

**“NATIONAL CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE”  
FOUNDATION**



**EXPERT PANEL REPORT  
INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION OF  
STEPANAVAN STATE AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE NAMED AFTER PROFESSOR A.  
KALANTAR**

**Yerevan – 2024**

## INTRODUCTION

The institutional accreditation of the Stepanavan State Agricultural College Named After Professor A. Kalantar (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.

## SUMMARY OF EVALUATION

The expertise of the Stepanavan State Agricultural College Named After Professor A. Kalantar institutional capacities was carried out by 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. The evaluation was conducted according to 10 institutional accreditation criteria set by the RA Government Decree N 959-Ն, dated June 30, 2011.

After the first accreditation process, Stepanavan Prof. A. Kalantar State Agricultural College's overall development and management decisions were based on the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan (from now on referred to as the SP), which to some extent includes the recommendations given to the college during the previous accreditation process. In recent years, managerial decisions have contributed to the revision of the college's management system, the implementation of an accountability system from bottom to top, the opening of new specialities due to external stimuli, the introduction of a dual education system, the improvement of the effectiveness of the quality assurance system, the identification of the needs of students and lecturers, the development of external relations, and the establishment of international partnerships.

Following the analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of two experimental academic programs based on work-based education (from now on referred to as WE), the dual education model for the same specialities was introduced. This model implies a more collaborative and institutional approach so that learners will develop their practical skills.

The college has progressed since the first accreditation and managerial decisions are based on more analyzed data. It should be noted that the experience gained from conducting analyses, if further developed and spread across all departments, will provide the college with a data-driven decision-making system, contributing to its continuous and substantiated development.

Eight academic programs are being implemented in the college, two of which are work-based. Lecturers link the assignments given to students in the work-based academic programs to practical activities in the agricultural sector. Professional analyses and practical skills are more pronounced in the diploma projects included in these programs, which are based on real case studies from the labor market. At the same time, it should be noted that some of the outcomes of the work-based academic programs are not fully verified due to the limitations of the relevant field employers' capabilities and the college's material and technical base.

Implementing the remaining academic programs is more theoretical due to the scarcity of the college's resource base and the relatively low involvement of employers. The TLI sees

the solution to the problem in gradually making all academic programs work-based or dual in the future. The expert panel notes the importance of increasing employer involvement in all academic programs, regardless of the format (work-based or non-work-based), as this will alleviate the current limitations of the material and technical base and contribute to the balanced development of all academic programs.

It should be noted that there has been a noticeable trend toward rejuvenating the faculty after the previous accreditation process. In recent years, the influx of many young lecturers has led to the development and systemic implementation of a mentoring policy and the need to develop the faculty's capabilities. The college recognizes the importance of this and is taking steps to provide mentoring support to its lecturers. However, regarding the involvement of faculty from the practical professional field, it should be noted that the current numbers are low—only one lecturer is involved in the teaching process. Mentors conducting practical sessions with employers within the framework of the work-based model somewhat mitigates the shortage of practical experts. However, this good practice is still only evident in the two programs.

In summary, the current educational programs, the tasks given to students, and the joint use of the resource base of employers in collaboration largely ensure the credibility of the qualifications awarded to students.

Since the previous accreditation process, developing the teaching staff's research capabilities and enhancing their motivation to explore international experience remain relevant. The expert panel believes that in the next phase of institutional accreditation, the TLI should pay greater attention to this by introducing clear policies, creating a culture of constantly researching, and keeping innovation in the spotlight within the faculty. This will contribute to preparing competitive graduates and implementing the region's vision for development (having competitive agriculture through modern and innovative practices and technologies).

The introduction of dual specialities in agriculture and establishing international partnerships have led the lecturers who developed the program package to explore similar international practices. The expert panel is confident that the college's management will extend this positive experience to other specialists teaching different specialities.

Students are the college's most important stakeholders. Several mechanisms for identifying students' needs have been developed, ensuring a student-centred environment within the college. Regarding the career trajectories of graduates, the expert panel notes that the college's achievements in this area are not yet satisfactory. An in-depth analysis to

determine the main reasons for unemployment is needed, which will allow steps to be taken towards solving the issue.

The expert panel emphasizes that introducing an accountability system in the college has been a strategic goal, and the work done in this direction is commendable. However, the panel believes that the transparency of processes related to providing information to the public about the college needs improvement. The college has entered a new development phase, and informing the broader public about this will increase the college's attractiveness.

The expert panel also notes that the college effectively collaborates with local and several international partners, and their number has increased in recent years. Through international partnerships, the college acquires resources and studies best practices, which will also contribute to preparing graduates with practical skills.

#### **Strengths of the Institution:**

1. The increase in the college budget in recent years.
2. Clear distinction of hierarchical management relations and clear definition of employees' functions.
3. Increase the salaries of the faculty.
4. Introduction of an analytical component in the reports of certain departments.
5. Inclusion of external and internal stakeholders in the management processes.
6. Experience implementing work-based learning academic programs and identifying and analyzing problems arising from implemented academic programs.
7. Experience studying international practices within the framework of dual academic programs.
8. Availability of professional training within international programs in the agricultural sector in the framework of two agricultural specialities.
9. The diploma introduction has an analytical component based on students' practical experience in the two agricultural specialities.
10. Involvement of local and international partners and the implementation of joint programs.

#### **Weaknesses of the Institution:**

1. The lack of performance evaluation indicators in strategic planning.
2. Inefficient management of specific VET programs (from now on referred to as APs).
3. Imperfection of personnel development and professional qualification improvement mechanisms.
4. Insufficient resource base to develop and assess students' practical skills at educational institutions.

5. Theoretical teaching and assessment in certain specialities without ongoing and final practical skills assessment.
6. The absence of production internships in certain specialities.
7. Limited professional training in non-agricultural VET programs, apart from agricultural specialities.
8. Limited involvement of students and faculty in research work.
9. Low employment rate of graduates.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **Database management**

1. Develop and implement key performance indicators to effectively implement strategic objectives and carry out preliminary financial planning.
2. Activate the involvement of internal and external stakeholders in all strategic planning processes.
3. Derive annual departmental plans from the strategic objectives, which will allow the setting of clear, measurable indicators for evaluating the strategy's performance.
4. Continue to expand the policy of attracting additional financial resources to the institution based on the experience already gained.
5. Ensure the balanced development of all departments, focusing on providing work-based education that forms practical skills (Work-based learning, dual education).
6. Review the Quality Assurance (QA) manual to align it with the college's specific needs.
7. Review the topics for focus group meetings and surveys, focusing especially on teaching effectiveness, evaluation of VET programs, and priority issues for the college, studying them from various perspectives (students, faculty, employers, alumni, etc.).
8. Continue conducting annual SWOT analyses, also including suggestions from departments on overcoming weaknesses and threats.

#### **Credible award of qualifications**

9. Revise the programs for non-agricultural specialities to be implemented in agricultural regions, including a sectoral component (elective courses, reserve hours).
10. Develop and implement a flexible schedule for the external and internal exchange of modules with partner organizations to ensure the effectiveness of dual VET programs and achieve all possible outcomes.
11. Develop and implement a unified approach to student assessment, ensuring transparency in evaluation and establishing specific mechanisms to combat plagiarism.
12. Apply tasks or approaches that assess practical skills in all academic programs (both during the course and during final assessments).

13. Implement clear mechanisms for APs benchmarking, ensuring continuous improvement of the programs based on best practices from local and foreign educational institutions.
14. Implement clear mechanisms for continuously monitoring academic programs, ensuring ongoing improvement of all APs.
15. Conduct periodic needs assessments for faculty, establishing clear methodological and professional development mechanisms based on these needs.
16. Implement a mentoring system for new faculty members, helping them integrate quickly and easily into the educational process.
17. Explore the possibility of involving practising lecturers (especially in non-work-based learning and non-dual programs) to align education with labor market needs.
18. Provide funds for renovation, improvement works, and resource adequacy to improve the college's basic infrastructure (especially laboratories), contributing to the smooth learning process implementation.
19. Expand the network of partners, allowing access to their resource base to implement academic programs in all specialities.
20. Allocate financial resources according to strategic objectives, aligning with the financial resource generation and distribution policies and procedures.
21. Find mechanisms for attracting alternative financial resources, considering the possibility of acquiring new international partners.
22. Take steps to develop entrepreneurial activities at the university, including the involvement of financial resources.

### **Long-term development**

23. Develop and implement a policy to encourage faculty research activities to increase faculty involvement in research, facilitate the study of international practices, and introduce innovative methods.
24. Increase the research and analytical work component in all academic programs through independent student projects while simultaneously developing students' ability to conduct research.
25. Consider expanding the successful experience of thesis work to other academic programs while preparing the faculty for these changes.
26. To expand the research environment/material and technical base, consider collaboration between the college's faculty and employers and faculty from other agricultural institutions to conduct joint research projects.
27. Develop and implement a director's reporting format that summarizes the performance of strategic priorities.

28. Increase the opportunities for transferring knowledge to the public, including providing consulting and support to the region in the agricultural sector.
29. To increase the institution's visibility, consider the possibility of having a foreign-language website.
30. Expand the network of international partners, involving other specialties as much as possible in the internationalization process.
31. Continue improving faculty and student proficiency in foreign languages, supporting student and faculty mobility and studying international experience in their professional fields.
32. Conduct a comprehensive study of student employment rates (including self-employed individuals) and conduct an in-depth analysis of the main reasons for the low level of professional employment among graduates.

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**Christine Hakobyan, Chair of Expert Panel**

**09.09.2024**



## DESCRIPTION OF EXTERNAL REVIEW

### COMPOSITION OF EXPERT PANEL

The following expert panel carried out an external evaluation of the institutional capacities of the Stepanavan State Agricultural College Named After Professor A. Kalantar.

1. **Kristine Hakobyan**- Deputy Director for Educational Affairs of Kotayk Regional State College, Lecturer, Head of Expert Panel.
2. **Aida Dabaghyan**- French Armenian Professional Training Center, Education Quality Assurance Officer, Deputy Director for Personnel Affairs, member of the expert panel.
3. **Alisa Grigoryan**- Lecturer at the Department of Animal Husbandry Products Processing Technology, National Agrarian University of Armenia, member of the expert panel.
4. **Aram Hakobyan**- student of the "Nursing" speciality at Yerevan Base Medical College, student member of the expert panel.

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

Anahit Terteryan, a specialist at the ANQA Institutional and Programme Accreditation Department, 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 (01.02.2024), filling out the application form, and presenting copies of the license and respective appendices.

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, current discussions were organized by the ANQA to clarify the issues.

The self-evaluation of the college's institutional capacity was presented on 02.05.2024. 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, together with the process coordinator, set the site visit schedule.

### **Preparatory visit**

Before the site visit on, a preparatory visit to the college was carried out on 11.06.2024. The ANQA coordinator, the head of the institutional program accreditation department and the head of the expert panel were present at the meeting. During the meeting, the schedule of the site visit was introduced and agreed upon with the college as well as 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 18.06.2024.-20.06.2024. 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 bring out the strengths and weaknesses of the college according to the standards, clarify the questions to be asked to the target groups, and discuss the procedure of 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 on 05.08.2024.

The College sent its response to the report to ANQA on 21.08.2024. Then, on 09.09.2024, the expert panel prepared the report's final version.

**Anahit Terteryan**

**Coordinator of the Expert Panel /09.09.2024**

## EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

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