'NATIONAL CENTRE FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE'
FOUNDATION

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ANQA

EXPERT PANEL REPORT
INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION OF
SHIRAK STATE UNIVERSITY AFTER MIKAYEL NALBANDYAN

Yerevan – 2024

INTRODUCTION

The institutional reaccreditation of Shirak State University After Mikayel Nalbandyan (hereinafter 'ShSU' or 'TLI') is carried out based on the application of the education institution.

The process of institutional accreditation was organised and coordinated by the 'National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance' Foundation (hereinafter 'ANQA'). ANQA was guided by the Regulation on 'State Accreditation of RA Education Institutions and Their Academic Programmes' set by the RA Government Decree N978-N, dated June 30, 2011, as well as the Decree N959-N, dated June 30, 2011, on 'Approval of RA Standards for Professional Education Accreditation'.

The expertise was carried out by the independent expert panel formed in accordance with the requirements set by the ANQA Regulation on 'Formation of the Expert Panel'. The expert panel consisted of 4 local experts and 1 international expert.

Institutional accreditation is aimed not only at external quality assurance, but also at the continuous improvement of the quality of management and academic programmes. Therefore, local and international experts had two tasks:

1. To carry out institutional capacity assessment in accordance with the RA state accreditation criteria;

2. In order to improve the quality, to carry out an expert assessment in terms of compliance with international developments and integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The report contains the results of the UTM institutional capacity assessment according to the RA tertiary education accreditation criteria and international expert's peer review for EHEA integration.

CONTENTS

The expert evaluation of the institutional capabilities of the Shirak State University named after M. Nalbandian was carried out by the independent expert panel formed in accordance with the requirements set by the ANQA Regulation on 'Formation of the Expert Panel'. The evaluation was carried out according to 10 accreditation criteria set by the RA Government Decree N959-N, dated June 30, 2011.

While carrying out the evaluation, the expert panel took into account that being a higher education institution that implements APs at the 6th, 7th, 8th levels of the RA NQF, the university's activities are focused on the region (in particular, Shirak Marz, Javakhk), aimed at meeting the needs of sport and culture, training qualified and competitive specialists through the implementation of APs and scientific research in line with the requirements of the changing external environment and the RA labour market.

ShSU aims to be a competitive institution in the Republic, which prepares high-quality professionals meeting the requirements of the time, combining traditional and modern teaching methods and innovative educational technologies. In all spheres of its activity, the TLI emphasises the existence of a continuous learning environment and the need for the continuous development of a quality culture.

The expert panel also took into account that the university went through the institutional accreditation process for the second time in 2022, as a result of which the university was granted institutional accreditation for a period of 2 years. ShSU, based on the deficiencies mentioned in the expert report and recommendations, made a follow-up plan and schedule. The previous accreditation issues were reflected in the new ShSU SDP (2023-2027) approved on November 13, 2022 by the Board of Trustees of the Foundation.

After the previous accreditation and as a result of the approval of the new ShSU SDP (2023-2027), many organisational, programme and content areas were reviewed and changed. Thus, the university implemented a significant organising structural change, as a result of which structures responsible for strategic goals were formed: centres. Structural changes have been applied to almost all departments, at the same time, their goals and tasks, functions, scope of responsibility have been clarified. Adopting a new management approach to the college and school operating within the Foundation, the directions for the development of these structures have been left out of the SDP.

Referring to the operation of the governance system, the expert panel considers it worrisome that the university still does not provide adequate financial resources for the realisation of its goals, the existing indicators are unclear, and the mechanisms for monitoring the plans are not yet applicable. From the point of view of the effectiveness of the governance system, the TLI needs to apply the data collected by the quality assurance system. Taking into account that the university is in the period of active changes, the expert panel emphasises the continuous monitoring of the implemented improvements, the implementation of improvements based on the needs of the beneficiaries, which will significantly contribute to the increase of management efficiency and the sustainable long-term development of ShSU.

It is important to note that among the internal stakeholders of the university, the awareness of the formation of the quality assurance (QA) culture of education is visible. The objectives and functions of the internal QA structure are specified. However, the QA Department is still not able to obtain full

analytical data and present them as a basis for making managerial decisions, which causes problems for process planning or when evaluating what is planned. ShSU needs to continuously develop the indicators for the evaluation of planning results, the analytical component of the accountability system. Although the QA structure's policies and existing tools support the implementation of the university's mission, the education institution has work to do to adequately represent the quality culture goals among all stakeholders, emphasising priorities, expectations and needs in order to develop managerial capabilities and culture.

Extensive work has been carried out in the direction of updating the specifications of APs. Updated packages with all existing undergraduate APs have been compiled. In the documents, among other necessary data, the goals and objectives of the programmes, assessment methods, teaching and learning methods, educational outcomes are described in accordance with the provisions of the RA NQF or SQF, taking into account the requirements of the labour market. Programme outcomes by course are mapped. Course descriptors are developed, with outcomes aligned to the AP outcomes, etc. All this can contribute to the competitiveness and recognition of APs, as well as to activate international cooperation and mobility. As a result, updated APs specifications have been implemented for all undergraduate AP majors in the 2023-2024 academic year. Master's programme reform works are planned and underway, which are expected to be completed by the beginning of the new 2024-2025 academic year. ShSU needs to evaluate the changes implemented in the direction of APs in the near future, to measure their effectiveness in order to implement improvements based on the labour market requirements.

One of the strengths of ShSU is the availability of faculty and staff with appropriate qualifications and professional experience. Highly qualified and experienced professionals work at the university, but there is an issue of rejuvenating the TS. Expert panel observations document that although in recent years the university has filled its TS with young professionals who are mostly its alumni, including employer-teachers, the policy implemented in this direction is not completely effective. Being a university with unique regional traditions, ShSU should provide additional resources to motivate professors, to carry out professional and pedagogical trainings. Additional incentives (not only financial) will also affect both the quantitative and qualitative image of the work performed by professors in the field of research, enabling the university to make its professors more presentable on international platforms, thanks to exchange programmes, international projects with the participation of the TLI.

ShSU has classroom, laboratory, library and other necessary infrastructure. Although the existing infrastructure and resources are sufficient to achieve the AP outcomes, in order to increase the quality of the APs and make them internationally competitive, the university needs to implement measures to expand, improve, and modernise the infrastructure, especially the laboratories.

ShSU still fails to provide the necessary resources for all areas of its activity, for the balanced implementation of strategic goals and the full development of planned programmes, as a result of which the solution of some problems is delayed. Considering the limited resources, in order to solve this issue, the university can also consider the possibilities of diversifying financial sources.

Given that ShSU recognises the need for change, has been able to propose a plan for the AP improvement in a short period of time, has the human potential for its implementation and organisation: faculty and staff with professional qualities, appropriate infrastructure, which it

continuously develops, and material resources, it can be concluded that the education institution ensures the credible award of qualifications.

ShSU, as a strategic goal, visibly emphasises the importance of modern and innovative scientific research. After the previous accreditation, the TLI has made visible steps in the direction of defining the policy of the university in the field of research, conducting research related to the needs of the region by students and professors. Teachers are involved in research projects, but their number is still small. The TLI has the experience of conducting an intra-university grant competition, but in the case of having great ambitions in the field of research and due to the limited resources available, they often become unrealistic. At the same time, the university's research policy can become more effective as a result of a comprehensive assessment of the research component reflected in the AP specifications and course descriptions, the research activities of professors, in the context of the research-education nexus, by studying and measuring their impact on the labour market.

In ShSU, although the process of international cooperation is regulated, these processes have mostly contributed to the replenishment of the university's resources. Through external relations and international programmes, the TLI also creates opportunities for the exchange of experience and capacity development of the TS and SS. Their effect on improvement of APs is even less. The low level of foreign language proficiency, particularly English, affects mobility indicators and in some cases is an obstacle for domestic stakeholders. ShSU has documented this issue and is taking steps to resolve it.

ShSU, in accordance with its strategic goal, implements measures to transfer knowledge and values to the public through short-term programmes, education and cultural projects, policies implemented for the purpose of professional orientation of applicants, and the involvement of students and professors in community events. The electronic platforms of the university are active, helping to increase the recognition and reputation of the education institution. It should be noted that the official website of ShSU is quite full of information, as a result of which the transparency of the institution's activities is ensured.

The strengths of the TLI are the following:
1) The strategy aimed at the development of Shirak marz, the education, cultural and social role and importance of the university for the region,
2) reflecting the needs of internal and external stakeholders in the strategic planning process,
3) improved APs based on discussions with employers,
4) presence of the TS with the necessary professional qualities to realise the goals of APs,
5) availability of educational environment, infrastructure and resources necessary to ensure the AP outcomes,
6) accountability approaches with defined mechanisms of activity transparency,
7) continuous replenishment of resources and re-equipment of infrastructure as a result of the expansion of participation in international programmes,
8) eformed system of quality assurance, which creates the basis for the spread of the quality culture, ensuring the transparency of the implemented processes and access to the stakeholders.

The weaknesses of the TLI are the following:
1) Imperfection of the quality management cycle in governance and administration processes,
2) disproportion of the distribution of financial resources for the implementation of strategic goals,

3) inactive involvement of internal and external stakeholders in decision-making processes,
4) making managerial decisions based on incomplete or not completely reliable data,
5) ineffectiveness of the policy of the generational change of the TS,
6) lack of joint APs,
7) lack of mobility programmes and limited opportunities for experience exchange,
8) low level foreign language proficiency of internal stakeholders.

Main recommendations:
Mission and Purposes

1) To promote the involvement of external stakeholders in the processes of strategy development and university vision formation.
2) To clarify the SP performance indicators by defining measurable quantitative and qualitative outcomes.

Governance and Administration

3) To promote horisontal governance collaborations, contributing to the extraction and dissemination of best practices.
4) To take steps to clarify the functions of the management system of APs and their full operation in order to increase the efficiency of the AP planning and implementation.
5) To clearly plan the financial resources to ensure the KPIs defined by the university, ensuring effective financial governance.
6) To improve the mechanisms of monitoring the long-term and short-term programmes and evaluating the effectiveness of all processes, ensuring the full implementation of the PDCA cycle.
7) To continuously assess the effectiveness of the changes being made, basing governance decisions on reliable data.

Academic Programmes

8) To regularly study the labour market and apply the results in the context of the introduction of new APs, as well as in the context of risk management of the implemented APs.
9) To improve the policy of determining and distributing credits in the APs by defining clear approaches for calculating students' classroom and extracurricular workload.
10) To monitor the application of learning and teaching methods in order to raise and spread positive experience in the TLI.
11) To expand the work carried out in the direction of the development of students' soft skills, considering the possibilities of implementing additional internships, supplementary, informal courses.
12) To refine formative assessment tools and applications, providing feedback to students to ensure their progressive professional development.
13) To introduce clear indicators for the AP assessment and, based on them, carry out targeted monitoring for the AP improvement.

Students

14) To introduce mechanisms for the involvement of MA and BA part-time students and raising awareness about the APs.

15) To take steps in the direction of increasing the role of the Student Council as a body for the protection of students' rights and involving a wider range of students in the activities being carried out.

Faculty and Staff

16) To review the mechanisms for the selection of the TS and SS and the logic of the employment contracts concluded with them to ensure the stability of the staff.

17) To expand the professional development opportunities of the TS, based on the assessment of their needs, by allocating appropriate financial resources and setting a clear schedule.

18) To promote the involvement of employer teachers in the APs to ensure that students acquire practical skills and adequate preparation for labourmarket requirements.

19) To continue to encourage the involvement of young teachers by creating favourable conditions and opportunities for them, including continuously developing the mentoring culture in the TLI.

Research and Development

20) To improve the system of performance indicators in the research field by identifying qualitative result indicators and monitor the TLI research activities accordingly.

21) To promote the participation of the ShSU teachers in international conferences and seminars in order to become aware of current research trends and to form cooperation with scientists and scientific organisations of different countries.

22) To introduce mechanisms for promoting the implementation of interdisciplinary research at intra-university and inter-university levels.

Infrastructure and Resources

23) To continuously use the opportunities of international programmes, apply for grant programmes in order to improve the infrastructure.

24) To take steps in the direction of diversification of financial income in order to form a development budget and to ensure the long-term sustainable development of the TLI.

25) To estimate the amount of resources needed for the AP implementation and base the assessment on the distribution of financial resources.

Societal Responsibility

26) To expand the possibilities of transferring knowledge to the society by diversifying the provided education services and including new groups of external stakeholders.

27) To regularise the practice of summer schools within the framework of the ShSU professional directions.

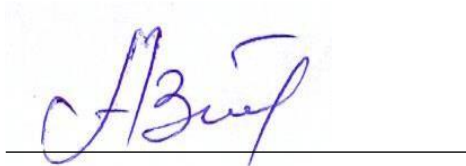### External Relations and Internationalisation

28) To take active steps to involve Master's and PhD students in international programmes to contribute to the development of the capacity of researchers and teachers.

29) To introduce joint APs with the inclusion of courses taught in a foreign language, taking into account the SP priorities.
30) To deepen the ties with the Diaspora, taking into account the existence of the research direction of Armenian conservation.
31) To organise regular foreign language courses for the purpose of increasing the level of language proficiency among students and teachers and expanding involvement in mobility programmes.

Internal Quality Assurance System

32) Using the network of the QA supporters, to work towards developing the capacity of self-assessments and peer assessments among teachers and students by organising trainings, small-scale targeted training events.
33) To improve the mechanisms for raising the needs of the TLI and collect reliable data on all the processes taking place in the university.

Armen Harutyunyan
Chair of Expert Panel

15.08.2024

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

ShSU is a small university (with approximately 2,082 students enrolled in 70 fields of study and 234 academic staff members) with a long tradition of teacher education. Most of its students reside in the Shirak region and the city of Gyurmi. Consequently, the mission of the university emphasises the importance of education for the needs of this region. According to the university's vision, education and research processes are to be integrated with the EHEA and ERA. The 2023-2027 Strategic Plan specifies internationalisation goals and objectives in each of the three main areas (education, research, and public engagement). It can be confirmed that many solutions known in other European universities have already been implemented. SUSh provides education at three EQF levels (6-8, also at level 4), learning outcomes are defined according to the NQF, benchmarking is used, ECTS credits are awarded, and a Diploma Supplement is issued. The quality assurance system (IQA) is aligned with ESG requirements to a certain extent. From an external observer's perspective, the progress made by ShSU since 2022 is evident in all areas of its work. However, there are still some discrepancies, largely attributable to state regulation rather than solely to ShSU policy.

Employability of alumni is one of the major goals of the EHEA and a key indicator for assessing the effectiveness of the university educational process. Today, European universities are expected to ensure a close match between alumni' qualifications and labour market requirements. The assessment of the ShSU from this perspective is not simple. To improve the success of alumni in the job market, the university has conducted surveys of high school students, started a work-based learning programme, and extended the duration of student placements and the practical component of the curriculum. However, there persists a mismatch between the needs of the local job market and the educational programmes offered. Only about half of the alumni surveyed have found employment, and a significant number of them are still unemployed. Enrolment in some fields of study is low, and there has been a decrease in the number of high school alumni from Shirak pursuing studies at ShSU. Additionally, the university has closed nine Bachelor's degree programmes and three Master's degree programmes over the past three years, while establishing three new ones. Master's degree programmes for part-time students have not been launched due to a lack of interest. It is also worth noting that some successful programmes from other countries, such as Computer Graphics, Information Technologies, Computer Science, and Computer Science and Applied Mathematics, have been closed at ShSU. The management attributes this to the better quality of education provided by competing institutions.

There are two main reasons why opportunities to improve the employability of ShSU alumni are limited. First, curricula do not sufficiently adapt to the changing employment trends of their alumni. An example of this is the curricula of the Faculty of English Literature and Grammar. According to the information provided, most alumni do not take up teaching jobs in schools. However, all students are obliged to complete an internship in schools. In Armenia, the primary employer is the public sector. The absence of a developed industrial and private business sector limits the number of available jobs. Consequently, the key challenge is to create new jobs. A review of the curricula reveals that the university offers few opportunities for students in this field. There is a lack of a course on how to start your own business, as well as programmes to support and facilitate start-ups (for instance, business incubators). The university should consider establishing these types of structures and seek

external funding for them. The second issue is the absence of systematic research into the needs of employers and the careers of alumni in the labour market in the long term. Consequently, the university lacks reliable data on the destinations of its alumni, the types of skills in short supply, the programmes required, and so forth. It appears that the primary factor influencing the number of new students is the results of surveys of secondary school alumni, with less influence exerted by the actual needs of the labour market.

Employers do have some input into the shaping of the curriculum as members of the affiliated methodological councils for each field of study, final certification committees, and observers of students during placements. However, as indicated by the SER and interviews conducted during the visit, their participation in these bodies is not satisfactory. The university does not offer up-and-reskilling courses for the local labour force (apart from training for employed teachers). It is of the utmost importance that the University develops a plan, in collaboration with employer representatives, to improve the situation in this area.

The traditional hierarchical organisational structure and management system, as observed in ShSU and typical of large universities, is proving ineffective in today's dynamic environment. To adapt to changing conditions, contemporary universities employ a diverse range of interdisciplinary approaches and methodologies. A review of the available documentation and discussions suggests that the faculties, and chairs operate independently of each other, with minimal collaboration. This is evidenced by the lack of interdisciplinary fields of study or research projects that bring together researchers from different disciplines. The lack of solutions to promote horisontal collaboration hinders the dissemination of good practices, which in the case of teaching remain locked in chairs' silos. Interviews revealed that some academic bodies do not work closely together and there is not always a good flow of information Some stakeholders have indicated that there has been a lack of communication and a slow response, or even a reluctance on the part of the university administration to implement the notified change proposals.

The management system of this university exhibits two characteristics that are relatively uncommon in European universities. First, the university does not guarantee tenure even for professors, as all academic staff only have one-year labour contracts. Secondly, most academic managers (all vice-rectors, two deans and heads of chairs) are serving their roles without having been formally appointed or elected. This generates a great deal of uncertainty and may weaken the commitment to innovative projects and approaches. Another notable difference is the absence of foreign experts in university management, even in the form of participation in advisory committees. Consequently, the university fails to utilise this channel for the transfer of academic know-how and experience from foreign universities.

After analysing the data collection and analysis system, it became clear that there were significant weaknesses. This was evident by the simple fact that the university, despite having a lot of experience with student surveys, couldn't provide the expert team with basic but reliable information about the status of alumni in the labour market. Furthermore, there seemed to be a noticeable absence of critical reflection on the methodology of information gathering. According to SER, the university is currently in the initial stages of developing a unified system for aggregating, processing, and analysing information using IT tools. Consequently, the requirements of ESG Standard 1.7, which stipulate the 'use of relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities,' have not yet been fully met.

In Europe, university alliances are developing rapidly, with discussions about joint programmes and the possibility of a single European degree. However, despite this progress, the ShSU does not seem to be pursuing closer cooperation with Armenian universities, not even with local ones. The only initiative announced so far is the launch of joint programmes.

Modern universities consider academic integrity to be highly important. ShSU has made progress in establishing elements of this system, such as defining a catalogue of academic values, adopting a code of ethics, and raising awareness in this area. However, a permanent ethics committee has not been established yet. The rector may establish such a committee on an ad hoc basis if a violation of ethical standards is reported. Additionally, there are no documented studies on behaviours such as plagiarism, sexual harassment, bullying, discrimination, nepotism, and corruption. Only alumni in one question of the survey can report corruption related to examinations. As for disputes in the evaluation of students' exam results, only three cases have been reported in the last three years. Furthermore, an anti-plagiarism system for checking thesis papers has not been implemented yet.

In European universities, there is a heated debate about preventing the misuse of AI tools and the importance of upholding academic values in the face of rapid technological change. It is evident that the influence of AI on academic integrity, as well as on teaching, learning, and assessment, should be a top priority for academic leaders. Therefore, it is crucial to invest in training teaching staff in pedagogy using artificial intelligence.

ESGs promote flexibility in study programmes and student-centred learning (SCL). The university shows a commitment to this concept. ILOs have been defined, and the syllabuses list a wide range of teaching and learning techniques. Teaching methods are reviewed, and small student groups facilitate individualisation of the learning process. The establishment of educational advisors offering systematic consultation and assistance to students is praiseworthy. It is commendable that the university has implemented an anti-grade-inflation policy. Training is offered to academic teachers to improve their pedagogical competencies.

In practical terms, the flexibility of learning pathways and the consideration of the needs of a diverse student population in the teaching and learning process are severely limited, also by state regulations. The duration of undergraduate programmes is considerable, at four years, and cannot be shortened. The supply of elective courses is limited, (until recently all courses were compulsory in undergraduate programmes). The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System in the recognition of learning outcomes achieved at other universities is constrained by significant curricular differences.

Interviews revealed a lack of clarity regarding SCL concepts, and the introduction of innovative teaching techniques is an individual initiative of teachers rather than a system requirement. Establishing a university framework for a Student-Centred Learning policy could significantly improve the situation. This framework could help in better understanding contemporary SCL requirements, identifying the need for modifications to teaching methodology, encouraging the development of innovative pedagogical approaches, and enhancing the comprehension of the relationship between quality culture and educational practice. To encourage teachers to adopt innovative teaching methods, the university could consider implementing rewards for those who demonstrate the highest standards of teaching performance.

A significant portion of ShSU's student body consists of working students who have gained knowledge and skills in their workplaces. However, the university is not prepared to recognise so-

called micro-credentials. Indeed, no procedure has been adopted for the validation and recognition of learning outcomes obtained outside higher education (non-formal and informal education).

In the field of research, the gap between ShSU and European universities is still significant. The university acknowledges the importance of research and has implemented various initiatives to encourage faculty to engage in research. However, these efforts have not produced the desired results. Only a small number of researchers apply for grants and conduct independent research, and a very low percentage of staff publish their work (about one-quarter). Currently, there are only eight research projects ongoing this year. As a result, the university's visibility in the ERA is limited. The number of publications in internationally recognised journals in recent years has been very low, not exceeding a dosen. The maximum Hirsch index value was only 7. This insufficient research output has serious negative implications. It significantly limits the opportunities to realise the research-based education promoted by ESG and declared in ShSU. Additionally, it hinders the attainment of scientific degrees and timely promotion to higher academic positions. This is supported by employment statistics, which indicate that only 14 PhDs hold the position of full professor.

The academics emphasised that the lack of motivation to engage in research activities stems from inadequate financial rewards for research performance and high workload. For example, completing a doctoral degree could result in receiving approximately €400, while publishing an article in a journal listed in Web of Science could earn around €190. Teachers may have an annual workload of up to 1,000 hours, while professors may have 750 hours. These heavy workloads often require teachers to instruct classes beyond their scientific domain.

Following the ESG, the university is required to provide students with sufficient material resources, infrastructure, as well as adequate support. There is a clear discrepancy between European universities in this regard. Students and staff utilise laboratories that are inadequately equipped, and they lack access to specialised software, databases, and foreign scientific journals. In such circumstances, it is challenging to guarantee that research and studies are kept up to date with the latest knowledge. Improving research infrastructure and ensuring online access to databases should be a high priority. While the current number of staff resources is sufficient for existing programmes, low salaries (lower than in other regions) and heavy workload make it difficult to attract highly qualified young teachers, leading to an ageing academic staff. Additionally, the system of annual employment contracts does not support the establishment of long-term careers within the university.

ShSU has implemented an internationalisation policy, to use internationalisation as a tool to achieve strategic objectives rather than an end. Given the university's regional nature and high proportion of part-time students, as well as the challenges posed by the pandemic and ongoing conflict, significant advancements in internationalisation in recent years have been difficult to anticipate. The university's internationalisation scale is relatively modest, with minimal participation of students and staff in mobility programmes. There have been no research projects with foreign partners, and only one foreign student has visited ShSU to date. There are no programmes or classes conducted in foreign languages, except for the English Literature and Grammar Faculty, and no foreign students are enrolled at the university. Instances of integrating global values and fostering multicultural awareness within the curriculum are challenging to identify. The absence of financial support for mobility programme participants and insufficient English language skills among students and teaching staff are the main barriers to mobility. While internationalisation is a key objective, there has been a noticeable lack of focus on foreign language learning. The university previously offered English classes for only one

semester, but this has now been extended to two. Assessing the effectiveness of English language learning is crucial for furthering the internationalisation of the university and enhancing alumni competitiveness.

The university is making commendable efforts to bring about change in this situation and has achieved some successes. In recent years, the university has either renewed or signed agreements with 10 foreign partners, mainly from Romania, Spain, and Portugal. The university is also involved in five Erasmus+ university capacity-building programmes, some of which have been running for several years. In the context of internationalisation, it's clear that the quality and quantity of activities carried out under these agreements are more important than the number of agreements. An assessment from this standpoint shows the positive effects of internationalisation. Collaborations with foreign partners have led to the modernisation of curricula and the introduction of new specialisations, including Biotechnology, Social Work, and Sustainable Tourism. Additionally, new teaching methods like work-based learning have been implemented, along with the establishment of new laboratories. Moreover, a Foreign Language Learning Centre has been set up. Participants in exchange programmes share their experiences with the wider academic community, thereby contributing to the advancement of knowledge in the field.

ShSU has defined a quality assurance policy and an internal quality assurance system as well as a supportive structure. The IQA is structured following the requirements of ESG chapter one. A series of formal conditions have been established to ensure that most processes operate by the PDCA cycle. Nevertheless, the QA policy is not applied to all processes by the requirements of ESG'15. For instance, there is no established procedure for evaluating research, its integration into teaching and learning, the implementation of the university's third mission or internationalisation. And KPIs are not employed to assess the quality of services provided. Many of the declared goals have not been achieved, and planned policies and actions have not been fully implemented. Furthermore, the utility of a significant proportion of the documents comprising the IQA for stakeholders and external observers is limited. These documents often consist of a collection of statements, intentions or, in the case of the Quality Manual, a mere list of procedures. In general, the emphasis in QA documents is on what should be done, rather than on how to do it. Academic managers see changes to the documentation as a positive step forward, but teachers have concerns about overregulation and bureaucratisation.

It is difficult to determine how individual IQA mechanisms, measures, and activities effectively contribute to the university's objectives in a focused and coherent manner. There's little evidence that these failures have been thoroughly analysed, and there isn't much evidence of adequate improvement proposals being formulated. The extent to which analyses' results, such as those in annual reports, are used in decision-making and strategic planning, and the identification of gaps in the internal quality assurance system, remains problematic.

ESG states that IQA aims to encourage the development of a quality-focused culture. However, in interviews with university representatives, no unified vision for a quality culture based on shared values and objectives was found. Surprisingly, most interviewees, including students and staff, were unable to identify any shortcomings in the IQA or acknowledge any benefits from it. Additionally, they did not recognise the need for significant improvement. The absence of critical reflection is a significant barrier to implementing transformative changes and may hinder the development of innovative grassroots initiatives.

It is important to note that many of the issues identified in this report can be attributed to the university's ineffective management in the past. Although some positive changes were made in the last year, their long-term impact is likely to be significant. The university's ability to identify and secure additional financial resources will be crucial for further development of academic capacity, especially in terms of investing in human capital and physical infrastructure.

Mieczyslaw W. Socha
ShSU international expert

DESCRIPTION OF EXTERNAL REVIEW

COMPOSITION OF EXPERT PANEL

The external evaluation of the institutional capacities of the ShSU was carried out by the following expert panel[1]:

Armen Harutyunyan: Candidate of Arts, Associate Professor, Vice-Rector for Development at the Yerevan State Institute of Theater and Cinema, head of the expert panel.

Samvel Karabekyan: Candidate of Philology, Associate Professor, Chief Adviser to the Rector of the State University of Economics of Armenia, member of the expert panel.

Narine Sirakanyan: Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Head of the Teachers' Professional Development Department at the National Centre for Education Development and Innovation, member of the expert panel.

Mieczyslaw Socha: Doctor of Economics, Professor at Warsaw University and School of Public Administration, international member of the expert panel.

Arpine Hakobyan: Student of 'English Language and Literature' Department of Vanadzor State University, expert panel student member.

The composition of the expert panel was agreed with the education institution and appointed by order of the ANQA director.

The works of the expert panel were coordinated by **Meri Barseghyan**, ANQA Policy Development and Implementation Division Specialist.

The translation was provided by **Anna Azaryan** and **Kristine Ohanyan.**

All the members of the expert panel, the coordinator and the translators signed a confidentiality agreement and a declaration of exclusion of conflict of interest.

PROCESS OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW

Application for State Accreditation

ShSU applied to ANQA for state institutional accreditation by filling out the application in the prescribed format and submitting copies of the license and its annexes.

The ANQA Secretariat has reviewed the data submitted in the application, the attached documents.

After the decision to accept the application was made, a bilateral agreement was signed between ANQA and ShSU. A schedule for the accreditation process has been drawn up and approved.

Self-assessment

The institution submitted the self-assessment of the institutional capacity (in Armenian and English) and the package of accompanying documents according to the format set by ANQA, within the timeframe provided by the schedule.

The ANQA coordinator reviewed the report to verify its compliance with the ANQA requirements. The self-assessment was returned to the TLI once to make format corrections and to meet the self-assessment acceptance requirements. The reviewed self-assessment conformed to the

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[1] APPENDIX 1. CVS OF EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS

prescribed format, the relevant grounds and the attachments required by the format were available. Then, the self-assessment and the package of attached documents, the electronic questionnaire completed by the TLI were provided to the expert panel, the composition of which was agreed with the university in advance and approved by the order of the ANQA Director.

Preparatory Phase

In order to prepare the expert panel for the work and to ensure the effectiveness of the processes, ANQA conducted four trainings on the following topics:

1. The main functions of expert panel members;

2. Preliminary assessment as a stage of preparation of the expert report, the main requirements for the report;

3. Methodology of document and resource examination;

4. Ethics and techniques of meetings and questions.

Examining the TLI's self-assessment and package of attached documents, the expert panel conducted a preliminary evaluation according to the format, preparing a list of required documents for further study, as well as a list of issues and questions, indicating the relevant departments or target groups. During the preliminary evaluation, expert panel members participated in online lesson observations at the institute. Then, the expert panel summarised the results of the preliminary evaluation and made a plan-schedule for the site visit[2].

Guided by the ANQA Accreditation Manual, the schedule includes expert meetings with all groups, open and closed meetings, document reviews, etc.

Preliminary Visit

On September 16, 2024, An online meeting with the management staff of the TLI took place with the participation of the head of the Institutional and Programme Expertise Department at ANQA, the head of the expert panel and the coordinator. During the meeting, the site visit schedule [2], was discussed with the institute, the list of additional documents to be studied was presented, discussed, mutually agreed decisions were made on organisational, technical, informational issues, ethics norms and meeting participants' behaviour. The conditions for focus group and expert panel meetings were discussed.

Site visit

The site visit took place between on May 27-30, 2024. The work of the panel started with a closed meeting, the purpose of which was to discuss and agree the scope of the expert assessment with the international expert, the issues to be studied during the visit, the strengths and weaknesses of the TLI according to the criteria, the procedure of the focus group meetings, and clarify the next steps.

The expert panel, ANQA coordinator and translator were present during the visit.

The site visit started with a meeting with the Rector of the institute and ended with a meeting with the TLI managerial staff. The participants (teachers, students, deans, chair heads, employers and alumni) of focus group meetings organised to clarify the questions were selected from the list provided

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[2] APPENDIX 2. SCHEDULE OF SITE VISIT

in advance by the TLI. All scheduled meetings were held. During the planned visit, the expert panel also reviewed documents[3] and resources[4].

During the closed meeting of the expert panel held at the end of each working day of the visit, interim results of the expert evaluation were presented, and at the end of the visit, the main results of the visit were summarised in a closed discussion.

The expert evaluation was carried out within the framework of the ANQA procedures and State Accreditation Criteria and Standards, which provide for a two-tier rating scale: **satisfactory** and **unsatisfactory**.

Expert Report

The expert panel conducted the preliminary assessment based on the electronic questionnaire filled out by the university, the self-assessment submitted, the examination of the attached documents, the online lesson observations, as well as the site visit (as a result of regular discussions). Based on the observations made after the discussions, the expert panel and ANQA coordinator prepared the preliminary version of the expert report.

The international expert also prepared a separate opinion on the peer review. The documents were translated and provided to the expert panel. The peer review opinion is fully included in the text of the report. After the approval of the expert panel members, the preliminary report was provided to the TLI.

Based on the TLI's response to the preliminary expert report, the expert panel prepared the final version of the report, which was approved by the panel on August 15, 2024.

Meri Barseghyan
Expert Panel Coordinator

15.08.2024

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[3] APPENDIX 3. LIST OF DOCUMENTS OBSERVED
[4] APPENDIX 4. RESOURCES OBSERVED

History. 'State University of Shirak after M. Nalbandyan' Foundation (formerly Gyumri State Pedagogical Institute named after M. Nalbandyan), from the very first year of its establishment, in 1934, in accordance with its mission, undertaking the organisation of education in the spirit of modern educational reforms, has been carrying out the services provided with great responsibility. continuous improvement. In particular, aiming to be an institution integrated into the European higher education and research area, the TLI, adhering to its primary commitment to the effective implementation of higher education, reviewing the processes of governance and education organisation, research implementation and internationalisation, strives to ensure the full implementation of the planned activities.

The TLI has its own anthem, coat of arms and gold commemorative medal, which is awarded by the decision of the Academic Council.

Education. About 1,900 students are studying in the three faculties of Shirak State University named after M. Nalbandian (humanities, natural sciences, mathematics, social sciences) with 190 students for 34 BA APs , 450 students for 21 MA APs, and 14 students in 7 areas for the researcher AP.

1 correspondent member of RA NAS, about 20 doctors of sciences and professors, 200 candidates of sciences and associate professors are involved in the work of 11 chairs of ShSU.

Research. In order to ensure development in the direction of the priorities of scientific research activity in the TLI for 2023-2027, to develop and implement clearly differentiated long-term, mid-term/short-term research programmes, to internationalise the results of the conducted research activities, to make the study-research connection stronger, on the basis of the previous order of granting intra-university grants for scientific activities the procedure for providing intra-university grants to employees and students for the priorities of research activities was developed, approved and implemented in the AC, as well as the procedure for providing intra-university grants to employees and students for research activities in the Foundation was significantly improved. The main tool for the development of all directions of research activities is the intra-university grant, which has been provided since 2016. As a result of the implementation of the latter, in particular, the number of employees and students carrying out research activities has increased.

Internationalisation. One of the primary goals of ShSU's external relations and internationalisation strategy is to preserve and continue the established international and republican spheres of cooperation as much as possible, to expand and diversify their scope, making consistent work towards establishing new cooperative relations.

Giving particular importance to the grant programmes of international cooperation among the instruments promoting foreign relations and internationalisation, the TLI has been continuously involved in the consortia of the European Union Tempus, Erasmus Mundus, Erasmus+ Programmes for the -past ten years. As a result, continuous cooperation relations were established with a number of republican and European universities and other social partners.

Quality assurance. The main principles of the QA policy of education at ShSU are a systemic approach, centralised regulation and procedural regulation of the QA system, planning, decentralised implementation of internal QA processes, self-assessment, improvement, motivated, expanded and conscious participation of staff, benchmarking and evidence-based approach, involvement of students, alumni, TS and employers, interrelation between internal and external quality assessment processes.

The goal of the ShSU QA policy is to:

· ensure the compliance of the services provided by the institution (education, research, etc.) and/or the education results obtained by the students to the goals defined by the mission and vision of the Foundation,

· contribute to the continuous improvement and development of the internal QA system, in particular, support the increase of the role of internal and external stakeholders in the QA, management and improvement processes.

Source: the sources of evidence in the above areas are the documents provided by the TLI (e.g . self-assessment, strategic plan, schedule, department plans, concepts, etc).

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

Findings

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

The current ShSU SDP (2023-2027) was approved at the meeting of the Board of Trustees on November 13, 2022. The university, guided by the consultations provided as a result of the previous accreditation, presented the project of the new strategic plan for the approval of the Board of Trustees within half a year after the previous accreditation. In addition, the TLI aligned the Foundation Charter with the SDP in order to ensure the connection between the activities and the mission of the university. Thus, in the 2023-2027 ShSU SDP, the TLI's mission is outlined as follows: 'ShSU is an educational, scientific and cultural higher education institution, whose activities are aimed at meeting the educational and cultural needs of the region (in particular, Shirak marz, Javakhk), in line with the changing external environment and the requirements of the RA labour market, through APs and quality scientific research. and preparation of competitive specialists'. It has become clear from the site visit that the TLI did not manage to carry out a complete analysis of the labour market to clarify the needs of the region, neither did a comprehensive study of the professional activities of the alumni, therefore, although the solution of regional problems is mentioned as a mission, there are no accurate data on the basis. In developing the university's mission, the TLI considered existing research on labour market requirements and vacancies.

ShSU has clarified its vision by stating five ambitions that reflect the ways of comprehensive development of the university. According to the SP, the values adopted by ShSU are student-centreed environment, academic integrity and benevolence, responsibility, respect and tolerance, democratic principles.

The TLI SDP outlines three main goals: quality education, modern and innovative research, and public involvement.

Problem-solving actions and performance indicators are developed that are mostly realistic. The TLI SDP also has an approved implementation schedule, in which the issues, actions, implementation period, responsible persons, and performance indicators are recorded. The university has not implemented a clear financial planning for the planned actions, financial resources are provided as needed.

It is worth noting that the schedule of the follow-up programme mentioned in the ShSU institutional accreditation expert report in 2022, which was drawn up and approved by the rector of ShSU on November 25, 2022, is aligned with the implementation schedule of the SDP.

ShSU provides education at NQF Levels 6, 7 and 8, guided by the characteristics set in the NQF and, in the case of some APs, in the SQF.

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

The ShSU SDP (2023-2027) was developed in three stages. At the initial stage, an analysis of the university's strengths and weaknesses, an assessment of risks and financial opportunities was carried out, after which the working and then project versions of the SP were formed, which were discussed with the chairpersons, teachers, SC and SSS members, alumni, employers, trade unions. It became clear from the site visit that the university is now considering the inclusion of internal and external stakeholders in the governing bodies of the university, the Boards of Trustees and Academic Councils and other committees, as the participation of stakeholders.

Focus group discussions, meetings, surveys were also conducted in the TLI in order to highlight the needs of internal and external stakeholders in the process of developing the SDP. As a result of the observations and meetings conducted during the site visit, it became clear that the involvement of stakeholders in the process and highlighting their needs had a minor impact on the formation of the SP. This was most evident in the case of external stakeholders, as there was a lack of interest in the process on their part, as the ShSU points out.

In order to ensure the involvement and participation of all stakeholders as much as possible in the processes carried out at the university, as well as to ensure transparency, the 'Project Discussion' window has been launched on the official website https://ShSU.am/, which should create an opportunity to hold discussions on the online platform.

According to the site visit and studies, the external stakeholders had little participation and involvement in the process of building the development plan, self-assessment, but they mostly share and agree with the development policy adopted by the TLI and have the same ideas about the development directions.

It is clear from the site visit that although the university changed its direction years ago from a pedagogical university to a multi-disciplinary education institution, in the perceptions of the stakeholders it is often still a pedagogical university.

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

As a mechanism for evaluating and improving the results of the mission and goals, the TLI distinguishes a defined accountability system, starting from the annual reports of the departments to the Academic Council to the annual report of the Rector of the university to the Board of Trustees.

From the study of the Rector's reports, it became clear that they mainly summarise the performed actions. The reports are mainly descriptive, where the actions implemented according to the performance indicators are not presented, there is no evaluation or interpretation of the objectives, tasks provided by the SP. It should be noted that the report on the activities of the past academic year (2022-2023) differs in its structure from the previous ones. The performance of the strategic plan for the 2022-2023 academic year is presented in a separate section, as well as a summary of the performance according to the SP goals, there are comments and analysis.

Expert studies show that the combination of problem-based actions and performance indicators in the TLI SDP and its implementation schedule is problematic. Thus, the first goal of the strategic plan is to maintain quality education, to achieve which the education institution has outlined 6 tasks. Solutions/actions were developed for each of the problems. For example, the first issue, 'High-quality and competitive APs', provides five solutions/actions and ten performance indicators, the second issue, 'Improved educational environment', provides five solutions/actions and eight performance indicators,

and so on.As a result, it is unclear what the performance indicator is as a result of any action, in what period it is expected to be recorded, who is responsible. At the same time, indicators with, for example, 'Improved APs', 'Reduction in the Number of Severely Underloaded Courses', 'Increase in the Number of Participations in Research Grant Programmes' and other similar wordings do not allow a full assessment of progress or implemented actions, as they do not contain quantitative or qualitative clear criteria, requirements. Therefore, in the activity report of the Rector of the university for the 2022-2023 academic year, in the 'SP performance: 2022-2023 academic year' chapter, presenting the summaries 'APs improved /done/' or 'Severely underloaded courses reduced /done/' as performance indicators, it is not possible to assess whether all APs have been improved (assuming that MA APs are still under development and not approved), what the criteria for the underloaded courses are and whether the APs in the current undergraduate system 'Cartography and Cadastral Work', 'Journalism' were only underloaded, as a result of which the university dropped them.

Considerations. The expert panel notes that after the previous accreditation, the education institution was able to develop and approve a SDP, clarifying its mission and development directions for 2023-2027.

The expert panel positively assesses that the TLI SDP is generally understandable and acceptable to internal and external stakeholders, but the lack of participation of external stakeholders is noticeable, which is important in the context of defining the university's development directions and emphasising theTLI's role in the region. The TLI TS and SS, with expert panel observations, imagine what they have to do, they are willing, even if they do not agree with all the processes or ideas implemented. The more active participation of external stakeholders in the process will create an opportunity to highlight the real needs of the community, region, marz, state, which will help to increase the quality of education and clarify the direction of the University's development.

The expert panel positively evaluates the change in the format of the ShSU Rector's report, in particular, the presentation and summary of the performance of the strategic plan in the report of the 2022-2023 academic year, at the same time notes that the more measurable indicators will contribute to the full evaluation of the performance and increase the efficiency of the planned processes. The expert panel also emphasises the specification of risk assessment, governance, distribution of financial resources according to strategic goals in the process of strategic plan and budget planning of the university, which will contribute to the proportional distribution of the resources of the university and the long-term development of the institution.

Summary. Considering that the mission of ShSU is formulated clearly and reflects the main directions of activity, the strategic planning process and tools have been noticeably improved after the previous accreditation, the strategic planning includes the approaches of potential stakeholders, the expert panel considers that the TLI meets the requirements of Criteria 1.

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

II. GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

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

Findings

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

The ShSU governance is carried out in accordance with the RA laws and the ShSU Charter (amended on 29.09.2021), combining individual and collegial governace principles, through the Board of Trustees, the Academic Council, the Rectorate and the Rector. The ShSU Rector has been occupying this position since 2022. The Board of Trustees consists of representatives of the ShSU TS, students, founder and authorised body. From the study of the documents and the visit, it was found out that the members of the council are not actively involved in the governance process, not all of them know their powers as members of the council. Studies have shown that the council has 7-8 meetings per year, most of which are conducted in an electronic format or in a hybrid way. Absences of the members of the board at the meetings of the board are frequent. Often the proposals given by the council remain unresponsive or appropriate steps are not taken in the direction of the proposals. For example, the council considers some of the expenses planned within the framework of the SP to be unrealistic, comparing them with the ShSU financial resources.

The Rector is included in the processes implemented in all directions of the TLI's development. From the study of the documents and the site visit, it became clear that phased structural changes were implemented on the basis of the TLI SDP for 2023-2027. It is clear from the expert studies that large-scale job reductions were carried out in the university, other positions were added, responsibilities or positions were renamed. There are employee job descriptions that define employee functions.

The Faculty of Humanities and Arts with its 5 chairs, the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law with 3 chairs, and the Faculty of Pedagogy with 2 chairs were dissolved. 18 positions of deans, assistants, laboratory assistants and other positions of the mentioned faculties were reduced. 3 faculties have been established in the structure: Natural Science and Mathematics, Humanities, Pedagogy and Psychology with 11 chairs, including the Military Chair. On the basis of the consultations given as a result of the previous accreditation, based on the need to increase the efficiency of APs, the positions of the AP responsible persons were introduced. It became clear from the site visit that these introduced positions are not operational yet.

It should be noted that the vice-rectors, as well as the heads of a number of departments (deans, chairpersons) are acting.

In the SP, 3 directions are distinguished: Quality Education, Modern and Innovative Research, Public Involvement, which are managed respectively by the centres of Educational Process Management, Academic Policy and Innovation and Foreign Cooperation. At the same time, the expert panel notes that the ShSU SDP does not reflect the characteristics of the ShSU College, SHSU High School, SHSU Basic School, their mission, vision, goals and objectives, which are represented in the structure of the university under the authority of the Department of Pre-University Education. During

the meetings, the expert panel noted that the approaches of the teaching staff to structural changes, especially regarding faculties and chairs, are not identical.

More than 70 rules and procedures have been developed and updated, but during the site visit it was found that the basis of the change is not clear. At the same time, they were not changed according to priority and necessity. For example, since 2012, the internal disciplinary rules of ShSU or the regulations on the formation of the TS and SS have not been changed.

The governance of the ShSU finances is regulated by the budget approved by the Board of Trustees, the draft of which is drawn up according to the procedure for the preparation, approval and analysis of actual data (performance) of the University's income and expenditure budget, according to which the draft University budget is drawn up for programme budgeting and income and expenditure based on planning methodologies, but financial allocations are not mentioned in the ShSU SP implementation schedule. According to the financial planning and the mentioned procedure, in the stage of developing the budget draft, the centres present the financial needs of the coming year to the FRM department, by which these data are coordinated and evaluated from a financial point of view and included in the next year's budget draft. During the document studies and the visit, it was found that although ShSU has invested certain financial resources for the implementation of its SP objectives, in some cases they do not correspond to the objectives defined by the SP, for example, in terms of research and internationalisation. And approximately 80% of the budget is made up of salaries. At the same time, the TLI does not carry out specific activities in the direction of securing additional financial flows.

The expert studies have shown that the top-down management mechanism in the University works, but the horisontal connections between departments are weak. Faculties and chairs operate almost independently of each other and exchange of information between them is weak.

ShSU is currently in the process of change, and an evaluation of the effectiveness of changes in governance processes and their results has not yet been carried out.

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

Faculty and students each make up 25 percent of the ShSU's Board of Trustees. According to the ShSU Charter, faculty candidates are nominated by the ShSU structural divisions, and students are nominated by the Student Councils of the faculties, and the election is carried out by the ShSU Student Council.

The Academic Council includes the Rector (as a chairperson of the Council), Vice-Rectors, directors of centres, academic secretary (secretary of the Academic Council), deans of faculties, head of the military department, college director, school director, ShSU trade union president, the youngest doctor of sciences, the oldest doctor of sciences, as well as elective members from teachers with academic degrees or titles, at least one teacher from each chair and students - 25%.

At the same time, ShSU has emphasised in its SP the provision of a democratic environment, which implies collegial decision-making in ShSU, preserving the principles of pluralism and democracy. Teachers and students are also involved in faculty councils. However, during the site visit, it was found that teachers and students are passively involved in the councils. Their involvement in councils is often of a formal nature.

ShSU considers the surveys conducted by the QA as a tool for the participation of faculty and students in making decisions related to them, but during the visit, it became clear that the results of the surveys were only subjected to quantitative analysis and did not essentially form the basis for decision-making.

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

ShSU considers its SP as a long-term project. Expert studies have showed that after the expiry of the previous SP, the new SP was approved three years later. The new five-year SP sets out ShSU's goals, objectives and performance indicators, but involves more verification of whether actions have been taken or not. During the site visit, it was revealed that ShSU plans to have new KPIs that will be more measurable. The SP implementation planning is reflected in the SP implementation schedule. However, the planned financial allocations and terms are not clearly visible. For example, the dates of actions are generally defined according to quarters (I-III, II-III, etc.), mid-term actions, their results and dates are missing. The TLI does not have medium-term plans, and the short-term plans are the annual work plans of the centres and departments, which correspond to the SP. They have been improved taking into account the recommendations provided by the expert panel as a result of the previous accreditation.

It was approved on March 11, 2022, and at the AC meeting on January 18, 2024, i.e. after the approval of the current SDP, it was reaffirmed with a new edition for the development (improvement) of the SDP of the 'Shiraki State University after M. Nalbandyan' foundation and the concept of ensuring accountability. According to the concept, a working committee is formed by order of the rector for the development, implementation, control and improvement of the SP results. Based on the decisions related to the annual reports of the centres, the analyses of the results of the annual surveys conducted by the QA department for the evaluation of the effectiveness of various processes, the committee prepares and submits to the Rector an annual report on the performance of the SDP and proposals for improvement.

After the previous accreditation, the related report procedure was introduced at ShSU. The ShSU units submit annual reports of their activities to the AC, including the performance of annual work plans. It became clear from the site visit that the mechanisms of application of the related report are not yet understood by the stakeholders.

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

ShSU considers the reports prepared by the units as a mechanism for current study of the factors affecting its activity. Expert studies have shown that departmental reports present mainly facts about the performance of operations and do not include studies of factors affecting the TLI performance.

According to the self-assessment, ShSU considers the annual surveys conducted by the QA department among internal and external stakeholders of the university as a reliable data collection mechanism for decision-making. The TLI also conducts focus group meetings, discussions, surveys among internal and external stakeholders. From the study of the documents and the visit, it was found out that although the employers emphasised the high speech culture of future pedagogues in the

discussions, the release of specialists in pedagogy APs who meet the new standards, but tangible results are still not available, the steps in this direction are still not clear. It is planned to carry out courses in accordance with the requirements of the labourmarket, which will satisfy the requirements of employers.

From the study of the documents and the visit, it was found that the problems of the region, the introduction of new APs were not studied. The University-Employer Cooperation Department of ShSU studied the analysis of the 'HR LabourMarket 2022' by the staff.am website and the September 2023 labour market analysis conducted by the unified social service of the RA Ministry of Labourand Social Affairs. It should be noted that it did not contribute to the effective management of APs, as there are APs that have been cancelled (for example, IT) or sepacialisations have been introduced ('Biotechnology', 'Sustainable Tourism') with a small number of students.

The TLI plans to develop and introduce the system of identification and study of factors affecting its activity. During the site visit, it became clear that decision-making at ShSU is not based on comprehensive studies and collected and analysed data.

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

From the site visit and studies, it became clear that after the previous accreditation, the TLI revised about 70 documents, developed and introduced 14 new legal acts, but the prerequisites and justifications for their development are missing. ShSU emphasises the PDCA cycle in all domains, according to which it has implemented the SP planning, but during the visit it became clear that there has been no significant increase in the application of the PDCA cycle since the previous accreditation. Although the works of the units are planned, reports are issued accordingly, but ShSU is mainly in the process of implementation. There are still no processes closed by the PDCA cycle of quality management. For example, it can be noted that the structural changes are under evaluation, most of the revised documents are still in the implementation phase, the revised undergraduate APs are in the implementation phase, etc.

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

At ShSU, the main mechanism for collecting information on the AP effectiveness and other processes is the implementation of surveys, as well as the collection of student opinions and employers' needs. ShSU has the documents 'Policy for Development, Approval, Monitoring and Review of APs of the Foundation', concept of the AP management and 'Policy of Management and Administration of the Foundation', which regulate the mechanisms of data collection and analysis. Reports are also considered data collection mechanisms, as well as podium discussions. During the site visit, it became clear that the results of data analysis are not often applied, and most of the main processes are still in the implementation stage.

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

The main means of publishing information about APs and the quality of awarded qualifications at ShSU are the official website and relevant pages on social networks. From 2023, the academic advisor

also conducts information-awareness meetings, during which students are presented with APs, outcomes, awarded qualifications, etc. The TLI also plans to develop and introduce electronic manuals 'Applicant Guide' and 'Student Guide'. ShSU posts success stories of its alumni on its official website. However, during the visit, it was found out that the collected data is not used for the purpose of evaluating the AP efficiency and making improvements in them.

Based on the results of the previous accreditation, the website has improved a lot, particularly in terms of foreign language materials, but it still needs improvement in terms of enriching the materials and increasing the visibility of the website. It should also be noted that an evaluation of the effectiveness of the website was not carried out.

Considerations. The expert panel positively assesses that the TLI has mostly addressed the recommendations provided as a result of the previous accreditation, implementing improvements in almost all directions. Although the progress is noticeable, according to the expert panel, the governance system still does not contribute to the effective implementation of the SP goals and mission. The expert panel emphasises the need for the justification of the implementation of changes and the involvement of stakeholders in these processes, which will be aimed at the implementation of the SP goals and mission. The expert panel believes that increasing the initiative of all management units, particularly the Board of Trustees, and clarifying development directions based on their proposals will contribute to the balanced development of the university.

The expert panel highlights the alignment of the SP goals and the allocated budget, the activation of additional financial flows, the governance of finances according to the SP and the specification of KPIs for the goals, with the recording of which the realisation of the goals will become realistic and measurable. It is appropriate that the TLI, when implementing document changes or introducing new documents, takes into account their priority and purpose, based on research and based on the needs of stakeholders. The expert panel considers positively the planning of processes in the University by separate departments, the existence of top-down mechanisms of accountability, but horisontal connections are also important from the point of view of balanced development of processes. Weak cooperation between departments hinders the dissemination and localisation of good practices in other departments.

The expert panel considers that in order to increase the efficiency of the governance system, the TLI should continuously collect data on all areas of its activity. Their contribution to the basis of managerial decision-making will contribute to the comprehensive long-term development of the TLI.

The expert panel emphasises that the TLI should promote the activity of those involved in the councils in order to ensure inclusiveness in decision-making, transparency of governance for all levels, as well as to have mechanisms to actively involve external stakeholders in the decision-making process, which will contribute to raising their needs and studying external factors. At the same time, the expert panel considers that ShSU should conduct labour market analyses and rely on labour market requirements when implementing APs, which will make education more competitive and contribute to a sustainable increase in the number of students.

It is positive that the TLI emphasises the importance of the PDCA cycle in almost all directions, but the transition from the emphasis phase to the practical phase will ensure the efficiency of the processes and contribute to the formation of a quality culture. Taking into account that the university is in a period of active changes, the expert panel emphasises the continuous analysis of their results and

the evaluation of their effectiveness, which will lead to decision-making based on managerial data and long-term planning of the development of the TLI.

Although the TLI has some mechanisms for collecting information on the AP efficiency and other processes, the expert panel emphasises the application of the results of the analysis of the collected data for process improvement and decision-making.

It is positive that the TLI has mechanisms for the publication of information, in particular the official website and social pages, which have been improved as a result of the previous accreditation, but it is necessary to analyse the viewing data in order to distribute the resources in the direction of information management proportionately.

Summary. Considering that the TLI still does not provide adequate financial resources to achieve its goals, internal and external stakeholders are not actively involved in decision-making processes, horisontal connections are weak, effective mechanisms for monitoring long-term and short-term plans are not implemented, governance decisions are not based on reliable data, the governance and administration processes did not go through the quality management cycle, the expert panel considers that ShSU does not meet the requirements of Criterion 2.

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

III. ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES

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

Findings

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

The TLI implements existing 28 Bachelor's APs, 20 part-time APs, and 22 Master's APs at the NQF Levels 6, 7 and 8. The postgraduate APs are conducted in four fields and three majors. ShSU has 3 faculties (Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Social Sciences) and 11 chairs, including the Military Chair with a separate status, to implement the APs.

The undergraduate APs have been revised based on the advice provided as a result of previous accreditation, aligning APs with the NQF, SQF and ShSU's mission. The outcomes, the characteristics of the awarded qualifications were reviewed. The AP changes were regularly discussed with internal stakeholders. Regarding some APs (for example, 'Service'), discussions were also held with employers when formulating the final results. As a result of the discussion, the duration of internships was increased from 4 weeks to 5 weeks. A larger number of hours was also allocated to practical, seminar, laboratory works, as needed. For example, the number of practical hours for the 'English Language (Spoken)' course in the Bachelor's 'English Language and Literature' AP course has been increased from 128 to 144, for the Foreign Language (Professional) course in the BA Service AP the number of practical hours (also the number of modules) has been increased from 380 to 444. However, despite the increase

of foreign language hours, as a result of the site visit and lesson observations, it was found that the issue of foreign language proficiency remains in the TLI.

From the study of the APs, it became clear that the curricula were changed. new courses were introduced, teaching semesters of some courses were changed. For example, the course 'Fundamentals of General Science' was introduced in the 'Biology' and 'Geography' APs. In the APs, the development of students' research abilities was also emphasised, for which purpose the course 'Fundamentals of Research Work in the Professional Field' was introduced. The courses were separated by educational units, the credit distribution policy was also revised, taking into account classroom hours and the number of independent hours needed by the student. Optional subjects were also added, but during the discussions it became clear that the choice of optional subjects is not related to the AP outcomes.

The document review has revealed that AP Thematic Calendar Plans (ThCPs) were also thoroughly reviewed and amended. In the ThCPs, the topic, the outcomes, classroom and independent assignments for their assessment, teaching and learning methods are indicated. It became clear from the site visit that they are reviewed and improved every year. In the APs specification, the alumni competencies for the APs with a Bachelor's degree in pedagogy are aligned with the content of the standard and model programme for teacher training subject to regular certification (except for the promotion of 21st century skills, which is also important for future teachers). In addition to basic information, the chapters include the AP description, programme goals and objectives, structure, credits, course units, assessment methods, teaching and learning methods, programme curriculum and map, areas of professional activity, educational standards used to improve the programme, AP requirements for teachers and further study opportunities for alumni. Despite the changes, the document review showed that the AP expected outcomes still have a problem of measurability as well as wording. For example, the following outcomes can be mentioned: 'Ensures the development of his professional competences...', 'Ensures the development of the professional competences in accordance with the educational requirements of modern society, the requirements of the labour market, defines science as a cultural value in line with socio-economic and scientific-cultural developments' etc.

Practical hours in the curricula of some programmes are less than theoretical hours (for example, the 'Biology' AP).

The APs course descriptions were also revised after the previous accreditation. From the study of the ShSU APs, it became clear that the TLI also has assignment packages attached to APs according to taught subjects (for example, the 'Biology' AP), in which the general directions of the assignments, the outcomes, the evaluation scales according to the topics are presented in accordance with the directions of the assignments, but their wording is not clear, for example current classroom formative tasks, current classroom formative/teaching (non-credit) assessment forms, etc.

In the context of improving the APs, some concepts (2024), policies and procedures aimed at effective AP management, development, approval, monitoring and improvement procedures were also reviewed.

Although ShSU emphasises labour market requirements, it did not conduct comprehensive labour market analyses when implementing changes to the APs and introducing new APs, as a result of which some APs have been closed and some are at risk of closure. From the site visit, it became clear that competition with APs from other institutions and lack of applicants are often the basis for closure. It became clear from the site visit that the TLI registers a request to open programmes with double

majors: physics-mathematics, geography-natural science, but analyses and risk assessment in this direction have not been carried out.

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

ShSU has a policy on the selection of teaching and learning methods. Teaching and learning methods in APs are presented in the AP specifications, subject descriptors and thematic calendar plans in a unified approach according to outcomes. APs feature student-centreed teaching methods. During the site visit and lesson observations, it became clear that the teachers are mainly guided by their experience, applying methods aimed at meeting the needs of students, but the existing positive experience is not taken up and disseminated. Taking into account the AP features that grant pedagogical qualifications and the importance of developing students' ability to learn and teach, it became clear from the lesson observations that the learning materials and teaching methods presented in the teaching process (pedagogy, teaching methodology courses) are not connected with the teaching of a specific subject, which the alumni should will later teach at school.

To improve the applied methods, ShSU has a number of tools (surveys among students, alumni and TS, lesson observations, SWOT analysis of APs, analyses of reports of final attestation committees), which are reviewed and fixed in the document 'Management Concept of APs' (2024). There are also regulations for organising and implementing lesson observations, implementing surveys, etc.

From the study of the assignments given to the students, it became clear that along with the traditional methods, discussions, justification of opinions, group and independent works, analytical works are also used, which are aimed at the development of students' independence, analytical and critical thinking. At the same time, during the visit, it was found that during the self-assessment, it was discovered that the teachers have an issue with the effective use of teaching methods, as a result of which the TLI initiated training in cooperation with the State Pedagogical University of Armenia.

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

ShSU has an Assessment and Appeals Procedure (revised in 2024) for undergraduate full-time/part-time and graduate for-credit APs (revised 2024) that assesses and appeals for undergraduate and graduate APs. The formative and unit forms of assessment, the assessment process according to the full-time/part-time AP learning forms, assessment components and weights, and the appeal procedure are defined. The scoring is done on a scale of one hundred points. The threshold for a positive grade is 40 points.

It became clear from the site visit that there were few complaints. It became clear from the expert meetings that the reason for this is that before fixing the student's final grade, the teacher discusses it with the student.

The APs, AP specifications, subject descriptions and ThCP present assessment methods according to learning outcomes, and the specifications provide tools. When implementing changes in the APs, in particular, a large place was given to formative assessment, but from the study of documents and during the visit, it became clear that the perceptions of formative assessment are still not clear by the AP implementers and teachers. For example, the formative assessment methods are not complete in the specifications and not clearly formulated in the task packages.

The AP courses also have assignments for which rubrics are developed, but they are not always used in practice. In the APs, the credits are presented according to the educational units of the courses, but the visit revealed that there is no clear policy for the distribution of credits.

The TLI has a procedure for evaluation and appeal of study results with of Bachelor's full-time/part-time and Master's credit APs. In 2024, the procedure for checking students' residual knowledge was introduced to ensure the objectivity and impartiality of the evaluation system. It became clear from the site visit that at ShSU, a residual knowledge check is carried out in case of registration of the overall progress result of 90 points or more from the course in the academic group/course.

When evaluating the course outcomes, the TLI uses the concepts of evaluation: check 1, check 2, final check, settlement. There is a multi-factor evaluation system, which is formed on the basis of two, three, four factors with appropriate weights. Undergraduate: for three factors (full-time): attendance - current activity - 30 points, summative check - 60 points; for four factors (full-time): attendance - 10 points, current activity - 30 points, check 1 - 30 points, check 2 - 30 points; for four factors (full-time): attendance - 10 points, current activity - 30 points, individual work - 30 points, final check - 30 points; for two factors (part-time): current activity - 40 points, final check - 60 points. And in the Master's degree, for two factors: individual work - 40 points, final check - 60 points.

Students in all majors undergo a 5-week training internship with employers. At the end of the internship, the students submit an internship diary, in which the content of the work is presented, the student's report on the internship, the student's recommendations for improving the internship, the profile of the direct supervisor of the internship appointed by the organisation and the teacher leading the internship, and the evaluation of the student's work. The internship is evaluated with a 100-point system for the practical application of theoretical knowledge and the implementation of organisational work. In the case of some majors, field practices are also carried out in professionally oriented organisations, for example, in the 'Biology' AP, during which students carry out studies within the framework of certain topics, and the topic and programme of the internship is agreed with the coordinators of the internship and the organisation. The field practice is also evaluated on the basis of the student's written report, defense results, in accordance with the established evaluation criteria.

The final attestation process is organised according to the current 'Final Attestation Procedure for Alumni of Institutions Implementing Higher APs in RA' and the 'Final Attestation Procedure for Master's and Bachelor's Alumni of the Foundation' (amended in 2024). The co-supervisor institute was introduced for Bachelor's theses and Master's theses. Students present current term papers and final theses, and in the Master's programme, Master's theses. They have a research component, the topics allow for independent research while maintaining academic integrity. For example, in the 'Psychology' AP, the student studied the cooperation of mentors and mentees, conducted research using research methods, posed operational problems and presented recommendations, and in the case of the 'Service' AP, the topics are unique, have a regional focus, which motivates learners independent research.

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

ShSU, taking into account the observations and recommendations presented by the expert panel during the previous accreditation, has developed a benchmarking implementation methodology (2024), according to which the role of the AP manager in the implementation of benchmarking is

important. Taking into account the previous accreditation consultations, a comparative analysis was carried out for APs: the relevant APs of YSU, Armenian State Pedagogical University, VSU, Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava, and University of Valladolid, Spain were studied.

From the expert studies, it became clear that within the framework of the implementation of benchmarking, changes in the names of the AP courses mainly took place.

According to the self-evaluation, ShSU has concluded international agreements with nine European universities, cooperation with which provides an opportunity for mobility. From the study of the documents, it was found that during the last 3 years, 7 students participated in mobility programmes from ShSU, and 1 student came to ShSU. Similar data are also available for professors. in the past 3 years, 4 teachers from the technical universities of Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava and Cluj-Napoca had teaching experience at ShSU, and 7 teachers from ShSU visited 6 TLIs in Romania, Spain, Portugal. It became clear from the site visit that the exchange of experience by participants of mobility programmes through seminars contributes to the comparative analysis of the APs.

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

At ShSU, there is an AC-approved 'Development, Approval, Monitoring and Review of Professional APs' policy (2013), which was revised in 2024, according to which the AP development is carried out by the relevant department. The QA department monitors APs, analyses and evaluates the AP development and review processes, and the Education and Science Centre coordinates and controls the APs approval and review process. During the visit, it was found that the APs were mainly improved based on the recommendations given during the previous accreditation. A guide to support the improvement of course descriptions and ThCPs has also been developed, in which the groups of teaching, learning and assessment methods are presented. There are also monitoring mechanisms: surveys, final attestation committee reports, meetings with employers. The results of the surveys are not fully applied, which is mainly due to the quality of the questionnaires and the incomplete analysis of their results, which is planned to be reviewed.

It became clear from the expert studies that some issues were also raised in the reports of the final attestation committees, which, however, were not analysed. Such are, for example, the reference to international experience in final works, the need for proper presentation of works, promotion of professional orientation events, etc.

From the expert meetings, it became clear that as a result of the meetings with the school principals, the issue of students' use of the electronic EMIS systems was raised, for which the university is conducting supplementary courses. A supplementary course has also been planned regarding the competition for filling the vacant position of a teacher. The problem of communication skills was also raised by the employers, on which the TLI planned to implement a series of informal courses.

From the site visit, it became clear that the AP improvement was facilitated by the lectures conducted according to the schedule, during which the problems of laboratory saturation, students' involvement in classes, etc, were raised.

Considerations. The expert panel positively assesses that after the previous accreditation, APs were reviewed at ShSU, policies and procedures regulating the AP management process were updated, and the full implementation of all developed documents and the targeted use of procedures will make

the process management more effective. While revising APs, ShSU relied mainly on the advice given by the expert panel during the previous accreditation process, aligning the APs with the NQF, SQF and ShSU mission, reviewing the final results, specifications of awarded qualifications, etc. The expert panel finds that the positive effects on the processes as a result of the changes still need to be evaluated (level of students' English proficiency according to courses, matching the final results of elective subjects with the AP outcomes, etc).

The expert panel positively considers the strengthening of the research component in the APs, the increase of internship hours, the presence of field practice, which contributes to the achievement of the defined final results. From the point of view of continuous AP improvement and implementation of new APs based on labour market requirements, the expert panel also emphasises the implementation of labourmarket analyses, which will enable the university to manage the risks of introducing new APs and effective implementation of existing APs.

The expert panel considers the implementation of a unified system of methods in APs positive, the selection of teaching and learning methods according to topics, as well as the unique experience of teachers in choosing methods, but at the same time, it is important to actively use the methods presented in the APs, to highlight and spread positive experience, as well as to adapt the methods to the AP outcomes, which will contribute to effective learning and the achievement of expected outcomes. From this point of view, the expert panel emphasises the encouragement of professors for the use of innovative teaching methods, considering the possibility of providing awards.

It is positive that the university also has a policy of selection of evaluation methods, the types and methods of formative and final evaluation are used, but in particular, the clarification and application of formative evaluation methods will provide the opportunity to provide the necessary feedback to students and contribute to the gradual development of their abilities.

The expert panel emphasises the need to strengthen the credit distribution policy in order to contribute to the effective study of students. The existence of procedures for evaluation and appeal of learning outcomes, verification of students' residual knowledge, applications, and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the existing tools will enable to improve the tools in accordance with the existing needs.

It is positive that ShSU has developed a benchmarking methodology, emphasising the role of the AP manager, has implemented benchmarking both with RA universities and with other international universities, but the studied experience still needs to be localised and improved, which will allow to ensure the alignment of APs and promote agility.

The expert panel also considers the use of monitoring and efficiency evaluation mechanisms of the APs as positive, which has contributed to the improvement of the internship process and selection of methods in the APs. At the same time, the group emphasises the necessity of introducing clear indicators for the AP assessment and the implementation of targeted monitoring, based on the analysis of which the implemented changes will be the basis for the continuous AP improvement. From this point of view, it is especially important to keep the improvements made in the focus of the AP management system, to continuously evaluate the progress of students, to highlight the existing issues in APs and to build on them when making improvements.

Summary. Taking into account that after the previous accreditation, the TLI improved the APs, taking into account the characteristics of national and sectoral frameworks of qualifications, based on discussions with employers, the AP content was improved, the TLI has a policy on the selection of

learning and teaching methods, the evaluation methods, the format of the theses were improved, the teachers provide appropriate feedback during the study, within the framework of the AP monitoring, ShSU has implemented benchmarking, some mechanisms of programme implementation and effectiveness evaluation have been implemented, the expert panel considers that ShSU meets the requirements of Criterion 3.

Conclusion. The expert panel evaluates the compliance of ShSU institutional capacities with the requirements of Criterion 3 as **satisfactory**.

IV. STUDENTS

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

Findings

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

ShSU has implemented clear mechanisms for student recruitment, selection and admission. The TLI conducts admissions to study in the full-time, part-time Bachelor's and full-time Master's programmes. Admission is based on the 'Admission to State and Non-State Higher Education Institutions of the Republic of Armenia' procedure. Applicants can familiarise themselves with the admission procedure through the ShSU official website, where the separate 'Applicant' section provides information on the dates of admission, documents and the list of stakeholders for the corresponding AP training for the given academic year.

Admission to the full-time undergraduate studies is organised on the basis of a competition, applying for joint exams. Master's degree admission takes place in accordance with the 'Master's Degree Admission and Teaching Procedure in RA Higher Education Institutions', as well as the 'ShSU Master's AP Admission Procedure'. It should be noted that admission to the 'Physical Education and Sports Training' AP is done through the organisation of intra-university exams.

Since 27.05.2023, the Department of 'Organising Pre-University Education' has been operating at ShSU, which coordinates the activities of the college, high school and primary schools of the ShSU Foundation, as well as the work with applicants. For the purpose of professional orientation, the department makes informative visits to schools, talks with students of grades 10-12, conducts surveys, and also regularly hosts students from a number of schools.

In 2021-2023, 741 students were admitted to the ShSU Bachelor's programme with full-time education, and 381 with part-time education. The analysis of enrollment indicators for 2022-2023 shows that the number of students in the full-time undergraduate system has increased (198 students enrolled in 2022 and 215 students in 2023), while enrollment in the part-time system is more stable, making up 98 students in 2022. and 97 students in 2023.

Referring to the Master's Degree, it can be noted that 185 students were admitted to ShSU in 2022, and 204 students in 2023. It should also be noted that 'Information Technologies', 'Journalism', 'Cartography and Cadastral Work' specialities were closed due to lack of applicants in the 2023-2024 academic year. And from 2022-2023, the specialities 'Intercultural Communication' and 'Computer Graphics' will not function either.

From the study of documents and expert meetings, it became clear that 95 students (4.1%) were expelled in 2021-2022, and 104 students (4.9%) in 2022-2023. According to site visit data, as of May 2024, 2 students (0.1%) were expelled. According to the self-evaluation, about 93% of student expulsions were due to academic debts, and about 7% were caused by truancy. A review of the documents revealed that more than half of the expelled students (≈65%) were subsequently reinstated to continue their studies at ShSU.

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

ShSU has a number of mechanisms in place to address the education needs of students. The first link in addressing the education needs of students is the academic advisors attached to each course. It became clear from the site visit that the meetings with the academic advisor are included in the class schedule and are of a periodic nature. Students are in direct contact with the TS and SS and receive an answer to their question in a short period of time. During the site visit, it became clear that the need to extend the period of internships, for example, from four weeks to five weeks, was raised by contacting the academic advisor.

ShSU also has a Student Support University-Employer Cooperation Department (SSUEC), which provides students with information about discounts and scholarship-granting companies.

The next main tool for highlighting the education needs of students is surveys of the quality and satisfaction of the education process among students and alumni, which are also carried out annually. Furthermore, the survey questionnaires are regularly updated to include a wider range of needs. It also became clear from the site visit that the majority of students participate in surveys. Through the analysis of the survey results, optional subjects were added in a number of APs, the possibilities of prolonging internships were considered.

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

In order to promote the effective process of studies, the university organises additional consultation meetings with academic advisors, as well as after the end of the main examination period, during the reexamination periods, additional consultation sessions are organised for students who are not progressing.

ShSU also creates opportunities to have informal courses. It became clear from the site visit that 2 additional courses were organised at ShSU: 'EMIS Platform: Functions, Opportunities' and 'Competition for Filling the Teacher Vacant Position; Knowledge, Abilities' in order to give opportunities to future educators to familiarise themselves with the possibilities of electronic platforms used in schools, as well as the features of filling pedagogical staff in schools. Informal courses such as 'Conflict Management', 'Communication Skills, Writing, Verbal Speech', etc, were also held at the university. A course on 'Public Speaking' organised by foreign volunteers was also organised, which was attended mostly by the students of the 'English Language and Literature' Department, due to having sufficient English language proficiency.

It became clear from the site visit that there are currently no additional English classes at ShSU, but the Foreign Language Learning Centre has been established within the framework of the Erasmus+ SMARTI programme, which will be operational from September and provides English courses for both students   and   TS.

Additional classes and consultations are part of the TS workload. Students' satisfaction with these classes is assessed through a survey. Analysis of survey results shows that 66.7% of students are enrolled in these classes and 97.5% are satisfied with consultation services.

4.4 There are precise regulation and schedule set for students to turn to the SS for additional support and guidance.

In SHSU, there are clear rules for addressing the AS and governing bodies. According to the established procedure, every business day, at 12:00-13:00 and 14:00-15:00, a student reception time is set for all structural units. It became clear from the site visit that the students have free access to the administrative part and can apply with all the issues that concern them. From the site visit, it became clear that the students freely apply to the deans, chairpersons and academic advisors and receive appropriate support and information regarding the discount system, examination board, etc, in a short period of time. The visit also made it clear that ShSU's 'Complaints, Grievances and Suggestions Box' is actively functioning separately for students and TS.

4.5 The Institution has student career support services.

SSUEC provides career support services for students at SHSU. The department distributes vacancy announcements to students and alumni, information on capacity building activities, surveys employers to identify labourmarket needs, organises surveys among the alumni to gather employment information, etc.

To strengthen and develop links between the alumni and employers, the department collaborates with a number of employers, including schools, banks, etc. Moreover, for the past three years, the ShSU students have been actively filling university vacancies in various departments, such as HR and QA centres.

Alumni also have the opportunity to participate in additional and informal courses organised by ShSU in order to meet the changing demands of the labour market. It became clear from the site visit that students and alumni are informed by the SSUEC department and actively participate in additional informal courses, among which are the courses organised at ShSU on writing a resume, effective participation in interviews, and developing communication skills.

According to the analysis of surveys presented by ShSU, 68% of students are satisfied with the services provided.

ShSU has created a database that contains information about students and alumni of the past 3 years. Through this database, SSUEC regularly contacts alumni to update employment data. In the case of vacancies within the framework of cooperation with employers, the department directs students and alumni to appropriate professional work.

4.6 The Institution promotes student involvement in research activities.

The implementation of research activities at ShSU is coordinated by the Centre for Science Policy and Innovation (CSPI).

SHSU, according to the implemented SP, takes appropriate measures to increase the rate of participation of students in the research process. The presence of 1 or 2 students is mandatory in each research group. It became clear from the site visit that the TLI has mechanisms for student encouragement, intra-university grants, and additional payments. Moreover, a mechanism has been

established for students studying in the Master's APs, according to which the presence of a published article is evaluated as 5 points. As a result of all this, in 2023, 21 works were published in ShSU with the authorship and/or co-authorship of students; last year this figure was 11.

As a means of developing students' research abilities, a separate course on 'Fundamentals of Research Work in the Professional Field' was introduced in all Bachelor's APs.

The ShSU SSS actively participates and organises various academic conferences. According to the self-evaluation, international, republican and student conferences were held in ShSU at the initiative of SSS in different years, where students also had the opportunity to participate on their own. For example, on November 11, 2022, young researchers from 18 universities of the Republic participated in the republican student conference organised by ShSU; and on June 28, 2024, the Republican student conference dedicated to the 90th anniversary of the university's founding was held on the initiative of ShSU.

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

SHSU structural divisions and governing bodies, as well as the Student Council, deal with the protection of students' rights and complaints. According to the ShSU SC Charter, the ShSU SC is a university-wide structure. It became clear from the site visit that the seniors of all courses are SC members, the council is taking steps to involve students in its activities. However, it should be noted that students are not yet fully involved in the SC activities. It became clear from the site visit that SC is still not considered by university students as a structure responsible for the protection of their rights.

The SC regularly organises meetings and discussions, and the raised issues are brought to the relevant departments. The SC also meets students' entertainment needs, actively organises excursions, expeditions, volunteer work. There were a number of meetings-discussions, seminars on topics such as trafficking, how to use intelligence to succeed, freelance and remote work for students, Book discussion with Ani Kochar, Volunteer awareness meeting by the 'Nor Luys' mentoring centre, intellectual quizzes, movie screenings, etc.

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

The main tool for assessing students' satisfaction with education, consultation and other services provided at ShSU is the surveys developed and regularly updated by the QA department.

The evaluation and quality assurance of the services provided to students is also facilitated by the reporting system operating in the Foundation, in particular, the reports of chairs, faculties, centres and the Rector's reports to the SC.

It became clear from the site visit that the students are satisfied with the services provided to them and receive appropriate assistance in case of their related issues.

Considerations. The expert panel positively assesses that the TLI continuously improves the services provided to students, contributing to the improvement of the education environment. The mechanisms of recruitment of applicants and admission of students make it possible to form a stable student population, which is the basis for the development of the university. The expert panel emphasises the implementation of continuous awareness-raising activities regarding the APs, which will make it possible to expand the number of part-time and Master's students. It will also facilitate the

implementation of competitive APs, which, in the long run, can increase ShSU's visibility and attractiveness to foreign applicants as well.

It is a positive circumstance that in order to highlight the education needs of students, periodic meetings with academic advisors are held at ShSU, which allows the TLI to quickly and effectively respond to students' demands. These mechanisms increase the level of student satisfaction, which contributes to the effectiveness of the education process.

Additional consultations, formal and informal courses enable students to receive the necessary support and skill development opportunities, which are important for continuing professional development and building transferable skills.

The expert panel emphasises that the regulations and existing mechanisms at ShSU give students the opportunity to contact the AS if necessary, to quickly and effectively get answers to their questions. According to the expert panel, the operating mechanisms contribute to the transparency of the university's governance and the increase of students' confidence.

ShSU has established student career support services aimed at securing employment for students and alumni. Career support services help students to enter the labour market quickly and efficiently. This also enhances the TLI's reputation as an institution that supports the success of its alumni.

After the previous accreditation at ShSU, mechanisms for involving students in research work have been improved. The expert panel emphasises the full implementation of these mechanisms and the involvement of more students in the research activities of the university, which will contribute to the realisation of the goals set by the TLI in this direction and having alumni with research abilities.

The expert panel emphasises the emphasis on the role of the SC as a structure dealing with the protection of students' rights, which will contribute to raising awareness about the SC and increasing confidence in SC as a student self-governing body.

It is an important fact that the TLI has introduced mechanisms for evaluating the services provided to students. The expert panel considers that the needs raised through them need to be continuously discussed with the governance bodies to ensure the continuous development of the provided services.

Summary. Taking into account that the TLI has clear procedures for the recruitment and admission of students, there are mechanisms for raising the education needs of students, academic advisors support the raising and meeting of students' needs, taking into account the needs of students, complementary courses are implemented in the university, the TLI supports the creation of career opportunities for its students and alumni, after the previous accreditation, mechanisms were introduced to promote the involvement of students in the institution's research activities, the TLI has an appropriate body for the protection of students' rights, there are mechanisms for evaluating students' education and consultation services, the expert panel considers that ShSU meets the requirements of Criterion 4.

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

CRITERION: The Institution has a highly qualified faculty and staff to achieve the set goals for academic programmes and institution's mission.

Findings

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

The processes of the TS and SS formation and recruitment at ShSU are regulated are regulated by the regulations on the 'Formation of TS and SS of State Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri after M. Nalbandyan State Non-Commercial Organisation' (approved on 26.05.2012) and the 'Internal Disciplinary rules of the State Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri Foundation' (approved on 20.12.2016). It should be noted that while amending and improving many internal normative acts, the mentioned documents were not considered subject to editing and were not changed. The TLI has defined procedures for employment, termination of employment, disciplinary action, incentive and disciplinary measures, rights and responsibilities of the employer and employees, as well as other procedures related to employment.

It became clear from the site visit that no tenders have been announced for the TS formation for more than ten years. Employment contracts with teachers are concluded for one year. For the TS selection (re-election), the qualification of professional education, scientific degree, title, professional and pedagogical skills, the results of scientific research activities, qualification increase and re-qualification, and other formats of teacher evaluation are considered as priority.

The TLI has basic, joint and hourly hiring conditions and procedures, the criteria for each teaching position are described.

The representatives of the labourmarket-employers are engaged as teachers in the university on a joint/hourly basis.

The issues of formation and deputation of the TS positions are discussed in the Faculty Council with the presentation of the relevant chairperson, after which the dean of the faculty presents the issues to the relevant Vice-Rector. The filling of the TS positions is also not carried out through competition. During the expert meetings, it was emphasised that ShSU considers its alumni primarily as employees.

It should be noted that the recommendations in the previous accreditation expert report regarding the clarification and application of the competitive mechanisms for the TS recruitment and the development of standards for the TS professional qualifications based on qualitative indicators have not yet been considered or implemented.

5.2 The requirements for qualifications of teaching staff per academic programme are comprehensively stated.

Regulations on the 'Formation of TS and SS of State Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri after M. Nalbandyan State Non-Commercial Organisation' present the requirements for the TS. From the study of the documents, it became clear that in line with the activities of improving the TLI APs in the 2023-2024 academic year, while improving the subject descriptors, a point was added to their format, where the requirements for the professional qualities of the teacher of the given course are included.

Examining the specifications of the Bachelor's APs on 'Service', 'English Language and Literature', 'Biology', the expert panel has acknowledged that the requirements for the TS professional qualities defined for all APs are the same: Qualification and/or scientific degree and/or title, that meet AP/course paper outcomes, mastery of psychopedagogical skills, academic or practicum experience.

It became clear from the review of the documents that the requirements presented to the teacher in the descriptions of different courses are also the same: having a qualification and/or scientific degree and/or title that correspond to the outcome of the course, mastery of psycho-pedagogical skills, scientific-pedagogical and practical work experience. In this context, the requirement of having scientific-pedagogical or practical work experience is also not clear, such as how this problem is solved in the case of young, novice teachers. Expert studies have shown that there are no differentiated requirements for ShSU faculty based on professional APs or education degrees.

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

In order to evaluate the activity of the ShSU TS, the annual rating assessment of the quality of the activity, the assessment of the needs for the development of professional, pedagogical and organisational competences, the evaluation of the professional, pedagogical and TS organisational competences by students through surveys and lesson observations are used.

In 2021, the procedure for the regular TS assessment and rating of Shirak State University after M. Nalbandyan foundation was reaffirmed with an updated version, the purpose of which is to study the quality of the TLI staff potential for the implementation of education, scientific and pedagogical work, further development and improvement, ensuring the quality of scientific and education activities. The order provides for the evaluation indicators of the TS (expressed in questionnaires and other forms according to evaluation forms) and components (professional, pedagogical, organisational competences, scientific, research, scientific-methodical activities, teaching-methodical, education, education-organisational, scientific-organisational activities, intra-university and extra-university social activities), assessment forms, data collection, analysis and ranking procedures. Moreover, according to the order, it is planned to apply incentives and punishment mechanisms based on the results of the TS ranking. It became clear from the expert studies that the procedure for evaluating and ranking the TS is still not fully implemented and there are still no decisions based on its application in the university.

In order to evaluate the TS activity, lesson observations are conducted in the university in accordance with the regulation on 'Organising and Implementing Lesson Observations in the University of Gyumri after M. Nalbandyan Foundation'. Classes are conducted according to the schedule approved by the Education Process Management Centre. The chairperson, who is responsible for the implementation of the process, the person in charge of AP, other teachers, and the dean participate in the lesson observations. Assessment of the TS professional, pedagogical and organisational abilities, identification and dissemination of best practices, assessment of the need for training, and support for novice teachers are considered as issues by the university.The results of the studies are discussed at the chair's meeting, and at the end of the academic year, they are included in the annual report of the chair's activity. The expert studies showed that the suggestions for improvement made as a result of the lectures are aimed at the selection of teaching and learning methods, improvement of assessment forms and methods, revision of assignments, as well as revision of the content of the courses.

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

On February 16, 2024, the ShSU Academic Council approved with amendments the regulation on the training and professional qualification of the Shiraki State University after M. Nalbandyan Foundation, which is mandatory for the main position (competitive) and contractual (non-competitive) positions of the Foundation for full-time teachers and teaching assistants. According to the regulations, the TS training and the improvement of professional qualifications are carried out in two directions: general-compulsory and special-professional. In addition, those teachers who have defended their candidate's and doctoral dissertations in a five-year period, or have received the academic titles of associate professor, professor, or have been evaluated as an effective employee based on the quality of the implementation of the individual work plan of the teacher, can be exempted from the special-professional component.

According to the self-evaluation, during the 2022-2023 academic year, 125 trainings were conducted at ShSU, of which 28 were professional and 97 were non-professional. However, in the mentioned document, there is information about only one training, the topic of which is aligned with the activities of improving APs taking place at the university: 'Improving Professional APs: Mechanisms and Tools'. It was carried out in June 2023, that is, before the re-establishment of the regulation. During the site visit, clear information about other trainings was not presented.

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

In the 2023-2024 academic year, ShSU employs 234 teachers. 131 have academic degrees (14 doctors of science, 117 candidates of science). 14 professors, 100 associate professors work at the university.

The number of teachers with academic degrees has changed in ShSU over the past three years. Compared to the 2021-2022 academic year, in the 2023-2024 academic year, the number of doctors of science decreased by 3, the number of candidates of science decreased by 10. The number of people with academic degrees increased by 3 over the mentioned academic years.

According to the presented statistical data, in the academic year 2021-2022, 221 full-time teachers worked at the university, and another 95 were employed on a part-time or hourly basis. In the academic year 2023-2024, the number of main teachers is 155 (decrease by 66), the number of part-time/hourly employees is 79 (decrease by 16). A combination of two years of data shows that the number of core faculty has declined by nearly 30%.

Examining the dynamics of faculty recruitment presented by the university, it can be noted that the number of newly hired teachers in the 2020-2021 academic year is 13, and the number of teachers dismissed due to contract expiration or other reasons is 31. In the 2021-2022 academic year, 14 teachers were hired, 32 were dismissed. In the 2022-2023 academic year, 12 teachers were hired, 11 were dismissed.

From the point of view of ensuring the TS availability, it should be noted that although the TLI tries to implement a policy of attracting young staff, the quantitative data presented by the TLI prove that it does not contribute to the process. Thus, comparing the data of the academic years 2018-2019 and 2021-2022, it is visible that during the mentioned period the number of professors aged 35

decreased by 6.8%, while the number of teachers aged 35-65 increased by 2.7%, age over 65 the number of those who have increased by 4.1%. During the expert panel meetings, it was also noted that there are chairs where the minimum age of teachers is 42 years.

It became clear from the site visit that the mentoring institute was introduced in the university to promote rejuvenation and attract new teachers. Taking into account the professional orientation of the teacher, as well as the content of the course taught by him, the university assigns novice teachers to experienced teachers in order to transfer experience. Mentors provide methodical support to beginning teachers, conduct lesson observations, provide recommendation.

In the context of ensuring the TS availability, the TLI takes a differentiated approach between the salary rates paid to employees with and without a degree and/or degree, according to the 'Main Norms of the Teacher's Workload Formation at State Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri after M. Nalbandyan Non-Profit Organisation'.

Expert studies have shown that currently the university has adequate teaching staff for the implementation of APs, and some chairs (for example, Psychology and Sociology Chair) also have a personnel base to supplement the TS if necessary.

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

Professional trainings and the formation of a mentoring institute to support novice teachers are considered tools for the professional development of faculty members at ShSU.

Obtaining an academic degree and an academic title is considered as an indicator of the professional progress of the TS. From 2025, it is planned to establish a one-time supplement for receiving a doctor's academic degree or a professor's academic title during the previous year.

As an attractive working condition, the TLI mentions the monthly calculated salary corresponding to the 1 rate of Doctor of Sciences, Professor. However, its comparison with the average salary of the republic shows that it is quite low. There is also an established tradition at ShSU: key employees who have not been subject to disciplinary action during the year are given a bonus at the official rate of one month's salary for conscientious and proper performance of work duties by order of the Rector.

Policies and procedures in place to ensure the professional advancement of the ShSU TS, which will significantly affect the relevant processes, are not noticeable.

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

Among the processes implemented in the direction of the implementation of the 2023-2027 SDP of ShSU, it is important to mention the structural changes implemented in the university and the personnel policy corresponding to it. According to expert panel observations, the TLI has sufficient TS and SS (50 or more employees) for higher education and the realisation of its SP goals.

From the point of view of the implementation of the policy for the selection of teaching and teaching assistants, the TLI considers the introduction of position descriptions, which define the requirements for the positions, the order of work organisation and the scope of responsibility, work duties, as progress.

Considerations. The expert panel positively evaluates the fact that the TLI is provided with appropriately qualified teachers for the implementation of its APs, which contributes to the continuous

implementation of APs. The involvement of professors with the appropriate academic degree and title in the TS also creates certain foundations for the promotion of scientific research activities in the university, the interconnection of research and learning processes. The expert panel considers that the observation of the efficiency of the mechanisms of the involvement and selection of the TS, the assessment of the risks of signing contracts for one year, are important for the TLI to increase the efficiency of the mechanisms of involvement of the teachers and to form guarantees for the long-term planning of APs (at the current stage, there is still no risk regarding the continuity of the activities of the teachers). According to the expert panel, the introduction of clear requirements for the recruitment of the AP teachers based on the final results of APs can contribute to the more targeted involvement of the TS.

The expert panel considers positively the use of opportunities to engage employer teachers and the tendency to expand this experience. It will contribute to the AP adaptation to the requirements of the labour market.

It is positive that the university is taking steps to attract young teachers, considering its alumni as a source of faculty attraction. The expert panel emphasises the importance of the mentioned processes for ensuring sustainable generational change. A balanced combination of young and experienced faculty can foster a dynamic learning and research environment. In this context, the introduction of the mentoring institute by the TLI is a positive circumstance, which can contribute to the improvement of the novice TS.

In ShSU, there are mechanisms for evaluating the performance of teaching staff. it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of the tools used and to direct resources in all directions of improvement of the APs.

After the previous accreditation, the TLI, reviewing the mechanisms of the TS encouragement and professional advancement, tried to create foundations and regulate the implementation of the processes. The expert panel emphasises the need for faculty training, employee incentives, and the use of policies that promote the advancement of teachers, which will contribute to meeting the professional needs of teachers and their professional development. It is necessary to plan professional development activities clearly and with an appropriate schedule, based on the problems identified as a result of the assessment. The allocation of financial resources by the TLI for the purpose of professional development of teachers will contribute to increasing the motivation of professors and improving their professional abilities. The expert panel positively assesses that the TLI has formed a sufficiently motivated, professional, teamwork-oriented SS and TS who support the realisation of the TLI education goals.

Summary Taking into account that the TLI has appropriately qualified faculty for the implementation of its APs, there are opportunities for evaluation and development of the faculty, the TLI takes steps to ensure the sustainability of the implementation of APs by involving young professors, including its alumni, there are opportunities for the professional development of the faculty some opportunities, the university has the necessary teaching and administrative staff for the realisation of its goals, the expert panel considers that ShSU meets the requirements of Criterion 5.

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

VI. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

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

Findings

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

The development of research activities is one of the three priorities of the ShSU 2023-2027 SP. After the previous accreditation, considerable work was done in the university to align the activities with that goal. Thus, at the previous stage, priorities in the field of research were not defined. In 2023, AC approved the main directions and priorities for the development of research activities in ShSU for 2023-2027, among which, in particular, Armenian studies with its internal branches (language, literature, history, art), a number of sub-fields of physics and geology. In the policy of promotion of research activities, natural science and mathematics directions are emphasised.

A structural change in terms of systematically managing the research activities at the university was carried out as a matter of priority, with the reorganisation of the former 'Academic Policy, Quality Assurance and Management Centre'; in 2023, the separate structure 'Academic Policy and Innovation Centre' was formed, the centre's activities were developed and approved until the 2027 target programme. Within the centre's activities, performance indicators have been defined, which are often quite general (Clarified and fixed research priorities, increase in the number of participations in academic grant programmes) or imply the development or revision of a document regulating the field (Guidelines for writing academic papers and developing research skills, encouraging the development of research activities developed and implemented procedures). Thus, studying the programme and comparing the defined tasks and performance indicators, it becomes visible that they still do not reflect the results that the TLI expects to have if the relevant processes are implemented.

During this period, the process of allocating internal grants was launched. The amount of funding for research activities has increased from 1.6% to 2.9%, which has also stimulated self-initiated research, 9 articles with H coefficient have been published at the university.

It became clear from the expert studies that the implemented improvements are still in the initial stage, and the cycle planned by the development plan of the centre has not yet been completed to evaluate their effectiveness (including the realisation of this goal of the strategic plan). ShSU allocates 3-3.5% of its budget to the implementation of expenses for science.

6.2   The Institution has a long-term strategy and mid-term and short-term programmes that address its research interests and ambitions.

ShSU's ambitions in the field of research are formulated in the TLI 2023-2027 SDP, on the basis of which the research activity development policy was developed and approved, according to which the main goal of the university's research activity development is the development of research in various directions of natural, humanitarian and social sciences: internationalisation, connection with learning and expansion of cooperation with scientific and education structures. In accordance with that goal, the programmes of the university centres and chairs, as well as the research activity coordinating structure, the Science Policy and Innovation Centre, have been developed, coinciding with the strategy's period of operation.

According to the established policy, the main directions and priorities of the research activities should have two components: constant and variable, the first of which is Armenian studies, and the second variable component is based on the results of the previous five years of the research activities at the university (published articles, monographs, etc), as also to take into account the existing academic potential of the university's academic and pedagogical team. From the study of the chair workplans, it became clear that the approval of the topics of the final works to be presented to the Centre for Scientific Policy and Innovation, and the holding of academic seminars are defined in them. The chairs also have research directions in accordance with their professional directions, but they are not clearly reflected in the annual chair workplans.

According to expert studies, during 2023, the results of research activities carried out by the TLI employees and students were summarised in 118 academic/academic-methodical articles, 5 theses, 3 education-methodical/academic-methodical/study works. In 2023, academic works were published by TS of the university, most of which (about 50%) were published in journals included in the list of scientific publications acceptable by RA MoESCS Higher Education and Science Committee (HESC) or in the ShSU Academic Bulletin. The number of works published by employees in 2021-2023 is as follows: 132 in 2021, 154 in 2022, and 114 in 2023. During 2023, 3 research topics funded by the RA MoESCS HESC were implemented in the university, 2 of which were contractual (thematic) and 1 was basic, and all of them were carried out by the TS of the Mathematics, Physics and IT chairs.

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

In 2023, the TLI developed and adopted the main document base regulating research activities, based on which the university decided to organise research activities. Among its main tools are intra-university academic grants and the establishment of academic schools. Under the wording 'Academic school' are understood research groups headed by a teacher with an academic degree, in which post-graduate students and students are also involved in the research of the subject of study.

In order to promote the research activities among the TS, the TLI has revised the procedure for granting intra-university grants, effective since 2016. The grant provided in the direction of priorities of the research activity was introduced as a long-term grant for a period of 24 or 36 months, and the grant provided in all directions of research activity was introduced as a mid-term or short-term grant for a period of 24 or 12 months. In order to commercialise academic results and attract international grants, a clear procedure for providing intra-university grants has been established.

The number of publications in 2023 is somewhat inferior to the indicators of previous years. This circumstance is due to the approach that the university, emphasising the fact that the ShSU TS are employees of the university in the publications, took into account only those articles in which the authors mentioned the fact of being a ShSU teacher when calculating the publications and articles.

One grant is implemented in the university with the HESC base funding, in which 3 employees are involved. The TLI, in addition to internal grants for research activities, has a procedure for granting allowances for the research activities carried out by employees and students, which also defines the ranges of allowances according to the journal of publication (an allowance is also defined for publication in the ShSU Academic Bulletin), as well as promotion of research activities aimed at obtaining an academic degree.

ShSU has an Academic Bulletin established by the ShSU AC in 2011. Volumes A and B of the ShSU Academic Bulletin were included in the 2023 list of academic publications acceptable by the SSC, and since September 2023 it has been registered in the eLibrary academic electronic library, which is a database of academic publications.

A separate coefficient for the results of research work carried out by students under the guidance of professors is established in the order of regular evaluation and ranking of the TS. 2 mechanisms ensuring the connection of research activities and studies were also introduced in the procedure of providing additional payment for research activities carried out by employees and students. In particular:

- In order to promote the implementation of the research activities by students, to strengthen the relationship between study and research, for the 1st time a supplementary fee (one-time incentive fee) was established for students as well.
- A new item has been added to the allowance scale, defining the allowance for academic seminars organised in the chairs.

6.4   The Institution emphasises internationalisation of its research.

Internationalisation of research activities is one of the ambitious goals of the ShSU academic policy. According to the self-evaluation, in order to contribute to the internationalisation of the scientific research activities carried out by employees and students, separate, higher amount of grants are provided: 150 thousand AMD for the articles published in the journals included in the Q1, Q2 quarters of the SJR, and 125 thousand AMD for those published in the journals included in the Q3, Q4 quarters of the SJR. In the order of evaluation and ranking of teachers, in the academic, research and academic-organisational activities section, the highest coefficients are defined for the internationalisation of the results of research activities.

In general, the TLI employees have published 78 academic articles as of 2023, 6 of them in CIS, 10 in other international journals, including 6 in academic journals included in Scopus and Web of Science databases.

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

In accordance with the SDP goal, a policy is being pursued at the university in the direction of forming mechanisms of interconnection between research activities and the education process. At the current stage, based on the provisions of the strategic plan, as well as the provisions of the follow-up plan drawn up according to the previous accreditation expert report, work has been done to regulate the issues of research and educational process interrelation and to give them new content. In particular, a course called 'Fundamentals of Conducting Research in the Professional Field' was also planned in the Bachelor's AP, the requirements for providing grants, their contribution to the topic of the APs of the given chair were regulated.

It became clear from the site visit that all of this has significantly stimulated the involvement of teachers and students in research, in a number of programmes, such as the 'Service' AP, the final papers have an essential applied-research component, making the issues of Gyumri and Shirak marz the   subject   of   study.   bringing   out   proposals   for   solutions.
Some issue related to the connection between research and education are still waiting for both

regulation and implementation, in particular, the involvement of interdisciplinary studies in the development and implementation of research programmes.

From the professional discussions, it became clear that mechanisms ensuring the connection between research activities and studies have been implemented in the university. In particular, in order to promote the implementation of research activities by students, to strengthen the relationship between study and research, a supplement (one-time incentive payment) has been established for students as well, and a new item has been added to the scale of providing a supplement, with the definition of a supplement for scientific seminars organised in the chairs. However, there are still no attempts to use the mentioned mechanisms.

The observation of Master's theses showed that there is a research component, analysis and summaries in students' theses. For example, the theses of the students of the final year of the 'Service' AP touch on regional issues, including not only Shirak marz. Course papers, Bacherlos' theses, Master's theses containing research elements are submitted in accordance with the main research directions of the chairs. Students' research skills are developed at the undergraduate level through course papers and graduation work.

Considerations. The expert panel positively evaluates the steps taken at the TLI to revitalise the research activity and to stimulate the interest of the TS and students in that direction. Setting priorities in the research field has made ShSU research activities more systematic and planned. The systematic implementation of the processes planned in this context can lead to the quantitative and qualitative growth of research results at ShSU. This will also contribute to increasing the university's international reputation and recognition in the academic community. The expert panel also emphasises the transformation of performance indicators for research development and the definition of a clear result framework, which will make the planning of the research process more targeted and more measurable from the point of view of evaluation.

The expert panel considers that the increase in research funding has become a stimulus for the research activities. The provision of intra-university grants and their new formats contribute to the activation of research initiatives.

It is positive for international recognition of research results that ShSU representatives have academic publications in international journals and databases. In this context, the expert panel also emphasises the implementation of interdisciplinary studies, which will contribute to the academic progress, as well as stimulate the formation of new research directions and the creation of innovative solutions. In order to promote interdisciplinary research, the university can also consider the directions of increasing cooperation with partner universities and academic organisations, which will create new opportunities for the TLI to have research results, including their commercialisation, in case of limited resources. The university can also consider the possibilities of internal interdisciplinary research, relying on the academic potential of its faculties.

The expert panel considers that in order to create an appropriate research environment, it is important to continuously expand and develop the content of the research component in the APs, especially in Master's APs. At the same time, it can be noted that the contribution of the research results made by the TS in the education process will contribute to the formation of the research APs. ShSU's efforts to involve students in research projects are positive, which promotes the connection between education and research.

Summary. Taking into account that after the previous accreditation, the TLI defined its ambitions in the field of research, tried to create foundations for the promotion of research activities, took steps to internationalise research activities, as well as to connect research topics to the needs of the region as much as possible, did some work on the mechanisms of linking research and learning. in the direction of forming, the expert panel considers that ShSU meets the requirements of Criterion 6.

Conclusion. The expert panel evaluates the compliance of ShSU institutional capacities with the requirements of Criterion 6 as **satisfactory**.

VII. INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES

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

Findings

7.1 The Institution has an appropriate learning environment for the implementation of current academic programmes.

ShSU operates in two buildings: the main building (10,002.87 square meters) and the Military Chair building (1125.87 square meters). The ShSU school and college buildings are also on the balance sheet of the Fund at separate addresses.

During the site visit, the observation of the resources showed that the education buildings are well-maintained. Offices of the SS are equipped with office equipment and equipment, have Internet access. The classrooms are furnished, there are computer classrooms, technically equipped classrooms with screens and projectors, as well as subject cabinets (geography, socio-psychological centre, language centre, etc) and workshops (drawing, painting, wood and metal artistic processing, etc). The university mainly tries to solve the problem of technical saturation of auditoriums through international cooperation and international programmes. Education laboratories of physics, chemistry, biology and biotechnology are equipped with appropriate equipment. Most of them were acquired decades ago. During the expert meetings, it was recorded that the students see the need to update the property in the classrooms, as well as to modernise the laboratory property and equipment for the purpose of conducting practical laboratory training.

The university has a conference hall with 150 seats, which is equipped with a simultaneous translation system, a projector, and other necessary technical facilities.

The total area of the ShSU library is 526.97 square meters, the reading hall is 201.14 square meters, and the number of professional books in the list of the library's literature is more than 60 thousand. Recently, the university acquired a book digitisation device, thanks to which it plans to digitise the most requested and necessary literature of the library in the near future. The process has already started: a certain number of literature is already available to students and teachers on electronic media. The reading hall is equipped with individual desks and computers with Internet access and can serve about 40 visitors at a time. The replenishment of the book fund mainly takes place at the expense of donations from both partner education institutions and individuals. The Library section of the ShSU website (https://library.ShSU.am/) provides access to dosens of digital books by science, and also provides links to more than 50 different electronic libraries, including foreign ones. The website also

has an electronic service system for ordering literature online, which can be used by students and employees of the university.

The university has two well-maintained sports halls equipped with necessary sports equipment and objects. The basement is partially used with a shooting range. There is a small TV booth equipped with appropriate equipment.

There is a cafeteria in the building, which is used by students and professors, positively evaluating the quality of services.

ShSU also has a beautiful and well maintained green courtyard.

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

According to the self-evaluation, diversification of financial incomes through the provision of additional education services for the implementation of renovations, attraction of grants, commercialisation of academic research results is a priority issue for the TLI. In recent years, revenues from such services have increased from 2.73% recorded in 2021 to 4.93% as of 2023. The issue was also raised in the Board of Trustees, but apart from the mentioned sources, other mechanisms of income diversification have not yet been applied by the university. The distribution of actual receipts in 2021, 2022, 2023 has the following proportion: respectively, according to the years, the share of state funding: 44.32%, 46.77%, 49.86%, from student fees: 52.95%, 49.15%, 45.21%, from other activities: 2.73%, 4.1%, 4.93%.

According to the procedure on the 'Preparation, Approval and Analysis of Actual Data (Performance) of ShSU Income and Expenditure Budget', when preparing the budget, the SDP goalsare first taken into account, then other circumstances are also taken into account: possible legislative changes, actual data of previous years, possible developments, etc. In the past three years, the actual expenses incurred by the university, which were carried out according to the strategic directions, have changed. Comparing the actual expenditures in 2021 and 2023, an increase in numbers is visible in the following directions: governance and administration (+0.76%), students (+306.0%), research and development (+74.0%), external relations and internationalisation (+349.0%), quality internal security system (+5.4%). During the mentioned period, a decrease in expenses was recorded in the following directions: professional APs, faculty and staff (-0.72%), infrastructures and resources (-1.29%).

At the same time, the study of the documents shows that in the last three years, a significant part of the TLI's funds (81% and more) is allocated to salaries, science costs average about 3.2%, economic costs - about 3.2%, the rest goes to to other expenses. The university's financial resources include external sources from various grant programmes.

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

According to the results of the study of the documents presented by ShSU and expert meetings, it became clear that the TLI does not have a policy for the distribution of financial resources that ensures the implementation and continuity of the goals of APs. The university did not calculate the minimum resources necessary for the AP implementation . At the same time, during the site visit, it became clear that based on the strategic issues and needs of the province and the region, the university finds an opportunity to provide the organisation of education of full-time Bachelor's and Master's

programmes, in the part-time Bachelor's programmes with a small number of students (for example, the 2023-2024 academic year data: Tourism (full-time/Bachelor's): 3 students; Intercultural communication: French and Armenian (full-time/Bachelor's): 2 students; Political science (full-time/Bachelor's): 3 students; Biology (full-time/Master's): 1 student, Decorative applied arts (full-time/Bachelor's): 1 student; English language and literature (part-time/Bachelor's): 2 students, Music education (part-time/Bachelor's): 1 student, etc).

During the site visit, it became clear that in order to prepare the budget for the planned year, data is collected from all structural departments, they are evaluated by the relevant department of the TLI, and then, based on the submitted requests, the TLI provides the current application materials and resources necessary for the implementation of the programmes.

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

During the site visit, it became clear from the review and discussion of resources that the TLI's resource base enables APs to be implemented. Nevertheless, as a result of the site visit, it was recorded that there is an issue, for example, of modernisation of laboratory materials and equipment, enrichment of the library fund, increase of the salary of the TS.

In accordance with the SDP, the TLI has implemented significant structural changes, thereby, in fact, changing the logic of resource distribution to a certain extent. According to the university management, this change should contribute to the implementation of the strategic plan. Nevertheless, expert observations have shown that the financial allocations of the university are mainly directed to the provision of salaries.

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

Document circulation at ShSU is coordinated by the Department of Human Resources Management, Document Circulation and Legal Assurance on the basis of its charter, which was approved in its current form in 2023. The department carries out the functions of using the Mulberry system, servicing the university's official info@ShSU.am and secretariat@ShSU.am e-mail addresses, accepts official and unofficial correspondence, and supervises their implementation. Among the functions of the mentioned department is the organisation of archiving of university documents, as well as the development of internal legal acts, regulations, draft contracts and other draft documents.

The internal document circulation of the university is organised both electronically (e-mail, local network) and, if necessary, in paper form.

A special computer programme was developed and implemented, which enables organising the academic processes. In particular, it includes data about students and alumni, forms examination, academic reports, progress summaries, etc. In cooperation with the relevant guest specialist, the university regularly tries to develop the software capabilities of the existing system, planning to expand the databases to include the necessary information about the TS in the near future.

Accounting activities at ShSU are carried out by an automation system using accounting programmes.

The coordination of the TLIs information process is carried out by the Centre for Foreign Cooperation based on its charter, which was approved in its current form in 2023. Among its many functions, the Centre's functions include the creation and coordination of content for ShSU's official

website, social platforms. From the study of the official website of ShSU, it became clear that it provides quite wide access to information on reports, documents, organisational and other academic processes.

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

The university has a first-aid stop equipped with first aid facilities. Doctor and nurse posts are planned in the list.

The entrance to the building has a ramp that provides access to the ground floor for people with special needs. There are no ramps inside the building. During the site visit, it was found that the university does not currently have students with locomotor issues, but in case of having them, it is planned to organise the education process for them on the first floor.

The safety rules for using the laboratories are posted on the walls of the university laboratories. From the site visit, it was found that the students are also informed about the safety rules for using the laboratories immediately before carrying out laboratory work.

The security of the premises and the building is provided during the day by doormen, at night and also on non-working days by a specialiased security service on a contractual basis.

The building has a fire safety system. Emergency evacuation plans are posted inside the building. The basement, although not sufficiently furnished, can be used as a shelter if necessary.

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

| As a mechanism for evaluating the applicability, availability and effectiveness of resources, the university conducts surveys among stakeholders. According to the procedure on 'Conducting Surveys and Summarising the results at the Shirak State University after M. Nalbandyan Foundation', the main purpose of the surveys is to identify the attitude and satisfaction (also needs) of the stakeholders of the fund with the services provided to them and, accordingly, to make improvements in the services provided. However, the document does not include questionnaires or questionnaire forms, nor does it include a range of topics to be researched. According to the self-evaluation, university students and alumni are generally satisfied with the material and technical resources provided to them during their studies. According to the assessment of various problems, the lowest index among students is 'Satisfaction with classroom furniture' - 3.79 (out of 5.0), the highest - 'Satisfaction with education materials' - 4.47 (out of 5.0). Taking into account that the submitted documents lack the description of the survey implementation methodology, the justification for ensuring representativeness, it can be noted that the conducted surveys do not include a complete and comprehensive assessment of the applicability, availability and effectiveness of the provided resources.

Considerations. The expert panel considers it positive that the TLI is continuously developing its infrastructure and resources to fulfill the goals of the educational institution. ShSU has the necessary learning environment, which contributes to the achievement of the AP outcomes. The expert panel believes that the revision of the resource replenishment and management policy, the allocation of financial resources according to strategic priorities will contribute to the long-term development of the university.

The expert panel considers it positive that the TLI replenishes its resources also through grant programmes. The expansion of alternative financial sources will give the TLI more opportunities to implement the planned programmes. The expert group believes that the university needs to focus on the directions of allocation of funds in order to expand the volume of allocations to development directions apart from salary payment. For the purpose of forming the development budget, the university can also consider other cooperations, the involvement of financial resources through the state and international organisations.

The expert panel emphasises the university's commitment to produce specialists with the necessary specialities for Shirak marz by implementing APs in small groups and notes that the evaluation of the resources needed for the implementation of APs by the TLI and the introduction of resource distribution mechanisms in line with the final results will be important from the point of view of financial planning of the APs.

The expert panel positively assesses that the university has also improved the documentation processes after the previous accreditation, which contributes to increasing the efficiency of information transfer and dissemination. The electronicisation of document circulation processes also contributes to the easier collection and processing of data necessary for the AP implementation.

The expert panel positively evaluates the steps taken by the TLI to create the necessary conditions for safe activity, to acquaint students with the rules for using laboratories, which contributes to the improvement of the education environment and the management of life activity risks.

It is also a positive circumstance that the stakeholders of the university are mostly satisfied with the infrastructure of the institution, and the mechanisms of application of the provided resources support the identification of needs. A comprehensive analysis of the identified needs can be important in the context of improving the TLI's existing resource allocation processes.

Summary. Taking into account that the TLI is provided with appropriate infrastructures and resources for the AP implementation, it is continuously improving its infrastructures, it also uses the opportunities of international programmes in order to replenish resources, the university has appropriate systems for implementing the documentation processes, the university creates a safe environment for organising the learning process for, resource efficiency assessment mechanisms are in place at the university, the expert panel considers that ShSU meets the requirements of Criterion 7.

Summary: The expert panel evaluates the compliance of ShSU institutional capacities with the requirements of Criterion 7 as **satisfactory**.

VIII. SOCIETAL RESPONSIBILITY

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

Findings

8.1 The Institution has clear policy on accountability.

Public responsibility is one of the tasks set by the ShSU SDP, which derives from the strategic 'Public Involvement' goal. A unique indicator of the ShSU societal responsibility is the fact that about 90% of alumni work and carry out activities in Shirak marz. It became clear from the site visit that the

TLI values accountability and transparent practices at all levels of governance and in all spheres of activity. Ensuring the accountability and transparency of the activity is assigned by the relevant regulations to the Foreign Cooperation Centre, which also uses the information provided by other centres and departments. Thus, expert studies show that the university tries to ensure accountability not only in vertical, but also in horisontal directions. The vertical component of the accountability system includes graded reporting and culminates in the rector's annual report for approval by the board of trustees. At each reporting level, the TLI has implemented the so-called 'related report' order, a unique mechanism of double-checking, when the body discussing and approving the report is also presented with the conclusion of the corresponding higher level. The efficiency of the introduced mechanism has not been evaluated by the TLI yet. Nevertheless, the reports continue to be largely descriptive, and the documentation requirements supporting the process do not form an adequate basis for encouraging the analytical nature of the reports.

The university also submits reports on its activities to the RA MoESCS, RA MoESCS HESC, RA SRC, RA Statistical Committee, as well as, as necessary and required, other state agencies.

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

Various aspects of the ShSU activities are covered both on the official website, on the pages of the university in social networks, and through information distributed through other communication channels. In the first half of 2024, the number of visitors to the TLI website is 226,607. It is noteworthy that the majority of respondents prefer social networks (53 and 29 percent of the respondents follow the activities of the university on Facebook and Instagram social networks, respectively, while 13 percent follow the university's official website). A study of the university's official website showed that information related to student services, the Student Council, and the Student Scientific Society are the most difficult to find: they are placed together in the 'More' section.

After the previous accreditation, considerable work was done to ensure the adequacy of the website's Armenian and, especially, English pages. It is important to note in this regard that a group of volunteers consisting of students was formed at the Centre for Foreign Cooperation, with the participation of which 47 pages of website materials were translated into Russian and 186 pages into English within a year.

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

Providing feedback to the public is entrusted to the Centre for Foreign Cooperation and is regulated by the latter's charter and approved public relations procedure, which includes collecting feedback from the off-campus environment, as well as filling the appropriate section of the official website, comment fields on social media pages, e-mails to various university infrastructures., etc. The mechanism of periodic press conferences of the ShSU Rector is also applied. In order to determine the effectiveness of feedback, at the end of each semester, online surveys are conducted among external and internal stakeholders, they are analysed and appropriate improvements are made based on the results of the analysis. It is important to note in this regard that regardless of the platform used, 87 percent of the stakeholders expressed satisfaction with the feedback. Nevertheless, in the absence of an analysis of the site's impact, the picture of the formation of communication mechanisms with some

groups of external stakeholders, in particular with parents of applicants, is not clear.

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

After the previous accreditation, some progress has been recorded in the university in the direction of imparting high-quality knowledge and values to the public. The Centre for Foreign Languages was created and will start its activities from the coming academic year, one of the goals of which should be the implementation of language courses for foreign stakeholders. It became clear from the site visit that the trainings for teachers are on a systematic basis, direct connections with the education institutions of the region have been activated, in particular, education visits are organised for school students, during which the students are also able to use the laboratory resources of the university. A number of other initiatives are also underway, among which it is noticeable that the study of local community issues, as well as the applied value, in the topics of master's theses and in the research conducted within the framework of the thesis is increasing.

The conducted surveys show the positive impact of that field of the university's activities on the environment of Shirak marz. Thus, during the last three years, the number of participants of the trainings and organised summer school was 521 and 107, respectively.

At the end of the summer school, the participants also fill in questionnaires, where the students evaluate the knowledge and impressions they received on a 1-5 point system. 90 percent of the participants found it interesting and 85 percent useful.

It is clear from the expert studies that when planning the processes of transferring values to the society, ShSU did not carry out a complete assessment of the region's needs, on which the directions of the courses would be based (for example, one of the TLI's research directions: implementation of courses in the field of Armenian studies) and target groups (for example, the elderly).

Considerations. The expert panel positively assesses that the TLI is guided by the practice of ensuring accountability and transparency at all levels of management. From this point of view, it is important to continuously improve the analysis of the submitted reports, to show the dynamics of the development of the planned processes and to analyse the reasons for the unfulfilled or incompletely fulfilled processes. Maintaining this chain of accountability will also significantly contribute to increasing the efficiency of subsequent planning processes.

It became clear from the site visit that the combination of public responsibility and external, including international relations functions in one link of coordination ensures the implementation of accountability and transparency processes.

It is a positive circumstance that after the previous accreditation, the mechanisms for ensuring transparency, the periodicity of updating information, including foreign language versions, have been improved. Full coverage of information on APs, coverage of professional opportunities for alumni will also contribute to raising awareness of the university among applicants and contribute to increasing public visibility of ShSU.

ShSU has made some progress in imparting knowledge and values to the public by organising trainings and courses for various groups of the public. The full use of the potential of the newly created Foreign Language Centre is important to contribute to the increase in the level of language proficiency of the stakeholders, and it can also provide additional financial income for the university. The expert panel considers that a complete assessment of the needs of the society can contribute to the correct

selection of courses and target groups, contribute to the solution of local problems and ensure the increase of the public influence of the university in the region.

Summary. Taking into account that ShSU, as a regional university, according to its mission, has a defined procedure of accountability, after the previous accreditation, the mechanisms for ensuring the transparency and accountability of the TLI's activities have been improved, there are mechanisms for providing feedback to society, and there are opportunities for the transfer of knowledge and values, the expert panel considers that ShSU meets the requirements of Criterion 8.

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

IX. EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND INTERNATIONALISATION

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

Findings

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

Shirak State University, taking into account the previous accreditation results, has defined its ambitions in the direction of internationalisation and cooperation, which is reflected in the ShSU SDP 2023-2027 as one of the problems of ensuring quality education (problem 5), proposing solutions in different directions. During the site visit, it was found that ShSU, emphasising the exchange of experience, development and internationalisation, developed and implemented procedures regulating processes, some of which were developed within the framework of international cooperation programmes, ensuring comparability with normative documents regulating relevant processes of partner universities. For example, the charter of the University's Centre for Foreign Cooperation (CFC) was revised, the internationalisation concept of ShSU for 2023-2024, the five-year/annual work programme of CFC for 2023-2027 were developed.

ShSU is guided by the strategy of internationalisation of RA higher education and a number of documents in carrying out processes in the direction of its foreign relations and internationalisation. In the SP implementation schedule, ShSU planned the actions arising from the problems of SP in the direction of internationalisation, some of which were implemented at a certain stage, for example, steps towards the development of the visiting teacher, associate professor institute, trainings aimed at developing the abilities and skills of the staff to write and manage grant programmes, but active steps have not yet been taken in the direction of some of the actions, they are planned to be implemented in the plan from 2024, for example, in the direction of the implementation of joint APs.

However, through various grant programmes, ShSU has also contributed to the enrichment of the university's resource base, promoting the equipping of the university with modern technologies necessary for the AP implementation. For replenishment and modernisation of the material and technical base, ShSU was provided AMD equivalent to about 250,000 euros, more than 100 employees of the Foundation received a salary of AMD equivalent to about 70,000 euros, and more than 40 staff

and students had the opportunity to continue their studies, teaching and experience from five days to a semester at European partner universities.

In its SP, ShSU also set the task of being an organisation supporting Armenian preservation in the Diaspora through the organisation and implementation of educational and cultural programmes, but there are still no noticeable results in this direction.

Emphasising cooperation and external relations, ShSU has a number of agreements with local and international organisations, of which cooperation agreements have been signed or revised with about 10 European universities within the framework of the Erasmus+ academic mobility KA-1 programme.

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

There is a Centre for Foreign Cooperation at ShSU, which has been operating since 2005, its functions are defined in the Centre's charter. It was also updated in accordance with the 2023-2024 SP goals, including the development of directions for the internationalisation and cooperation of ShSU, the involvement of high-quality human resources, public responsibility, and the organisation and implementation of high-quality and competitive supplementary education services. The centre has a five-year/annual work plan and submits an annual report, which is included in the TLI annual report.

The centre is staffed (7 positions are defined). There are job descriptions and conditions for performance of functions. During the study of the documents and the visit, it became clear that the head of the Centre is responsible for the development of the 'Public Involvement' direction of the SP. The activities carried out by the centre are aimed at the development of foreign relations and internationalisation.

The centre also provides coverage of ShSU's activities and promotes the expansion and diversification of ShSU's relations with the public, improving the quality of their implementation through the 'University Newspaper' periodical programme, programmes, ShSU website and social networks. During the site visit, it was found that trainings were carried out in particular for students and employees of ShSU on writing grant programmes, development of capacities for carrying out research works, construction and AP implementation at formulating education outcomes in line with national and sectoral frameworks of qualifications, as well as also conducted trainings for public school principals, teachers, pre-school education institution principals and tutors, and according to the WHO 2022-2023 annual report, the results planned for the implementation of supplementary courses for external stakeholders have not yet been provided. During the visit, it became clear that the Centre planned to implement some supplementary and informal courses (EMIS platform, functions, opportunities, knowledge, skills, conflict management, work-based learning-organisation and implementation issues, etc), some of which have already been implemented. Comprehensive analyses and evaluations of the performed works have not been carried out.

9.3 The Institution effectively collaborates with local and international counterparts.

According to the self-evaluation, ShSU cooperates with a number of local and international organisations. It has cooperation agreements with about 20 European, 2 Indian, more than 15 CIS countries, about 10 RA universities and education institutions, as well as more than 20 other RA and international organisations.

ShSU has actively participated in international programmes in different years. In particular, over the past three years, ShSU has participated in five Erasmus+ university capacity building (KA2) programmes (ABioNet, BOOST, SMARTI, WBL4JOB, T4GREEN), as well as seven academic mobility (KA1) programmes: four in Romania, two in Spain and one university in Portugal. It became clear from the site visit that the participants involved in the programme exchange experience in the form of seminars or presentations at ShSU when they return from their visits within the framework of international programmes.

As a result of the implementation of programmes aimed at the development of the universities' capabilities, the specialities 'Biotechnology', 'Social Work', 'Sustainable Tourism' were introduced in ShSU, structural units were established, and the existing units were modernised (QA Department, SSUEC Department, Foreign Language Learning Centre, Biotechnology Laboratory). From the site visit and the observation of resources, it became clear that within the framework of international programmes, the university acquired modern computer techniques and equipment, created and re-equipped professional classrooms.

Within the cooperation with the 'P-H International' organisation, the 'Civic Education Centre' was established at ShSU in 2023, where ShSU students actively participate in the courses.

Within the cooperation with the Gyumri-based 'Depi Hayk' organisation, during the last five years, volunteers were involved in ShSU, who carried out volunteer work in various fields, cooperating with students and employees.

ShSU actively cooperates with various structures and organisations in the region, which contribute to the social activity and involvement of students, as well as the development of practical skills. Cooperations are carried out not only in the context of internships, but also in the framework of the organisation of the practical part of the graduation work. For example, it became clear from the site visit that at the Institute of Botany named after A. Takhtajyan, the student of the 'Biology' AP performed experiments, based on the results of which they wrote their graduation thesis.

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

According to the self-evaluation, the level of foreign language proficiency among ShSU teachers and students is sufficient, in the case of teachers it is on average 91%, and in the case of students it is 100%. However, during the site visit, it was found that the level of foreign language proficiency is generally low. Meanwhile, young specialists of ShSU value it and try to improve language skills. ShSU considers the Centre for Foreign Languages (CFL) established in 2023 within the framework of the Erasmus+ SMARTI programme to provide education services not only to ShSU teachers and students, but also to the interested population of Gyumri as a means of increasing the level of foreign language proficiency, in particular, English. During the visit, it was found out that foreign language courses will start in the centre from September. In order to ensure the necessary level of knowledge of English, ShSU, taking into account the advice given as a result of the previous accreditation, increased the number of hours allocated to foreign language in APs to two semesters instead of one semester, but during the visit it was found that it is still not enough to ensure results in a short period of time. ShSU also does not have APs taught in a foreign language or any courses taught in English in non-professional courses other than the 'English Language and Literature' AP courses.The TLI also has no experience in studying tools that contribute to internationalisation. During the previous

accreditation, there was also the problem of foreign language proficiency among the internal stakeholders.

It became clear from the site visit that the level of foreign language proficiency among students and teachers hinders their mobility, the number of which in the past three years was 7 in each case (5 of them in 2023).

Considerations. The expert panel positively evaluates the fact that ShSU has a Centre for Foreign Cooperation, through which it participated in a number of international programmes, has an internationalisation and cooperation policy and implements coordinated processes. However, the expert panel considers that an effective way to achieve the SP vision and goals is to provide favorable conditions for the foreign language APs, mobility of teachers and students, including the creation of conditions for foreign language learning as quickly as possible. At the same time, the expert panel emphasises the selection of clear and realistic deadlines for the activities planned in the work programme, which can lead to higher performance indicators.

It is positive that ShSU has a number of local and international agreements in order to expand its cooperation, but their direction to the implementation of practical joint programmes will contribute to the implementation of mobility programmes in ShSU, the increase of the foreign language proficiency among internal stakeholders, and the exchange of professional experience. Involvement in international programmes for about 10 years has contributed to the improvement and acquisition of resources in the TLI, currently ShSU needs to direct the programmes to the improvement of APs and to connect the cooperation established within them to the implementation of benchmarking and the AP improvement.

At the same time, the expert panel finds the need for active cooperation of ShSU with research organisations and centres, including organisations operating in the Diaspora, which will result from its SP and expand the university's cooperation opportunities in the direction of implementing research programmes.

Existing collaborations in RA and in particular in Shirak Marz contribute to the implementation of student internships and interaction with employers, as well as their involvement as teachers in the university.

ShSU has emphasised the role of internationalisation and cooperation in all SP directions, which also documents the attitude and aspiration of ShSU in the direction of compliance and competitiveness with the European education environment. Although the low level of foreign language proficiency among the TS and students, particularly English, is a concern for the expert panel, on the other hand, the opening of the Foreign Languages Centre at ShSU can lead to positive results in this context.

Summary. Taking into account that ShSU has a policy promoting internationalisation, has defined its ambitions in the direction of internationalisation and cooperation, the infrastructure of external cooperation ensures a regulated process, the TLI continuously expands cooperation with local and international structures, plans to conduct foreign language courses for the stakeholders of foreign language classes to increase the language proficiency, the expert panel considers that ShSU meets the requirements of Criterion 9.

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

X. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

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

Findings

10.1 The Institution has quality assurance policies and procedures.

The internal QA system at the TLI was started in 2011. After the previous accreditation, ShSU is trying to transform it into a decentralised model, spreading the culture of quality among all departments in various processes. The TLI has adopted a policy aimed at ensuring and spreading that culture, continuous development and improvement. However, a separate QA structure as such was formed only in 2023, separating from the Centre for Academic Policy, QA and Management, which, according to the university, significantly limited the opportunities to form a comprehensive quality culture, in particular reducing the influence of QA tools in a number of key areas of ShSU activity, such as for example, research, international cooperation, communication with society. The newly created department operates under the direct supervision of the Rector.

The goal of the QA policy approved in 2024 is to ensure the compliance of the services provided in all areas of the TLI's activities, as well as the knowledge, skills and abilities acquired by students, to the goals defined by the ShSU mission and vision. One of the objectives of the QA policy is also to contribute to the continuous improvement and development of the internal QA system, in particular to support the increasing role of internal and external stakeholders in the QA, management and improvement processes. The QA policy has defined a number of issues, among which are the continuous improvement of the education, research and cultural environment in accordance with the needs of internal and external stakeholders, the continuous improvement of internationalisation and cooperation processes in line with the strategic priorities of the university and the increase of efficiency, ensuring the efficiency of governance in all areas of the university's activities and data-based decisions. supporting the establishment, internal and external accountability of ShSU, transparency of activities, continuous improvement and increasing efficiency. An internal QA and governance concept was also adopted and a new internal QA system manual was created. The study of the manual of the internal QA system shows that instead of reflecting the features of the internal QA system, the logic of the system's operation, it mainly presents the normative documents regulating the field of higher education, the tools used for the purpose of identifying needs. After the previous accreditation, the university, having taken steps in developing the necessary documents for the operation of the system, has not yet fully implemented the developed toolsets.

From the document review and site visit, it became clear that after the previous accreditation, the conducted researches were expanded, new questionnaires and forms were developed in order to highlight the needs of ShSU processes in the following directions:

- Evaluation of the TS professional, pedagogical and organisational competencies by the ShSU students,
- Evaluation of the education received by the ShSU students, professional and organisational processes of the university,

- Evaluation of education received by the ShSU alumni, professional and organisational processes of the university,
- Evaluation of the internship effectiveness and quality by the ShSU students,
- Evaluation of the governance system and administrative structures of the university by TS of ShSU,
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of knowledge assessment by the ShSU students, internship, academic consultation, etc.

During the site visit, it became clear that when improving the questionnaires, the TLI took into account the directions of application of the results expected from their answers, however, the observation of the questionnaires shows that the questions in them are not always within the scope of the assessment participant's activities (for example, the student's evaluation of the ability to solve professional tasks given by the teacher, etc). It became clear from the site visit that the university is currently in the process of developing and testing the QA tools and plans to consider the possibilities of their improvement, taking into account the feedback received from the stakeholders.

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

After the structural changes, the newly formed QA department, for which eighteen main functions have been defined (the key of which can be considered to be the maintenance of uniform quality standards in all the main areas of the TLI's activities, to support the correspondence and implementation of the QA and governance processes), has been staffed with four employees, who are provided with activities with the necessary material resources. Along with that, the department, with the aim of forming a complete QA system and in fulfillment of the above-mentioned main function, has created a branched network of quality supporting teachers and students, which supports the advancement of QA issues at the levels of the main education infrastructures: faculties, chairs, as well as individual APs. The work of volunteers is also widely used in matters of awareness and dissemination of questionnaires.

In essence, it can be stated that the formation of the internal QA system in the TLI is considered one of the priority tasks, for the implementation of which material and financial resources are provided according to the appropriate procedures established within the university, such as, for example, the salary and allowances of the employees of the QA department, the funds directed to the replenishment of the material resources of the department , as well as the funds provided for the trainings. It became clear from the site visit that in the near future ShSU plans to create training opportunities for QA department employees, as well as to conduct internal trainings for quality supporters.

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

After the previous accreditation, the newly established QA department has embarked on internal QA, in the direction of creating an effective branched system with the widest possible involvement of stakeholders, which will cover all aspects of the university's activities. Primarily, foundations have been laid to involve internal stakeholders, particularly students and teachers. Thus, students and teachers are involved in working groups, committees, particularly in the SP development/improvement committee, in the QA committee of the chair. The participation of external stakeholders, such as alumni, employers, and other public actors, in QA processes is more limited for

now. The university collects the opinions of external stakeholders for the purpose of updating the APs, considers the reports of the final attestation committees, and also conducts surveys among employers.In particular, at the end of the previous academic year, evaluations were made of the needs for the development of professional, pedagogical and organisational competences of the ShSU TS, professional, pedagogical and organisational competences of the TS by the ShSU students, satisfaction with the quality of professional training of ShSU alumni by the employer members of the final attestation committee. From the expert studies, it became clear that as a result of the conducted surveys, the university raised and took steps in the direction of extension of internships, expansion of foreign language learning opportunities, improvement of infrastructures. By highlighting the needs of the alumni, the university implemented additional courses aimed at developing soft skills and the ability to use information technologies. It became clear from the expert studies that the QA system has not yet been able to highlight the problems of the governance system, the evaluation of the effectiveness of the governance system has not been carried out in the university, there are no comprehensive analysed data on the regional priorities, the development directions of the university, which could be used as a basis for making managerial decisions.

10.4 The internal quality assurance system is periodically reviewed.

Since the previous accreditation, ShSU revised the QA system based on the expert recommendations provided as a result of the accreditation. Extensive changes to the ShSU internal QA system implemented last year are still in the process of implementation, and in that sense it is too early to consider the need for new revisions based on the analysis of the results of a certain cycle of the system's operation.

It became clear from the site visit that the developed questionnaires are discussed with the target group stakeholders, improved based on suggestions and then put into use. It became clear from the expert meetings that the university plans to review and improve the developed toolkits after using them for one round, taking into account the reactions of the beneficiaries. While developing the QA tools, the TLI also considers the questionnaires and formats used by other similar universities.

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

A working group was formed by the Rector's order to carry out the self-analysis of the external assessment. The director of the IQA centre and the Rector were responsible for all standards. Working subgroups were formed, among which institutional accreditation standards were distributed. Surveys and discussions with internal stakeholders and employers were used to collect self-evaluation data. The self-evaluation is mostly descriptive, presenting the processes implemented by the university after the previous accreditation. At the same time, it should be noted that there are issues with the way of presentation of the provided materials. The main part of them, including the QA manual, are descriptive, factual, not analysed. Within the framework of the self-analysis, the university did not analyse to what extent the results of the analysis, such as the results of the annual reports, are used in decision-making and strategic planning, as well as in the detection of problems in the internal QA system.

The TLI QA policy and procedures for external assessment are also available on the official website.

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

The TLI is engaged in providing open and transparent information on various fields for internal and external stakeholders. Documents posted on the university's website, including reports, protocols, rector's reports, and other materials are available for study, including bases also in English. Among the events published on the TLI website, a large place is occupied by messages about events that are directly related to QA processes, such as, for example, materials related to meetings with quality student supporters. During the site visit, it became clear that the stakeholders are informed about the QA processes and their results. The results of the questionnaires are discussed during the meetings with the stakeholders

The university also uses social media to spread awareness about the QA-related meetings.

Considerations. The expert panel positively assesses that the TLI has formed an internal QA system, which is based on a decentralised QA model, including various groups of stakeholders of the university. The regulation of processes through the development of policies and concepts is important to put internal QA processes on institutional foundations. In order to fully implement the QA system, the expert panel considers that the use of all developed mechanisms and their improvement based on the feedback of the stakeholders will contribute to the improvement of the education environment. Continuous improvement of the applied tools, accurate selection of target groups, ensuring representativeness of participants in surveys will contribute to the collection of reliable data.

Taking into account that the TLI is in the process of active changes, the expert panel emphasises the role of the QA system to continuously collect reliable data on the areas of the university's activities, to follow the process of change management. It is necessary to put the data provided by the QA system into the basis of the management of these changes, which will also contribute to the effective making of managerial decisions.

It is a positive circumstance that the new QA department was equipped with four employees and necessary material resources. The TLI places importance on providing sufficient resources to manage QA processes. According to the expert panel, the creation of new opportunities, the allocation of financial resources for the training of department employees will contribute to their professional development.

The expert panel positively evaluates the university's efforts to involve internal stakeholders in the QA processes, which has contributed to highlighting their needs, and emphasises the expansion of opportunities to receive feedback from external stakeholders, which will contribute to strengthening the TLI-employer ties and improving APs.

Periodic reviews of the internal QA system and the provision of transparent information ensure the continuous development of the system. The TLI website and social networks greatly contribute to the dissemination of information about the QA processes, which increases public trust in the university and can promote the expansion of cooperation with stakeholders, which will lead to the sustainable development of the university in the long term.
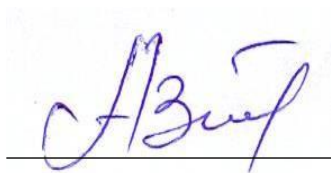
The expert panel, emphasising the spread of quality culture in all domains, considers that the TLI will make progress in the QA system in the conditions of the formation of a unified vision.

Summary. Considering that the university has improved the QA system after the previous accreditation, allocates adequate human and material resources for the implementation of the QA processes, continuously expands the QA network with the involvement of QA supporters, creating the basis for spreading the quality culture, internal and to a certain extent external stakeholders are involved in the QA processes, the QA system ensures the transparency and accessibility of the implemented processes to the stakeholders, the expert panel considers that ShSU meets the requirements of Criterion 10.

Conclusion. The expert panel evaluates the compliance of ShSU institutional capacities with the requirements of Criterion 10 as **satisfactory**.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

CRITERION	CONCLUSION
1. Mission and Purposes	Satisfactory
2. Governance and Administration	Unsatisfactory
3. Academic Programmes	Satisfactory
4. Students	Satisfactory
5. Faculty and Staff	Satisfactory
6. Research and Development	Satisfactory
7. Infrastructure and Resources	Satisfactory
8. Societal Responsibility	Satisfactory
9. External Relations and Internationalisation	Satisfactory
10. Internal Quality Assurance System	Satisfactory

Armen Harutyunyan
Chair of Expert Panel

15.08.2024

APPENDICES

Armen Harutyunyan. In 2000, he graduated from the Department of Theater Studies of Yerevan State Institute of Theatre and Cinematography. In 2003, he became Candidate of Arts. In 2004-2011, he worked as the deputy dean of the Faculty of Theater and Cinema, in 2011-2013 - as the head of the Educational department. Since 2002, he has been teaching Sociology of Art and History of Theater at Yerevan State Institute of Theater and Cinema. From 2014 to 2023, he was the dean of the Faculty of Art History, Theory and Management at Yerevan State Institute of Theater and Cinema. Since 2023, he has been the Vice-Rector for Development of the same institute. He is the author and co-author of a number of articles.

Mieczyslaw W. Socha. He holds a Master's degree from the University of Lodz and earned his PhD and Habilitation in economics from the University of Warsaw. As an academic, he served at the University of Warsaw, where he also fulfilled the role of Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Economics for 9 years. Additionally, he worked at Kozminski University as the Head of the Department of Economics and at Northern State University in the United States. Mieczysław W. Socha has been involved in various research projects funded by several governmental and international institutions, including the various ministries, the National Bank of Poland, the Central Statistical Office, the ILO, the World Bank, the European Parliament, the European Commission (5th Framework Programme), the Ford Foundation, the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science, PHARE, the Open Society Institute, and the A. Smith Centre. His published work, totalling about 140 papers, covers topics such as macroeconomics, the labour market, and the quality of higher education in Polish, English, Japanese, and German. Throughout his career, he gained extensive experience in quality assurance and accreditation of higher education through his work for the Polish Accreditation Committee, foreign agencies, and international accreditation networks. He has been associated with the PKA for almost 20 years. He served as its Secretary, and as a member of the Presidium, Vice-President. He has also been a member of the Advisory Council and the Programme Council and has served as an expert within the institution. Additionally, he was an elected member of the Boards of INQAAHE, ECA, and CEENQA. On behalf of ENQA, ECA, and national agencies, he participated in programme and institutional accreditations of higher education institutions and accreditation agencies in various countries including Albania, Armenia, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Denmark, Lithuania, Kazakhstan, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, and Sweden.

Samvel Karabekyan. In 1980, he graduated from Yerevan State University, Faculty of Oriental Studies (Arabic Language and Literature). In 1984, he defended his PhD thesis on the topic 'Rhythmic Structure of Arabic Speech'. He is a Candidate of Philological sciences, associate professor. In 1984-1990, he was teaching at the Chair of Arabic and Turkish Philology of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, YSU. In 1991-1992 he was an associate professor of the Chair of Arabic Studies of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at YSU. In 1992-2008, he was the chairperson of the Chair of Arabic Studies of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at YSU. In 1995-1997, he was an assistant to the President of the Republic of Armenia; in 1997-1998, he was an advisor to the RA Embassy in Egypt; in 2006-2008, he was the head of the YSU Education Development Department. He also worked as a senior expert on education at the EU Centre in Armenia, advisor to the RA Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports from 2018 to 2021. Since 2021, he has been the chief advisor to the Rector of ASUE. He is the author of a number of articles and works.

Narine Sirakanyan. In 2006, she graduated from the Mathematics and Informatics Department of the Armenian State Pedagogical University named after Kh. Abovyan (Yerevan) (qualification: Mathematics and Informatics teacher). Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences /since 2016/. From 2006 to 2014, she worked as a mathematics teacher at Gandza Public School No. 1, Ninotsminda region, Georgia. In 2014-2016, she worked in the Research Department of Pedagogy of the National Institute of Education of the RA Ministry of Education as a specialist, then as a chief specialist. In 2019-2020, she was the head of the QA Department of the Northern University. In 2020-2021, she was a participant of the 'iGorts' programme of the RA Education Inspection Authority. In 2021-2022, she is an expert in the Department of Risk Assessment, Inspection Planning, Analysis and Evaluation of the RA Education Inspectorate. In 2023-2024, she was the programme manager of the RA Ministry of Economy 'National Innovation and Entrepreneurship Centre' SNPO. Currently, he is the head of the Teachers' Professional Development Department of the National Centre for Education Development and Innovations. He is the author of 18 and more academic methodical articles.

Arpine Hakobyan. In 2023, she graduated from the English Language and Literature department of Vanadzor State University, receiving a bachelor's degree. Currently, she is a graduate student of the same department. She acted as a student expert in the process of external evaluation of EMI centres formed within the framework of Erasmus+ SMARTI programmes. She has published an article in Maribor within the framework of the PROMOEU project: 'Preserving Cultural Diversity: Interaction of Cultures Between Armenia and the EU'. She is a student member of the expert panel.

APPENDIX 2. SCHEDULE OF SITE VISIT

	26.05.2024	Launch	End	Duration
1	Departure from Yerevan to Gyumri	12:00	14:00	120 min
2	Observation of ShSU resources and infrastructure	15:00	16:30	90 min

	27.05.2024	Launch	End	Duration
1	Meeting with the Rector of the University	09:30	10:30	60 min
2	Meeting with Vice-Rectors	10:40	11:30	50 min
3	Meeting with the self-evaluation working group	11:40	12:30	50 min
4	Break, expert panel discussions	12:40	13:40	60 min
5	Meeting with the members of the Board of Trustees	13:50	14:50	60 min
6	Meeting with alumni	15:00	15:50	50 min
7	Meeting with employees	16:00	17:00	60 min
8	Observation of documents, closed session of the panel	17:10	18:30	80 min

	28.05.2024			Launch	End	Duration
1	Meeting with staff member(s) responsible for the AP on 'Biology'	Meeting with staff member(s) responsible for the AP on 'Service'	Meeting with staff member(s) responsible for the AP on 'English Language and Literature'	09:30	10:30	60 min
2	Meeting with teachers of the AP on 'Biology'	Meeting with teachers of the AP on 'Service'	Meeting with teachers of the AP on 'English Language and Literature'	10:45	11:45	60 min
3	Meeting with students of the AP on 'Biology'	Meeting with students of the AP on 'Service'	Meeting with students of the AP on 'English Language and Literature'	12:00	13:00	60 min
4	Break, expert panel discussions			13:10	14:10	60 min
5	Meeting with department heads (Foreign Cooperation, Academic Policy and Innovation Centres, Human Resources Management, Document Circulation and Legal Assurance, Financial Resource Management and Accounting, Student Consultation, University-Employer Cooperation, Economic Activity and Infrastructure Maintenance, Organising Pre-University Education, Library)			14:20	15:30	70 min

6	Meeting with the representatives of Student Council and Student Scientific Society	15:50	16:30	40 min
7	Open meeting	16:40	17:30	50 min
8	Observation of documents, closed session of the panel	17:30	18:30	60 min

	29.05.2024	*Launch*	*End*	*Duration*
1	Meeting with Deans	09:30	10:20	50 min
2	Meeting with the heads of chairs and responsible persons of the academic programmes	10:30	11:30	60 min
3	Lesson observations and participation in the defense of final theses	11:40	12:50	70 min
4	Break, expert panel discussions	13:00	14:00	60 min
5	Meeting with the teaching staff members (8-10 representatives)	14:10	15:10	60 min
6	Meeting with students (8-10 representatives)	15:20	16:20	60 min
8	Observation of documents, closed session of the panel	16:30	18:30	120 min

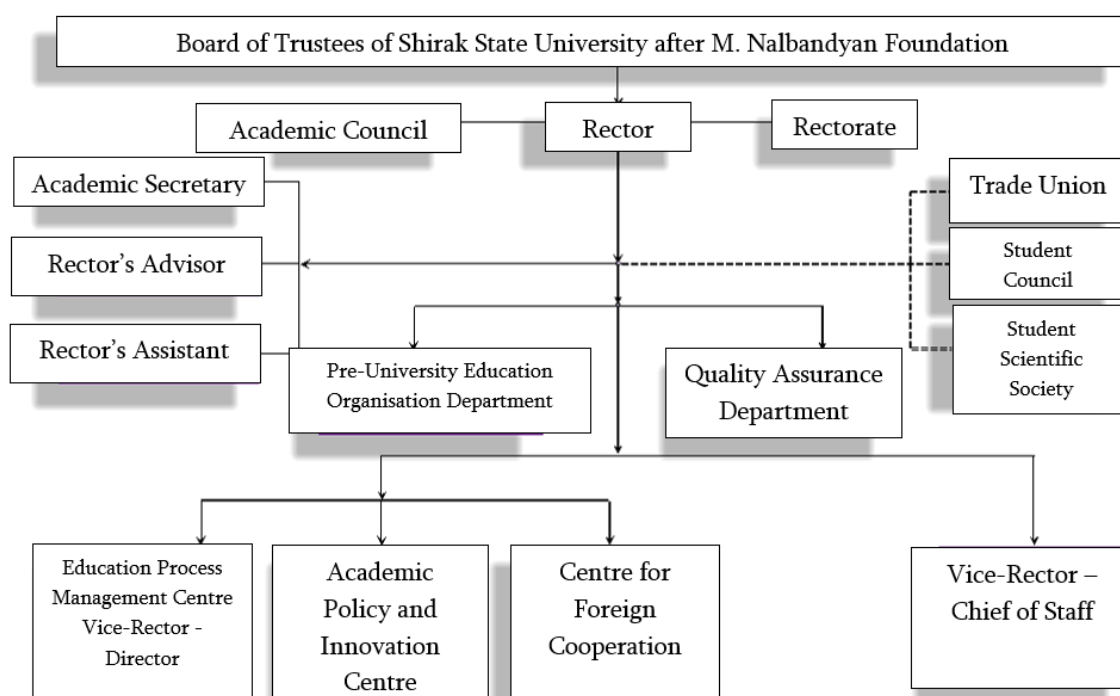|	*30.05.2024*	*Launch*	*End*	*Duration*
1	Meeting with the staff of the Quality Assurance Centre	09:30	10:30	60 min
2	Observation of documents, closed session of the panel	10:40	11:40	60 min
3	Meeting with the members selected by the expert panel	11:50	12:50	60 min
4	Break, expert panel discussions	13:00	14:00	60 min
5	Closed meeting of the panel	14:10	15:10	60 min
6	Meeting with the University managerial staff	15:30	16:00	60 min
7	Departure from Gyumri to Yerevan	17:00	19:00	120 min

APPENDIX 3. LIST OF DOCUMENTS OBSERVED

N	Document name	Criterion
1.	Grounds for labour market research	1
2.	ShSU Rector's orders N325 and N325/1 as of 06.09.2022	1
3.	Grounds for SP evaluation and analysis	1
4.	Proposals for discussion of projects on the ShSU website	1
5.	Analysis of internal and external stakeholder needs for the SP development	1
6.	Implementation schedule of the 2023-2027 strategic development plan	1
7.	Documents reflecting the principles of ethics	2
8.	Grounds for studying the factors affecting the activity of the fund	2
9.	Annual plans and reports of departments	2
10.	Job descriptions	2
11.	Analysis of the fund's strengths and weaknesses, assessment of risks and financial opportunities	2
12.	Thematic calendar plans, lesson plans	3
13.	Co-supervised and non co-supervised theses	3
14.	Theses, high and low graded	3
15.	Comparative study (benchmarking) with APs of RA and other partner universities, and SWOT analysis of APs	3
16.	Final attestation chairs' reports for the past three years by 3 APs submitted	3
17.	According to the APs, 2022 and 2023 admission, planned free and paid places, applicants, admitted data	4
18.	Student/SS ratio	4
19.	List of administrative employees	4
20.	Registers /for selected programmes, one from each course/	5
21.	Master's theses /two for each AP for the past three years/	5
22.	Lesson observation registers /one from each chair/	5
23.	Portfolios of teachers /five from each chair /	5
24.	Teacher plans	5
25.	Completed internship diaries/ for the 3 selected APs: 4 each/	5
26.	Academic advisers, consultation topics and the schedule of meetings, the book of registrations	5

27.	Chairs list with salaries	5
28.	Education load norms	5
29.	Schedule of teacher trainings	5
30.	Training packages	5
31.	Grounds for lesson observations and analysis	5
32.	Financial resource allocation policy	7
33.	ShSU budget, estimate and performance for the past three years	7
34.	Financial audit conclusion	7
35.	Website viewability data	8
36.	Internship contracts	9
37.	Current cooperation contracts with local and international partners	9
38.	Questionnaires for Requirements Elicitation and completed examples	10
39.	Analysis of 2022-2024 surveys	10
40.	SSUEC department plans and reports for the past three years	10

APPENDIX 4. RESOURCES OBSERVED

1. Classrooms,
2. Computer classrooms,
3. Laboratories,
4. Departments,
5. Library, reading hall,
6. Gym halls,
7. Guest house.

Board of Trustees of Shirak State University after M. Nalbandyan Foundation

Academic Council — Rector — Rectorate

Academic Secretary
Rector's Advisor
Rector's Assistant

Trade Union
Student Council
Student Scientific Society

Pre-University Education Organisation Department

Quality Assurance Department

Education Process Management Centre Vice-Rector - Director

Academic Policy and Innovation Centre

Centre for Foreign Cooperation

Vice-Rector – Chief of Staff

APPENDIX 6. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AC – Academic Council

ANQA – National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance

AP – academic programmes

GC – Governance Council

KPI – Key Performance Indicators

NQF – National Qualifications Framework

QA – Quality Assurance

QAC – Quality Assurance Centre

SC – Student Council

ShSU – Shirak State University

SP – strategic plan

SS – support staff

SSS – Student Scientific Society

ThCP – thematic calendar plan

TLI – tertiary learning institution

TS – teaching staff