- European organizations of Universities
- International networks for quality assurance and education.

Stakeholders are part of all the processes of policy development and implementation in an appropriate way. This means that a consultation process in all policy-making activities is an essential part of the ANQA day-to-day work. Methods of interactive policymaking are part of the normal practice of ANQA policy development. This is a challenging task, especially since the ways and procedures of interactive policy making are not strongly established in the Armenian policy arena.

Apart from involvement in policy making on specific subjects, it is also important to establish procedures to communicate with the different stakeholders on a permanent basis. A website, newsletters, regular meetings and for instance focus groups are in place to ensure effective communication with the stakeholders and their proactive involvement in ANQA activities.

4. ANQA Activity Framework

4.1. Mission and Strategies

ANQA is a quality assurance agency independent of the RA Government and Tertiary Level Institutions.

ANQA strives to promote public trust, social cohesion, equity, responsibility and competitiveness through systematic enhancement of tertiary level education provisions.

It does so by

- being receptive to the needs of the national stakeholders through its mandatory institutional accreditation and voluntary programme accreditation
- complying with international standards for quality assurance
- ensuring visibility at international level thus contributing to a stronger positioning of the Armenian tertiary education within Europe
- valuing close cooperation with stakeholders in the process of developing a quality assurance system.

The following are ANQA strategic objectives:

- to determine and ensure compliance with appropriate standards of tertiary education;
- to promote and support continuous improvement in the quality and standards of tertiary education provisions, working in partnership and consultation with tertiary education stakeholders;
- to promote TLI's ownership of quality assurance;
- to ensure that clear and accurate information is made publicly available about the quality and standards of TLIs; and
- to apply international good practice in evaluation and reviews of TLIs' provisions(see Annex 1_ANQA Strategic Plan 2010-2015).

4.2. ANQA Structure and Financing

The ANQA organization is set up as a small and flexible organization, with highly qualified staff to perform the wide range of responsibilities.

The organization has the following elements:

- The Board of Trustees is the ultimately responsible organ for the ANQA organization. It appoints the director and evaluates his performance. The government appoints the members of the Board. It has to approve the strategic plan, the three-year action plan (see Annex 4), the yearly work plan (see Annex 5) and an annual situation analysis and report (see Annex 6), and it monitors the internal quality assurance of the ANQA-organization. The Board is not involved in daily activities of the ANQA organization, and does not take part in decision-making on individual cases in external quality assurance.
- Accreditation Committee: The Accreditation Committee (AC) is the highest quality assurance body within ANQA designed to function as the one responsible for
 - taking the accreditation decision on institutional and program accreditation based on the evaluation report produced by the expert panel, and
 - assuring quality of the accreditation procedure and methodology in the Agency.

Its composition and high acceptance by the main stakeholders in the tertiary education system as well as by Armenian society in general are crucial elements for the success of the Armenian accreditation system.

Accreditation Committee is an independent, collegial body, which carries out its responsibilities prescribed by the Statute on Formation and Functioning of Accreditation Committee submitted for adoption in 2013 (see Annex 11).

The Accreditation Committee is made up through a rigid recruitment procedure to ensure legitimacy of its functions. The Accreditation Committee makes decision through a voting system.

- An Advisory Board performs consultative functions to the Board and the director of ANQA. It consists of persons with authority in the Armenian higher education system. They consult ANQA in questions like:
 - The strategic plan
 - Defining of standards and procedures for institutional audits, accreditation, etc.
 - Procedures of choosing members for expert panels
 - Effective ways to involve stakeholders in the development of quality assurance in Armenian Higher Education

The Advisory Board does its consultation when asked by the director or the Board, or it can give unsolicited advice.

The Director has the overall leadership of ANQA. He is responsible for policy direction and for communication with stakeholders.

ANQA has three functional departments (see Annex 2):

- Department of development and enhancement
- Department of management of external quality assurance processes
- Secretariat
- Supporting staff

For the first three years of functioning (2009-2012) the first two departments were combined in a Policy development and implementation unit.

The work within the functional departments is organized along the lines of major policy programmes. ANQA has defined 5 programmes on all major areas of external and internal policy development. These programmes form the basis for ANQA's efforts to realize the strategic goals. ANQA has defined programs on

- External Quality Assurance policies and procedures
- Institutional audit and programme accreditation
- International relations
- ANQA internal quality assurance
- Internal quality assurance of TLIs and stakeholder relations

The expert panels are not a part of the ANQA organization. The department of management of external quality assurance processes is responsible for the setting up and operationalization of the panels, according to the established procedures. The panels perform their duties independently, according to the standards and procedures outlined in the ANQA Accreditation Manual (see Annex 8). Six program managers/senior policy advisors from the department of management of external quality assurance act as coordinators of the peer reviewers' panel.

ANQA revenue model evolves around the following:

- RA Government through a separate budget line – to ensure ANQA functioning;
- Accreditation procedures financed by tertiary level institutions – to ensure smooth flow of accreditation procedures by covering costs for experts and other related costs. 15% of the income is envisioned for ANQA sustainability.
- Local and international grants – to ensure capacity building of the staff.

4.3. ANQA Processes and Internal Quality Assurance

Since its establishment ANQA has been working hard on adopting a model of its internal quality assurance that would drive its effective management. Many strategies have been adopted, put into practice to promote its effective and efficient functioning. Thus, starting 2011 a bottom-up approach to ANQA internal quality assurance has been opted for enabling establishment of a system that

works and yields positive outcomes. The internal quality assurance of ANQA is in the process of development and ANQA is in its first phase of self-assessment under the auspices of the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization (NVAO).

ANQA has adopted a process- and outcome-based approach to its management and quality assurance (see Annex 7 for the ANQA Policy on ANQA IQA), thus, all the activities run by ANQA are broken down to 11 quality assurance processes. To manage the processes an organization tool in the form of a protocol elaborating on the targets, indicators, activity plans and quality assurance tools has been developed. Each protocol is developed for operations in a given year or two and is cyclically reviewed (See Annex 9). Thus, the achievements of ANQA for the period of 2008-2013 will be analyzed from the perspectives of those processes, which evolve around:

- Leadership and management
- Financial management
- Institutional and programme accreditations
- Legal affairs
- Human Resources Management
- Accreditation committee,
- International affairs
- Internal quality assurance
- Secretariat
- Information technologies
- Resources

For each quality assurance process a Working group of 3 to 4 ANQA staff has been set up led by a coordinator. The primary responsibility for all the processes lies with the Director of ANQA.

For each process, data are collected on annual basis and the coordinator for each process takes care of the in-depth analysis of the data to feed into the annual report. Thus, each WG draws up an annual quality report concerning its own process, draws preliminary conclusions on the effectiveness of the given process as well as sets the area for further improvement. The summary results from all the protocols feed into the revisions that are to be made to the operational plans to better achieve the strategic goals outlined in the Strategic plan 2010-2015.

4.4. International Affairs

Since its inception, ANQA has taken aggressive steps to internationalize its activities and to succeed in ANQA's desire to achieve recognition by international organizations. The activities aimed at ANQA internationalization evolve around the following major processes:

- Active collaboration with other agencies from EU and former Soviet Union countries;
- Development of the external quality assurance drawing on the ESGs;

- Active participation in and contribution to quality dialogue through involvement in ENQA and INQAAHE activities;
- Pro-active participation in World Bank and European Union projects.

With regards to ANQA's participation in the quality dialogue an active participation in the QA events at European level was expressed through contributions in the form of articles submitted to the EQAF and INQAAHE conferences as well as participation in the ENQA and INQAAHE work groups. ANQA is currently an affiliate member of ENQA and is a full member of INQAAHE and is represented on the INQAAHE Board of Directors.

ANQA has also been active in the implementation of different projects. At project implementation level, the impact is tangible at the level of ANQA staff professionalization, refinement of the developed mechanisms based on the feedback of international experts, development of tools for external quality assurance, as well as professionalization of TLIs quality assurance staff. Further, regarding World Bank projects such lines as support to the development of internal quality assurance systems at tertiary level institutions, pilot accreditations, training of internal quality assurance staff of TLIs and development of external quality assurance system have been undertaken. As for the Tempus projects, ANQA currently has six Tempus projects running in which ANQA takes the role of a leading partner and coordinator at national level. The Tempus projects evolve around the current challenges the Armenian tertiary system faces: internal and external quality assurance, learning outcome-based curricula development, establishment of university and market cooperation ties, development of sectorial qualifications frameworks to name but a few (see Annex 26).

The goals of International Affairs program evolves around

- Cooperation with relevant organizations at an international level in order to understand best practices more thoroughly, provide for the exchange of ideas, and promote them at the local level;
- Promotion of the recognition of Armenian quality assurance and support Armenian tertiary education at international level;
- Follow up on international developments in quality assurance and higher education by actively participating at ENQA, INQAAHE and EQAR events;
- Ensuring active membership role in international networks of accreditation and quality assurance organizations

The targets for the last years have been:

1. ANQA capacity building at international level
 - a. Training of ANQA staff within international projects
2. Ensuring visibility of ANQA by collaborating with the international QA organizations and networks
 - a. Participation in ENQA annual events and work groups
 - b. Participation in INQAAHE annual events, work groups and Board activities
 - c. Participation in EOAR, ECA, EUA and other network activities
3. Development and management of International Projects

- WB projects (AROATA, Capacity building for HEIs, pilots)
- a. Tempus projects (DIUS, PICQA, ARARAT, MAHATMA, HEN-GEAR, INARM)
 - b. Twinning (2013-2014)
4. Establishing, maintaining and expanding the pool of international experts
 5. Organizing biennial conferences and fora at national level
 6. Preparing for ENQA proof and actual review.

A major function of the International relations programme is development and management of grant proposals. Thus, so far ANQA has authored 16 Tempus projects, 3 World Bank projects and 1 Twinning project. As a result, there are 6 Tempus projects that are active (the results for 2013 – 5 projects have been shortlisted) and 3 World Bank projects. All refer to capacity building of internal and external quality assurance, development of master's programme in higher education administration, university-market cooperation units, training of 400 IQA staff members, pilot institutional accreditation.

As the results demonstrate the trainings have had a positive impact on the ANQA staff and were generally useful (73%). Consequently, the trained staff gained competencies in managing an external review procedure, production of report, internal quality assurance of HEIs. Such key documents as ANQA Accreditation Manual, Criteria and Standards on Institutional and Academic Programme accreditation and accreditation procedure have been reviewed by international experts and drawing on the feedback those documents were redeveloped.

Further, to ensure ANQA approaches meet ENQA standards and guidelines on external quality assurance and EQA agencies, within the frames of "ENQA-GIQAC project - consultancy visits to Central Asia/Eastern Europe" in February 2012 an ENQA expert had a review of ANQA documentation and structure against compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), in particular regarding independency from the Armenian government, higher education institutions (HEI) and third parties, as well as transparency.

The documents reviewed were:

- Charter of the foundation (appendix to RA Government decree No. 1486N)(see Annex 3),
- Statute on State Accreditation of Tertiary Level Institutions and Academic Programmes (appendix RA Government Decree N978-N) (see Annex 10),
- Procedure on ANQA Accreditation Committee Formation and Operationalization (draft), and the
- Organigram (draft)

Overall, the review results were encouraging and the points that hindered ANQA's independence, the ANQA Board of Trustees President's role and the decision-making about accreditation in particular. The feedback of the ENQA expert was discussed with some members of the Board of Trustees and steps have been taken to strengthen independency of ANQA.

Within the frames of World Bank projects, capacity building of both ANQA staff and the quality assurance staff of the HEIs has been undertaken. The projects are:

- Armenian Quality Assurance Technical Assistance Project (ARQATA) under the coordination of the Dutch Flemish Accreditation Agency (NVAO). The project aims at building on the capacity of HEIs and ANQA as well as prepare ANQA for the recognition by ENQA. Within the frames of the project a series of workshops, trainings, study tours and conferences have been organized (for more details see the website <http://www.anqa.am/arqata/>). One of the major achievements was the feedback provided by the NVAO, represented by Karl Dietrich, to the ANQA Board of Trustees on the formation and operationalization of the Accreditation Committee to ensure independency of ANQA decision-making.
- Capacity Building for the HEI IQA Staff Members, coordinated by ANQA. Within the frames of the project, 400 staff members from the HEIs are to be trained. ANQA designed a three-round training: two rounds for three days and a five-day coaching on-site. The topic for the first round of training is on Establishment and Operationalization of Internal Quality Assurance. The topic for the second round is on Self-Assessment: methods and methodology. During the five coaching days the trainees are supposed to work with the HEIs staff on-site, providing guidance. The first two phases are completed and the third phase is to be launched in September 2013 (see Annex 20).
- Pilot accreditation of HEIs. The effectiveness of the pilot accreditation procedures was measured via the following two tools
 - a survey addressed to the HEI representatives regarding the effectiveness of the site-visits in general and experts' contribution in particular. The survey is run at two different levels: institutional accreditation and programme accreditation. For the institutional accreditation the effectiveness is evaluated quite positively with only one of the components being evaluated lower than the others. The latter refers to the question related to the skills of the peer-reviewers to reveal the necessary information for evaluation. In this case 65% of the respondents evaluated the skills positively while the rest of the questions were evaluated over 85% .As for the programme level, overall the satisfaction rate was over 88% for all the questions (see Annex16).
 - an internal report of the ANQA coordinator on the procedure in general and expert and HEI communication quality in particular. The report also elaborates on the performance of individual experts. Overall, the coordinators of the procedures are satisfied with the results: the procedures are consistent. The only drawback was encountered during review of the HEIs resources and open meetings with the staff. With the latter, neither staff members nor students were willing to attend them on a private basis. This alerts ANQA for making respective changes in a site-visit timetable, which because of some cultural peculiarities, turn to be not effective (see Annex 28).

As for the Tempus projects, DIUS (Development and Implementation of University Self-Assessment Systems) was aimed at establishment of internal quality assurance systems at 8 HEIs in Armenia, both in capital and in the regions. As a result, the HEIs in the project established and fully equipped their internal quality assurance units as well as had intensive capacity building – all in line with the ANQA quality assurance policies and procedures. As a culmination of the project, the universities conducted the first round of self-assessment (for more detail see the website <http://www.dius-project.org/ru>).

PICQA (Promotion of Internationalization and Comparability of Quality Assurance in Armenia and Georgia) was aimed at establishment/revision of the necessary document base for external quality assurance in each partner country. Within the frames of the project ANQA quality assurance policies and procedures were evaluated against the ENQA ESG standards and refinement of the developments followed. Further, one university from Armenia, State University of Engineering in Armenia (SEUA) is currently undergoing programme accreditation, which is conducted jointly by ANQA and ASIIN Consult GmbH by applying joint criteria and standards (for more detail see the website <http://www.picqa.org/en/Default.aspx>).

The Tempus project MAHATMA, considering the need for professionals in the field, was specially designed to solve the issue of capacity building in the sphere of educational management in general and quality assurance in particular. Currently, the project is run by an Armenian grant holding institution under the guidance of ANQA. Within the frames a new Master's programme in Higher Education Management is developed and piloted with 4 Armenian and 4 Georgian Universities (for more detail see the website <http://www.mahatma.am/>).

ARARAT, is aimed at promoting establishment of ties between the labor market and HEIs. The major objective is to promote relevance of the academic programmes in Armenia through developing a database that would constantly inform the universities about the developments in the market. Within the frames a university-labor market cooperation agency will be established at the national level and it will be supported by a strong network of university-market units established at partner institutions. This is a national project with the national grantholder – Armenian State University of Economics – guided by the ANQA staff (for more detail see the website <http://ararattempus.org/>).

HEN-GEAR is aimed at promoting employability of the graduates. Through establishing a database that would allow promotion of the graduates in the labor market, the project aims to establish a network that would be similar to the Alma Laurea network that is operationalized in Italy. ANQA has a consultancy role in the project (for more detail see the website <http://www.hen-gear.net/>).

INARM is aimed at development and operationalization of sectorial qualifications frameworks in Informatics and Management. This is an international project with involvement of Russian, Ukrainian as well as EU partners. ANQA has an

active advisory role in the consortium (for more detail see the website <http://inarm.uni-koblenz.de/>).

Thus, for the period under evaluation ANQA has met most of its targets. In particular, all the ANQA staff members have undergone intensive capacity building within DIUS, PICQA and ARQATA projects. Currently, the other Tempus projects are also providing capacity building for the ANQA staff as well.

Overall, the projects are successful and have a capacity building impact, the aim they were developed for.

As for the establishment of the pool for international experts, a special procedure for expert pool formation has been worked out. Thus, a letter of request for international experts was sent to different international organizations and agencies. Drawing on the list of experts obtained from the feedback the primary expert pool was formed and all the accreditation procedures were conducted with participation of international experts from the pool. Currently, there are 30 international experts in the ANQA pool.

Next, the programme is also responsible for organization of biennial conferences and fora at national level with participation of international experts. Thus, throughout the last four years two biennial conferences (2010, 2012) (see Annex 19) and two biennial fora (2009, 2013) have been organized (see Annex 18). The average participation rate at the conference was about 250, 15 out of which were international experts. The conferences and forums targeted promotion of an active dialogue on internal and external quality assurance developments in Armenian higher education.

Last, but not least, ANQA has been actively involved in quality assurance at international level. ANQA has established broad collaboration ties with the international QA organizations and networks (INQAAHE, ENQA, EUA) and QA agencies at international level for experience exchange and learning from peers. Thus, ANQA has been involved in ENQA work groups on LLL and Quality Assurance Agency staff capacity building. Besides, ANQA has participated in international conferences and forums with its contributions.

Overall, the international affairs undertaken by ANQA have been successful in building on the capacity of ANQA as well as the HE system in Armenia.

5. Analysis of the external quality assurance system in Armenia against the ESGs 2

ESG 2.1: Use of internal quality assurance procedure:

External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

The external quality assurance framework adopted by Armenian tertiary education underpins mandatory institutional accreditation and voluntary academic programme accreditation. Thus, ANQA policies and procedures for external evaluation underpin an external review, which is based on self-evaluation conducted by the HEIs. Besides, as outlined in ANQA Quality Assurance Manual, both institutional and academic programme accreditation criteria and standards (criterion 10 for institutional and criterion 7 at academic programme level) look at internal policies and procedures for quality assurance adopted by institutions and academic programmes and their evaluation looks at the extent to which the criteria and standards are met.

ESG 2.2: Development of external quality assurance processes:

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

Being established in 2008, ANQA started development of the aims and objectives of external quality assurance processes as well as the processes per se with full consultation and involvement of all stakeholders. The involvement of stakeholders was ensured in multiple ways:

- through organizing focus groups and discussions with HEIs and students about the aims and objectives of quality assurance
- through discussions with the RA Government, round table discussions with HEIs, students and employers
- through circulating the drafts of quality assurance framework, accreditation criteria, standards and procedures among the stakeholders for feedback
- through piloting the newly developed criteria, standards and procedures at institutional and academic programme levels.

The discussions and focus groups helped to define the needs of the system, set the aims and the objectives. Thus, unanimously it was agreed that the system did need to move towards enhancement rather than control.

Next, development of the quality assurance framework was developed in full consultation with the stakeholders. Drawing on the QA framework the criteria, standards and procedures were developed, circulated among the stakeholders for the feedback, revised and adopted by the RA Government on the 30th of June 2011. Prior to adoption a series of pilots of both institutional and academic programme criteria, standards and procedures was undertaken to ensure legitimacy of the adopted framework and acceptability by the stakeholders.

Further, significant changes in the legal acts of the foundation were made last year based on the stakeholders' feedback. In 2011 the draft with changes and amendments in the accreditation statute was developed and refined in full consultation with the stakeholders: tertiary level institutions, ANQA coordinators, experts (both local and international), and MoES. Changes to the ANQA accreditation policies, procedures, criteria and standards were also made

drawing on the pilot accreditation procedures conducted by ANQA. As one of the major results of changes inclusion of “conditional accreditation” was made. According to the December 15th 2011 N 1907-N decree respective changes were made in the accreditation statute.

On November the 23rd, based on the 14.1/{97088} decree of ANQA Board of Trustees the “Accreditation committee composition and operation procedure”, “The experts’ panel composition procedure” as well as Accreditation Manual were approved (see Annex 29 the protocol of the meeting).

The Statute of Accreditation committee was also refined with full involvement of stakeholders. In the Statute of Accreditation committee some changes were made and accordingly the number of members, the decision making process and the regulation of electing the president were changed (see attached the Heinz Ulrich Schmidt’s report). In 2012 the draft of the changes in ANQA Charter and Accreditation Statute was prepared, which was aimed at ensuring ANQA’s effective functioning and independence. In 2013 the changes were approved by the ANQA Board of Trustees.

ESG 2.3: Criteria for decisions:

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

The RA Criteria and Standards as well as Procedures for institutional and programme accreditation were officially adopted on the 30th of June 2011 and are publicly available on the ANQA web-site as well as are disseminated to the tertiary level institutions via publications (see http://www.anqa.am/am/Portals/0/ANQA_manual_ARM.pdf). Adoption of the document allowed for consistent application of institutional and academic programme accreditation criteria and standards as well as procedures. Thus far, 20 institutional and 12 academic programme pilot accreditations have taken place according to the published criteria, standards and procedures (see Annex 27_ the list of all the procedures).

Further, to check for the consistency and reliability of the adopted approaches, ANQA has set up its internal quality assurance, which constantly evaluates ANQA procedures. As outlined in ANQA internal QA protocol for institutional and academic programme accreditation, the tools that are to measure consistency and reliability of ANQA approaches evolve around questionnaires addressed to the tertiary institution staff/students/administration, written feedback from ANQA coordinators and ANQA experts (local and international). The results show that the criteria and standards are applied consistently across all the institutions and programmes under review. As for the procedure, apart from minor deviations prompted by some specific situational conditions, the published procedure has been adhered to.

As for the interpretation of the criteria and standards, ANQA has undertaken the following steps: orientation of the tertiary institutions, orientation of the expert panel members, and training of the expert panel members. Thus, once a contract for accreditation is signed between the institution and ANQA, orientation meetings with the top management of the institution under review as well as the self-assessment team are organized. During the meetings a detailed interpretation with in-depth discussion of each standard is undertaken. Next, once the expert team is set up the same orientation is organized for the expert panel members that are new to ANQA procedures. For the peer reviewers that are new to the process special trainings are organized.

The decision on any accreditation procedure is based on the conclusions of the peer reviewers' final report, which is drawn on evidences and facts registered during the desk-review and site-visits.

ESG 2.4: Processes fit for purpose:

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

The aims and objectives set for the quality assurance processes are in line with ANQA's mission and evolve around

- provisions of systematic enhancement of tertiary level education
- promotion of Armenian higher education visibility and recognition at international level.

Thus, ANQA has taken care to ensure the quality assurance processes are fit for the purpose whether it refers to the profile and qualifications of experts (local and international) invited to evaluate an institution or a subject area in question. In each case the profile of the institution and the programme as well as the orientation of the evaluation is considered while recruiting experts. Special attention is attached to inviting experts that complement each other with qualifications. To ensure students' views are considered in the evaluation the expert panel includes one student representative.

Next, to ensure new wave of approaches are introduced through recommendations as well as the visibility of the Armenian HE is guaranteed each expert panel has one or two international experts and the review as well as the reports are produced in two languages (English and Armenian).

As for the procedure, as stipulated in ANQA Accreditation manual, a standard approach of a self-evaluation undertaken by the institution or programme under review, desk-review of the self-evaluation report by the expert panel, site visit, production of a draft and final report as well as a follow-up measure is envisioned.

ESG 2.5: Reporting:

Reports should be published and should be written in a style, which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or

recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

According to the accreditation procedure adopted by the RA Government the reports produced by the expert panels are made publicly available through the web-sites of the ANQA and universities as well as publications. With regards to the writing style, steps are undertaken to make it comprehensive. However, a mechanism to check for the effectiveness and readability of the report is still to be developed.

In general, the structure of a final report produced by the expert panel consists of a descriptive part to enable the reader to understand the context and the purpose of the review as well as expert evaluation of an institution/programme against ANQA criteria based on which the decisions were made. The report also includes the following sections: findings, judgments, considerations, and recommendations (see Annex 12).

ESG 2.6: Follow-up procedures:

Quality assurance processes, which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure, which is implemented consistently.

The accreditation procedure adopted by the system also stipulates follow-up activities based on the recommendations in the final report produced by the experts. Thus, depending on the recommendation types, the follow up process can take place within the next six months after the review or within the next two years after the review. To effectively manage the follow-up, based on the final report sent to the institution, a detailed plan of improvement should be submitted by the HEI to ANQA within two months.

Since the process is still new and Accreditation Committee is still in the phase of establishment, no decision-making on accreditation has been taken. Consequently, no cases of follow up have been registered yet to discuss the effectiveness and impact.

ESG 2.7: Periodic reviews:

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

According to the policies outlined in the ANQA Accreditation Manual institutional accreditations have a cyclical nature and take place every six years and programme accreditations take place every five years.

ANQA is currently conducting the first phase of accreditation (both institutional and programme), which is to be completed by 2016.

ESG 2.8: System-wide analyses:

Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analyzing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments, etc.

ANQA is in its fifth year of functioning and during the year 2011-2012 it conducted its first system-wide analysis. Considering the main and mandatory instrument for quality assurance of HEIs and programmes is institutional accreditation, the first system-wide analysis focused on the extent to which internal quality assurance systems were installed at tertiary level institutions, the governance and management of institutions as well as ANQA's impact on the formation of the quality assurance in Armenian HE. The analysis is considered to be a development element necessary to further enhance ANQA approaches to quality assurance in particular and enhancement of the tertiary education system in general. The analysis was made publicly available in autumn 2012 (see Annex 13).

6. Analysis of the external quality assurance agency's functioning against the ESGs 3

ESG 3.1: Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education

The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

The ESGs 2 are considered in ANQA policies for external quality assurance. ANQA criteria, standards and procedures underpin the use of internal quality assurance systems that are extant at institutions. The ANQA procedures evolve around self-evaluation conducted by tertiary institutions, desk-review, site-visits, report production by expert panels, decision-making and follow-up. Further, the accreditation procedures carry a cyclical nature and there is broad involvement of stakeholders in the development and implementation of QA criteria, standards and procedures. The first system-wide analysis that focuses on the establishment of IQA and EQA in Armenia was produced in 2012 and is publicly available. The recommendations contained in it are introduced to the RA Government.

However, at implementation level, due to such external factors as delay with the establishment of ANQA Accreditation Committee, no decision-making for the pilot accreditations has been carried out, consequently, no follow up has been initiated so far.

ESG 3.2: Official status

Agencies should be formally recognized by competent public authorities in the

European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

The National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA) was established on November 7, 2008 under the Government Decree (No. 1486N), thus it complies with the legislative jurisdictions of Armenia. ANQA is the primary provider of quality assurance services for the Armenian tertiary education.

It is three years that ANQA has been conducting external quality assurance procedures (see Annex 27- the list of the procedures) and thus is getting ready for the official review against the ESG to ensure its recognition at European level and consequently at international level.

ESG 3.3: Activities

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

The RA quality assurance framework underpins the following two mechanisms:

- Mandatory institutional accreditation for public and private institutions. The institutional accreditation is done on a cyclical basis each six years.
- Academic programme accreditation on voluntary basis and positive institutional accreditation is a prerequisite for its application. Academic programme accreditation is done on cyclical basis every five years.

So far, 20 institutional and 12 academic programme accreditation procedures have been undertaken and the analysis below is based on the survey results of those procedures. To evaluate the effectiveness of accreditation procedures, ANQA developed questionnaires, which are run during and after site visits and aim at revealing effectiveness of the procedures. The questionnaires are addressed to teaching staff, deans, vice-deans, chair holders, students, administrative staff, quality assurance officers and self-assessment teams of the tertiary level institutions. As the results demonstrate universities are mainly satisfied with the ANQA accreditation procedures and activities. The performance of the experts' panel is highly valuable. Particularly, to the question regarding the quality of the experts' performance, the responses are as follows:

- 89.2% of the respondents mentioned that during the site-visits the experts were able to identify the participants' opinion and perceptions on the most important issues,
- 97% of the respondents mentioned that participants of the meetings were free to express their opinions,
- 94.6% of the respondents mentioned that the questions asked by the experts were clearly and correctly formulated,
- 96.6% of the respondents mentioned that the experts had proper style to deliver and get information,

- 88.8% of the respondents mentioned that the experts created such an environment that made it possible to carry out in-depth discussions and to discover their strengths and weaknesses.

Overall, the results provide with good enough a background to state that ANQA accreditation procedures are carried out in line with the publicly available criteria and procedures and effectively promote establishment of the IQA systems in TLIs.

As for the regularity, the first accreditation is due in 2016 and afterwards a new cycle with institutional and programme accreditations will start.

ESG 3.4: Resources

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organize and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

ANQA is governed by its Board of Trustees, which consists of 11 members. The Prime Minister of RA is the President of the Board and it represents ANQA main stakeholders:

- 1 representative from the Ministry of Education and Science,
- 4 teachers from state and private tertiary education institutions,
- 1 student from state or private tertiary education institution,
- 1 representative from the Union of Employers of Armenia,
- 1 representative from the Union of Banks of Armenia,
- 1 representative from the “Luys” foundation,
- 1 representative from the National Competitiveness Foundation of Armenia.

The Board of Trustees approves the strategic plan, organizational structure, payroll (see Annex 14) and budget of ANQA (see Annex 15) as well as controls its financial activities. The Board of Trustees elects the director of the foundation, who is responsible for the management of external quality assurance.

Another important body is ANQA Accreditation Committee – the main decision-making body on accreditation procedures. It was established in April 2013 and consists of 9 members: teachers, employers and a student. Its functions are defined in the ANQA Accreditation Committee Statute.

The ANQA staff consists of 23 employees. According to the organizational structure, ANQA has a unit for research and development, a unit that organizes accreditation procedures, a secretariat and support staff. The secretariat handles both the activities of the ANQA Accreditation Committee as well as of ANQA itself. Out of 23 employees, 6 are procedure coordinators and can manage 7 procedures per year. Thus, there is enough capacity to manage 42 procedures per year, a figure that is slightly lower than the one mentioned in ANQA targets for management and leadership (see Annex 9: protocol for Leadership and Management). This figure is to be raised to 50 procedures per year, which is

considered to be enough to handle both institutional and programme accreditations for each respective cycle.

Considering quality assurance is a new sphere of business in Armenia, recruitment of competent staff has been a challenge for ANQA. Thus, since its inception ANQA has taken professionalization of its staff seriously and efforts have been made to organize local and international professional development courses for the staff. With the aim local and international trainings have been sought and ANQA has initiated international grants to promote its staff professionalization (see above for the more details on the international projects and ANQA staff development). Thus, although its entire staff has been trained both locally and internationally further investments are required with this regards.

At regulatory level, there is no defined recruitment policy and procedure according to which ANQA would hire and fire its staff. Apart from the probation period and a set of responsibilities outlined in the contract, there is no set policy and procedure on the induction and promotion of the new staff. However, some traditions have been formed, which will be included into the policies and procedures to be built: all new staff first participates in the site-visits and peer-reviewers' meetings as observers and minute takers; next the most active ones are hired for a probation period of three months after which they are hired for a position. Once hired, the new staff first acts as a junior coordinator (learning through doing) for an accreditation procedure under supervision of a senior coordinator during which mentoring takes place. There is also an opportunity for the new graduates to volunteer for a period of two month to better understand the fitness of their career aspirations with the ANQA mission. A prerequisite for the newly hired staff is fluency of the English language since ANQA reports are produced both in English and in Armenian.

Professional development of ANQA takes place at different levels: (1) participation in the local and international trainings and study tours; (2) advising and consultation by the ANQA senior staff members; (3) participation in the site visits and discussion held at different tertiary level institutions.

At financial level, ANQA functioning is funded by a separate budget line by the Armenian Government as well as gets additional funding from the World Bank projects and Tempus projects. As for the funding of the accreditation procedures, the tertiary level institutions pay fees for each procedure to fund the work of the expert panels and related expenses (travel costs, costs of stay).

One of the quality areas of the ANQA internal quality assurance is human resource management, which aims to establish a collaborative and productive working ethos for staff members. Thus, periodic surveys are conducted to find out staff satisfaction with the working ethos. The results of the surveys demonstrate that the staff (60% in 2012 and 54,5% in 2013 of the staff participated in the surveys) is mainly satisfied with the working ethos. The survey explores the following factors: resources, opportunities, etc. The vast majority (78.6% in 2012 and 100% 2013) of the respondents mentioned, that

they were provided with necessary conditions and resources to implement their working responsibilities. The 62.5 % of respondents in 2012 and 72.7% of respondents in 2013 mentioned that they have the opportunity to contribute to the ANQA's mission according to their capacities. The most frequent negative answers were as follows: the tasks were not clear, and they are not paid appropriate to the job they do, which is a common case with newly emerging organizations. Further, 78.6% of respondents in 2012 and 100% in 2013 think, that the director and/or immediate supervisor care about them. Further, with regards to professional development, majority of respondents (34.8% in 2012 and 45.5% in 2013) mentioned that the management encouraged their professional development, 17.4% in 2012 and 45.5% in 2013- mentioned that individual initiatives and career development were encouraged, and only 13% in 2012 and only 9% in 2013 mentioned, that individual initiatives were not encouraged.

As for considering the opinions of the employees in different organizational matters, 57.14% in 2012 and 91% of respondents in 2013 thought, that the management considered their opinions. Overall, as the development trend shows there is a tangible improvement in the management throughout the last two years due to the in-depth analysis that the quality teams are producing (see Annex 21).

Regarding physical resources, ANQA occupies two floors in a building allocated to it by the Government. It has necessary space for organizing all its activities. All the rooms are well-equipped and have all the necessary facilities to effectively organize the day to day activities. To assess the satisfaction of employees with the information technologies two surveys were implemented in 2012 and 2013: ANQA internal process automation system – Docflow effectiveness survey, (58.82% in 2012 and 100% in 2013 of ANQA staff participated) and Information Technology software and equipment effectiveness (60% in 2012 and 100% in 2013 of ANQA staff participated). Mainly the quality and quantity of computer hardware and software necessary to function efficiently and effectively showed that 100% of the employees were satisfied with the speed of the computer hardware and software necessary to perform their jobs. IT staff support was evaluated 87.5% positive. The 81.82% were satisfied with the Docflow system. Next, ANQA internal process automation system - Docflow survey showed that 70% of staff members in 2012 and 88% in 2013 were satisfied with the information in the Docflow and 30% of the staff in 2012 and 12% in 2013 responded negatively stating that the information provided in the Docflow system was not updated regularly (see Annexes 22; 23). Last, but not least, policies and procedures for appropriate information retrieval and usage and security for all hardware and software has been developed - the “ANQA data and information adoption and maintenance policy project” but not yet implemented.

As for the resources in general, in 2013, 83.3% of the staff evaluated them as positive. Overall, the satisfaction rate with the ANQA resources demonstrate the necessary technical and physical capacity for ANQA to organize and run its external quality assurance procedures (see Annex 24).

ESG 3.5: Mission statement

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

ANQA is a quality assurance agency independent of the RA Government and Tertiary Level Institutions. It has a clear mission and explicit goals that are publicly available on its web-site and respective publications (www.anqa.am).

ANQA's mission:

ANQA strives to promote public trust, social cohesion, equity, responsibility and competitiveness through systematic enhancement of tertiary level education provisions.

It will do so by

- being receptive to the needs of the national stakeholders through its mandatory institutional audits and voluntary programme accreditation
- complying with international standards for quality assurance
- ensuring visibility at international level thus contributing to a stronger positioning of the Armenian tertiary education at European level
- valuing close cooperation with stakeholders in the process of developing a quality assurance system.

ESG 3.6: Independence

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

Independence is seen as two-fold: (1) independence of the agency from the Ministries, tertiary level institutions and third parties; (2) independence of decision-making on accreditation. As for the independence of the agency, ANQA is a foundation independent from tertiary level institutions, the Ministry of Education and Science and third parties. Although its Board of Trustees is presided by the Prime Minister such kind of arrangement is prerequisite for ANQA's success as well as success of external quality assurance since in a culture where for more than 70 years a central political control was at the heart no independent agency that is not related to the government in one way or the other would be taken seriously by TLIs and none of the TLIs would follow the agency as an external quality assurance authority. However, once the first cycle of accreditation is over and there is enough authority for ANQA to move on independently the Prime Minister will step back from that position. Further, drawing on ENQA expert's advice respective changes were made in ANQA

Charter, which states that the president of the ANQA Board of Trustees should be elected from the Board members.

As for the independency of decision-making, each ANQA accreditation procedure starts and ends with the decisions of ANQA Accreditation Committee, which is an independent body. All the decisions taken by the Accreditation Committee are based on the conclusions of peer-reviewer panels, which are established from the ANQA database of experts. Consideration of conflict of interests is at heart of the selection of experts.

ESG 3.7: External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies

The processes, criteria and procedures used by the agencies should be predefined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:

- A self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
- An external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
- Publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
- A follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

Armenian national quality assurance framework underpins two major mechanisms: institutional accreditation as a mandatory process and academic programme accreditation as a voluntary one. Institutional accreditation is a prerequisite for the programme accreditation. The institutional and academic programme accreditation criteria, standards and procedures were adopted by the RA Government on the 30th of June, 2011 and are publicly available.

ANQA accreditation procedures, institutional and academic programme, evolve around three consecutive phases:

- First phase: self-assessment conducted by the educational institution;
- Second Phase: desk-review and site-visit carried out by an independent external expert panel. ANQA expert panels include three local experts, one international expert, and one student. The panel is led by the ANQA coordinator;
- Third phase: production of the final report by the expert panel and decision-making by ANQA Accreditation Committee.
- Fourth phase: a follow up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

Unfortunately, up to now no follow up procedure has been taken since the Accreditation Committee was established in April 2013 and no decision-making on accreditation has been made so far.

ESG 3.8: Accountability procedures

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

ANQA's accountability procedures are two-fold: (1) the annual reports that are presented to the Board of Trustees and are made publicly available through different media and (2) its internal quality assurance reports.

ANQA considers its internal quality assurance as one of the major accountability elements. Thus, ANQA has developed a system of its internal quality assurance. From the outset it had a thematic rather than a structural approach. Later the further developments led ANQA to focus on structuring its IQA system. The ANQA has developed internal quality assurance system that:

- evaluates the organization and its ongoing activities,
- facilitates the evaluation of results and clearly plans the follow-up and improvement process (according to the PDCA cycle),
- is transparent and simple through the application of different tools,
- provides the basis for the external evaluation efficiency by the adoption of international standards in the development of the internal quality assurance system,
- stimulates involvement of all staff members, as well as guarantees the involvement of all stakeholders.

One of aims of ANQA internal quality assurance is to create a system that will provide appropriate policy and procedures regarding the ANQA internal quality assurance process, and to have these processes visible to the Armenian society and those at international level to ensure accountability. ANQA distinguishes 11 quality areas within the internal quality assurance system:

- Leadership and management
- Financial management
- Institutional and programme accreditations
- Legal affairs
- Human Resources Management
- Accreditation committee,
- International affairs
- Internal quality assurance
- Secretariat
- Information technologies
- Resources.

For each quality-area, strategic goals and targets are formulated on a one-year basis. A quality assurance working-group is established to assure accountability related to the activities of each quality process. The group consists of coordinators of all quality processes. The quality assurance working group is

responsible for the coordination of performance appraisal activities. The roles in the working group and their responsibilities for each quality area are clearly defined.

Each quality-area working group collects data on ANQA performance systematically. The quality coordinator of the specific quality area prepares the evaluations.

The evaluation of the content and organization of the internal quality assurance proceeds as follows: through periodic meetings of the Internal Quality Assurance Working Group, both the quality assurance issues on each quality area, and issues concerning the ANQA's general quality assurance activities are discussed.

Based on the results of the conducted surveys, it could be noted, that the meetings of the Quality Assurance Working group are effective. The surveys conducted among the QA working groups throughout the last two years demonstrate improvement of IQA activities as well as their positive impact on the staff development and overall management. If the discussions and debates held in the meetings throughout year 2012 demonstrated contribution of IQA to the development of problem solving capacity among 50% of the respondents in 2013 this figure came to 75%. For planning and decision making capacities the figure of 37.5% in 2012 raised to 87.5% in 2013. As for the capacity building, in 2012 25% of the ANQA staff felt that their participation in the QA working groups contributed to their professional development and 25% felt the same for individual development and, in 2013, these figures came to 75% and 62.5% respectively (see Annex 17).

As for the external quality assurance, mainly the tools evolve around feedback about the effectiveness of the expert panel functioning and ANQA organization of the procedures from the HEIs that have undergone the accreditation procedure. Mainly, the HEIs are satisfied with the organization of the procedures by ANQA. As for the quality of performance of the expert panel, the universities that have participated in the pilots expressed their satisfaction (above 80%). For the institutional accreditation the effectiveness is evaluated quite positively with only one of the components being evaluated lower than the others. The latter refers to the question related to the skills of the peer-reviewers to reveal the necessary information for evaluation. In this case 65% of the respondents evaluated the skills positively while the rest of the questions were evaluated over 85%. As for the programme level, overall the satisfaction rate was over 88% for all the questions (see Annex16).

Another accountability element is ANQA's annual reports, in which both operational and financial outcomes and outputs are presented.

All the reports produced by ANQA are publicly available through different media.

7. Strengths and weaknesses of the quality assurance system

Strengths:

- Independent agency and independent decision-making. Drawing on EQA expert advice respective changes were made in ANQA Charter, which now underpins election of the president rather than Prime Minister being the president of the Board of Trustees ex officio.
- Publicly available criteria and procedures
- Involvement of international experts in the expert panels
- Involvement of students in the expert panel, Board of Trustees and Accreditation Committee
- International grants promote capacity building and recognition of international good practice through participation of the national experts in projects: World Bank, Tempus, Twinning
- Proactive involvement in international projects, activities and networks: ENQA Affiliate and INQAAHE full member
- Motivation of the HEIs and ANQA staff to establish quality culture
- ANQA is a respected player tertiary education with substantial impact on quality assurance formation.
- ANQA's initiating role in the evaluation and development of the accreditation system is just an example of its critical, self-reflecting, flexible, cooperative and transparent way of functioning, which have all contributed to the respect for ANQA in the eyes of all stakeholders.
- Since 2008 ANQA has completed a large number of additional tasks. In completing these tasks ANQA showed not only its flexibility, but it also rapidly augmented its expertise in the field of quality assurance in tertiary education.
- ANQA, new developments in quality assurance are recognized, evaluated and transferred to the quality assurance framework in the RA.
- ANQA communicates and cooperates regularly in an open and transparent way with all stakeholders by organizing or participating in conferences, trainings, round-table discussion and workshops.
- New developments and instruments are always piloted prior to actual implementation to ensure legitimacy of approaches.

Weaknesses:

- The quality circle is not round:
 - No decision-making on accreditation so far
 - No follow up has been organized so far
- Staff professionalization is tangible
- Newly developing culture of peer review. Lack of expert capacity.
- Fragmentation of the overall higher education system hinders smooth flow of QA developments:
 - ANQA is faced with a challenge to solve the issues that are beyond its competencies (student assessment, ECTS development, academic programme development and the like).

