EXPERT PANEL REPORT

INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION OF

"LORI REGIONAL STATE COLLEGE" (SNCO)

Yerevan – 2025

INTRODUCTION

The institutional accreditation of the Lori Regional State College (hereinafter referred to as TLI or college) is carried out based on the application submitted by the College. The process of institutional accreditation is organized and coordinated by "National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance" Foundation (hereinafter ANQA), guided by regulation on "State Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Academic Programmes in RA" set by RA Government Decree N 978-Ն (dated June 30, 2011) and by Decree N 959-Ն on "Approval of RA Standards for Professional Education Accreditation" (dated June 30, 2011).

The expert examination was carried out by the independent expert panel, which is made up of four local experts and was formed by the requirements set by the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation in regulation on "Formation of the Expert Panel."

The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Republic of Armenia funded the accreditation process.

The institutional accreditation is aimed not only at external evaluation of quality assurance but also at continuous improvement of the quality of management and academic programmes at the institution. Special emphasis was paid to the cooperation between the institution and employers and its impact on education content.

The hereby report comprises the results of the evaluation of the TLI's institutional capacities by the State Accreditation Criteria and Standards.

The activities and history of the TLI

Lori Regional State College was founded in 1970 as the Kirovakan branch of the Yerevan College of Trade and Economics. Over the years, the college has undergone several name changes: in 1971, it became the Kirovakan Soviet Trade Technical School; in 1987, the Kirovakan State Technological Technical School; in 1992, the Vanadzor Technological Technical School; and in 2002, the Vanadzor State Technological College. The most recent name change occurred in 2011 when the institution was renamed Lori Regional State College.

In 2020, the college underwent the institutional accreditation process for the first time, and as a result, in 2021, it received conditional accreditation for two years. Lori Regional State College is in the Lori region.

Development Directions and Educational Programs of the College.

Lori Regional State College plays a crucial role in the region. Through primary vocational academic programs, the college contributes to training small and medium-sized business participants. The college trains service sector employees through additional academic programs and short-term courses.

Nine vocational education institutions operate in the Lori region, one of which is non-state and two of which are craft schools. These institutions offer education in 99 specialties.

The region's priority development areas include mining, light industry (especially light industry and mechanical engineering in Vanadzor), and tourism development. The college's academic programs align with these priorities, offering specializations such as "Clothing Modeling and Design," "Technical Maintenance of Computing Equipment and Computer Networks," "Organization of Tourism Services with Advanced Foreign Language Proficiency," and "Robotics." These programs aim to meet the demands of the region's industrial and tourism sectors.

The college has 492 students. The faculty consists of 44 lecturers, 43 of whom hold higher education degrees, one has a vocational education background, and two hold Ph.D. degrees. Among the 107 graduates of the 2023-2024 academic year, 20 have continued their education at universities in their respective fields, while 33 have found employment, 14 working in their specialties.

For student admissions, the college is allocated a set number of licensed places each year across various specializations:

- "Marketing," "Technical Maintenance of Computing Equipment and Computer Networks," and "Clothing Manufacturing Technology"- 20 places for primary education graduates and 25 for secondary education graduates (part-time learning: 25, 20, 25).

- "Clothing Modeling and Design" and "Trade"-20 places for primary education graduates and 40 for secondary education graduates (part-time learning: 25, 40).

- "Management"-20 places for primary education graduates and 45 for secondary education graduates (part-time learning: 25).

- "Printing Production" -20 places.

- "Organization of Tourism Services with Advanced Foreign Language Proficiency," "Tourism," "Mechatronics," and "Robotics"-25 places each for both primary and secondary education graduates.

While most of these programs are usually filled, during the 2024-2025 academic year, there were no applicants for specific programs, particularly "Tourism," "Trade," and the experimental "Robotics" specialization.

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION

The independent expert panel formed in accordance with the requirements of "Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel", National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation, carried out the expertise of the Lori Regional State College institutional capacities. The evaluation was conducted according to 10 institutional accreditation criteria set by the RA Government Decree N 959-Ն, dated June 30, 2011.

During the evaluation, the expert panel considered that the college is in the second phase of institutional accreditation. The expert panel also considered that the college is a VET institution, whose mission is to "train participants for small and medium-sized businesses through basic vocational educational programs that meet the demands of the economy and the labor market, provide training for service sector workers and individuals through additional academic programs and short-term courses, prepare more qualified and competitive specialists in the labor market through dual education, and ensure the alignment of academic programs with the developing and changing demands of the labor market and the service sector."

After the previous accreditation, the Lori Regional State College has taken significant steps to clarify its strategic plan and implement academic programs that meet labor market demands. The college's mission has been revised in the 2023-2030 strategic plan, emphasizing the importance of vocational education, training, and dual learning. However, it is essential to clarify strategic goals by making them measurable and defining clear indicators for these goals, allowing for periodic assessment of their implementation progress. Improving financial planning and diversifying financial sources will contribute to a more purposeful allocation of resources and ensure the institution's long-term development. The college's management system combines individual and collegial approaches while increasing the participation of students and faculty in administrative processes, which will allow for decisions based on stakeholders' real needs. Regularly analysing internal and external factors, particularly continuous monitoring of labor market demands and studying developments in professional fields, will help adjust strategic directions and increase the relevance of programs.

The existence of strategic planning is crucial for the institution's development. The expert panel positively assesses the improvements in short-term plans after the previous accreditation, and linking them to strategic planning will make resource distribution more purposeful and promote the effective implementation of strategic initiatives. This will ensure the continuity of current operations and clarify intermediate steps necessary to achieve strategic goals.

The expert panel notes that the steps taken since the previous accreditation have not yet led to the full implementation of a quality assurance system within the institution. The existing system does not provide a sufficient foundation to support the institution's strategic development, and the potential for conflicts of interest may limit the identification of governance issues and reduce the effectiveness of management processes. Surveys are conducted among college students, graduates, and employers. However, changes based on their results are not implemented systematically. Collaboration with external stakeholders and program improvements based on their recommendations remain incomplete.

Data-driven management, including periodic analyses related to students, faculty, and employers, will enable the institution to enhance its quality assurance system and improve the efficiency of educational services.

Lori Regional State College is taking steps to improve its academic programs by aligning them with labor market demands. New specializations have been introduced based on regional development priorities in recent years. The implementation of dual education and cooperation with employers contribute to the development of students' practical skills. The expert panel believes that the institution needs to establish clear mechanisms for benchmarking and continuous monitoring of academic programs, which will help enhance graduates' competitiveness in the labor market through program improvements. The constant enhancement of assessment criteria and the development of student feedback mechanisms should also remain a priority for the college to ensure students' professional growth and the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Lori Regional State College has established a clear policy for recruiting faculty and support staff. The faculty's professional qualifications largely align with the subjects they teach, and employers' involvement in the teaching process helps bridge the gap between labor market demands and academic programs.

The college has faculty evaluation mechanisms, and their systematic review will contribute to faculty members' professional development and improve teaching effectiveness. Incentive and professional development programs for faculty also play a crucial role in ensuring career advancement, while targeted funding for training programs based on identified needs will support the enhancement of faculty capacities. The college is taking steps to rejuvenate its faculty by ensuring generational renewal and professional continuity. However, the establishment of an appropriate reserve system could improve faculty stability and the retention of high-quality staff.

The college has the necessary resources to support the learning environment and implement academic programs. In recent years, the college's infrastructure has significantly improved through international programs and collaborations, with the establishment of new laboratories and specialized classrooms that contribute to developing practical skills. However, the college lacks clear financial planning for resource expansion and development, which may affect the sustainability of these improvements. The college also utilizes resources from partner organizations for practical training, which positively impacts students' professional readiness.

The college provides student support mechanisms, such as career guidance initiatives. Efforts to identify and address students' needs have yielded certain results; however, periodic evaluations of their effectiveness and developing additional opportunities for foreign language learning could significantly enhance students' competitiveness.

Research activities are not considered a strategic priority at the college; however, within the framework of professional modules, students engage in research and analytical work, which contributes to the development of practical skills. Student projects include individual and group study, though distinct research directions have not yet been established.

Thesis projects help develop students' analytical and entrepreneurial skills, but the criteria for evaluating research are not clearly defined. Implementing mechanisms to encourage faculty research activities would foster the adoption of innovative approaches and the enhancement of research capabilities.

The college operates a bottom-up accountability system, ensuring transparency, oversight, and periodic performance evaluation. The director's reports include academic and financial data; however, they are not presented as separate, comprehensive documents, which could otherwise provide a more concise overview of implemented initiatives and their alignment with the college's strategic goals.

The college currently uses Facebook as a platform for information dissemination, and starting in 2025, it plans to launch an official website to enhance the transparency and accessibility of information.

As part of its strategic plan, the college prioritizes the development of external relations and internationalization, aiming to integrate the best international practices, implement a credit accumulation and transfer system, and align with global education frameworks. The college collaborates with employers to facilitate student internships and dual education programs, supporting their professional training.

The college participates in Erasmus+ projects within international programs, promoting faculty training and creating new student opportunities. However, there have been no recorded instances of student or faculty mobility.

Strengths of the Institution:

1. Alignment of academic programs with the region's development priorities.
2. Processes implemented by the management team towards resource replenishment and inclusion in internationalization processes,
3. Implementation and development of the dual education system.
4. Development of technological specialties and application of innovative educational approaches.
5. Active collaboration with employers to modernize academic programs.
6. Promotion of students' entrepreneurial skills.
7. Availability of industrial training laboratories and their replenishment,
8. Implementation of international cooperation programs and continuous efforts to establish external partnerships.

Weaknesses of the Institution:

1. Lack of measurable indicators for certain goals in the strategic plan.
2. Insufficient initiative from students and faculty in decision-making processes.
3. Inadequate development of benchmarking and monitoring mechanisms for academic programs.
4. Irregular data collection on all aspects of the institution's activities and limited data availability for managerial decision-making.
5. Lack of diversification in financial resources.

6. Deficiencies in mechanisms for regularly analyzing students' needs to improve the learning environment.
7. Limited opportunities for faculty professional development and promotion of research activities.
8. Lack of accountability mechanisms for the comprehensive dissemination of information among external stakeholders.
9. Absence of measures to enhance internal stakeholders' English language proficiency.

Recommendations:

Database management

- Clarify the strategic objectives and define key qualitative and quantitative indicators for their assessment.
- Improve short-term plans of departments by aligning them with strategic goals.
- Consider presenting the director's reports as a comprehensive document, ensuring a holistic analysis based on strategic objectives.
- Diversify data collection mechanisms and apply them regularly to assess the needs of all areas within the college.
- Utilize the identified needs and collected data to support managerial decision-making.
- Strengthen the Quality Assurance Responsible position to ensure the independence of quality assurance processes.

Credible award of qualifications

- Implement and apply regular assessment tools for practical skills to ensure the continuous development and increased effectiveness of students' competencies.
- Conduct benchmarking by collaborating with local and international educational institutions to study and adapt best practices.
- Establish continuous monitoring mechanisms for academic programs, incorporating stakeholder feedback, graduate career tracking analysis, and final certification committee reports.
- Regularly assess faculty training needs and allocate appropriate financial resources for professional development programs based on identified needs.
- Define clear evaluation and incentive criteria for faculty and administrative staff.
- Upgrade computer equipment and introduce modern software to enhance the efficiency of the educational process.
- Diversify financial resource mobilization by exploring state, private, and international funding opportunities.

Long-term development

- Conduct efficiency assessments of student services and improve them by identifying issues through surveys and feedback mechanisms, developing clear action plans to enhance service quality.
- Establish mechanisms to encourage faculty research activities, promote research development, and increase its significance in education.
- Improve external accountability mechanisms by making annual reports and institutional achievements visible to external stakeholders.
- Take measures to enhance foreign language proficiency among students and faculty to facilitate the adoption of best educational practices and promote academic mobility.
- Develop a clear internationalization policy, define collaboration directions and expected outcomes, and ensure greater involvement of internal stakeholders.

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Lilit Abelyan, Chair of Expert Panel

03.03.2025

DESCRIPTION OF EXTERNAL REVIEW

COMPOSITION OF EXPERT PANEL

The following expert panel conducted an external evaluation of the institutional capacities of the Lori Regional State College.

1. **Lilit Abelyan-** Quality Assurance specialist at Kotayk Regional State College, Lecturer, head of the expert panel.

2. **Oleg Gevorgyan-** Deputy Director of the Information and Communication Technologies and Electronics Institute at the National Polytechnic University of Armenia, Ph.D. in Technical Sciences, Associate Professor, expert panel member.

3. **Susanna Pichikyan-** Lecturer at Shirak Regional State College, expert panel member.

4. **Artak Khachatryan**- Student at the European University of Armenia, Student-Expert.

The composition of the expert panel was agreed upon with the Institution.

Liana Alaverdyan, ANQA's Institutional and Program Accreditation Department Specialist, coordinated the expert panel's work.

All the members of the expert panel and the coordinator have signed independence and confidentiality agreements.

PROCESS OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW

The College applied for state institutional accreditation by submitting to ANQA, filling out the application form, and presenting copies of the license and respective appendices (31.01.2024).

The ANQA Secretariat checked the data presented in the application form and the appendices in the application package.

After deciding to accept the application, ANQA and the College signed an agreement. The timetable of activities was prepared and approved.

Self-evaluation

Considering that the educational institution is going through institutional accreditation for the first time and is in the initial stage of the formation of the culture of quality assurance in college, ANQA conducted four-day online workshops in February. The workshops aimed to prepare colleges for the organizational stages of the accreditation process. During the workshops, the interpretations of the institutional accreditation criteria and standards, the electronic questionnaire to be filled in for applying for institutional accreditation, and the features of self-evaluation and SWOT analysis were presented. The educational institution carried out a SWOT analysis, which was discussed with the

employees of the ANQA. During the implementation of the self-evaluation, the ANQA organized discussions to clarify the issues.

The revised self-evaluation of the college's institutional capacity was presented on 02.07.2024. Representatives of the institution's administrative and educational staff, lecturers, and students were involved in the self-evaluation process.

Preparatory phase

After the submission of the self-evaluation report and the attached documents by the TLI, the ANQA coordinator observed the package to reveal its correspondence to the requirements of the ANQA. The self-evaluation and the attached documents were provided to the expert panel for the preliminary evaluation. The composition of the expert panel was agreed upon with the College and was confirmed by the order of the ANQA Director. Within the scheduled time, the expert panel summarized the preliminary evaluation results, and the Chair of the expert panel and the process coordinator set the site visit schedule.

Preparatory visit

Before the site visit, a preparatory visit to the college was carried out on 13.11.2024. A meeting was organized with the institution's management team and the expert panel, during which class observations were conducted, resources were reviewed across the college's three buildings, and a visit was made to the internship base (Armavir Medical Center). During the meeting, the schedule of the site visit was introduced and agreed upon with the college and discussed, and mutually agreed decisions were made regarding the technical, organizational, and information issues of the site visit, the behaviour, and ethical norms of the meeting participants.

Site visit

The expert panel site visit occurred from November 18 to 20, 2024. During the week preceding the site visit, the members of the expert panel and the coordinator visited the college, observed the infrastructure and resources of the college, conducted class observations, and observed exams. Then, the experts and the coordinator had a closed meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the college according to the standards, clarify the questions to be asked of the target groups, and discuss the procedures for the meetings and the next steps.

The site visit started and ended with meetings with the college director. All the meeting participants were randomly selected from a pre-provided list. All scheduled meetings were held. During the visit, the expert panel studied documents.

At the end of each working day, the expert panel held closed meetings to discuss the results of the interim expert assessment, and at the end of the visit, the main results were summarized.

The expert panel reached its conclusion on the criteria after discussing and analyzing all members' work, always applying the principle of consensus.

Expert panel report

The expert panel members and the ANQA coordinator prepared a preliminary version of the expert report. After the expert panel members approved it, the preliminary report was provided to the college. The college submitted its feedback on the preliminary report version to ANQA on 20.02.2025. ANQA then forwarded the college's observations to the expert panel. Subsequently, ANQA organized a meeting between the college and the expert panel to discuss the institution's observations on the preliminary expert report.

Considering these observations, the expert panel prepared the final version of the expert report, which the group approved on 03.03.2025.

Liana Alaverdyan

Coordinator of the Expert Panel / 03.03.2025

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

CRITERION	CONCLUSION
I. Mission and Purposes	Satisfactory
II. Governance and Administration	Satisfactory
III. Academic Programmes	Satisfactory
IV. Students	Satisfactory
V. Faculty and Staff	Satisfactory
VI.Research and Development	Satisfactory
VII. Infrastructure and Resources	Satisfactory
VIII. Societal Responsibility	Satisfactory
IX.External Relations and Internationalization	Satisfactory
X. Internal Quality Assurance System	Unsatisfactory