

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



**EXPERT PANEL REPORT
INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION OF
GAVAR STATE UNIVERSITY**

Yerevan – 2022

INTRODUCTION

The institutional reaccreditation of Gavar State University (hereinafter “GSU” or “university”) 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 study programmes. Therefore, local and international experts had two tasks:

1. To carry out institutional capacity assessment in accordance with 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 GSU institutional capacity assessment according to the RA tertiary education accreditation criteria and international expert's peer review for EHEA integration.

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SUMMARY OF EVALUATION

EXPERT EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES ACCORDING TO RA PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

The expert evaluation of “Gavar State University” Foundation 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.

In conducting the evaluation, the expert panel took into account that GSU is an exceptional state higher education institution operating mainly in Gavar, making higher education available locally in Gegharkunik region.

The expert panel also took into account the fact that GSU is undergoing an institutional accreditation process for the second time, and considers that the implementation of the follow-up of the shortcomings addressed in the previous accreditation expert report had a positive impact on GSU's activities in various areas. GSU has taken action on most of the recommendations received, but a large number of actions were taken only shortly before the second accreditation process, as evidenced by the fact that a significant number of documents were approved in 2021. That is why so many new procedures have not yet passed the PDCA cycle.

The study programmes offered by GSU are aimed at bachelor's and master's degree in the required specialities in the region. The programmes are generally structured, as is the documentation of the development and implementation of APs, but the connection of individual components of the programmes is weak in some cases. In particular, the connection between the methods and outcomes is not clear, just as the whole of outcomes as a system is not visible. However, study programmes are developed and implemented taking into account the specifics of the professions, which significantly contributes to the competitiveness of the alumni. GSU also sets certain requirements for teachers, such as their assessment procedures, as a result of which APs are taught by professionals, including employers. The implementation of APs is also provided with an appropriate educational environment and various material resources. GSU spends the annual budgets significantly more on human resources than on material ones, but GSU is more focused on improving material resources.

Despite the existing problems with study programmes, it can be concluded that GSU generally ensures credible award of qualifications but must be consistent in taking action to eliminate existing problems and hazards.

Being an exceptional university, GSU's mission is perceptible and common to almost all stakeholders. The directions and goals of the GSU development are set out in the strategic plan. The set of goals, however, is not fixed by a clear logic of gradation, as a result of which it is difficult to understand at which point and to which purpose each employee is directing his/her efforts. In such a situation, the role of the governance system becomes more difficult, some parts of which can remain in uncertainty for a long time. However, GSU has established a comprehensive

accountability mechanism that allows for inefficient but result-providing management. In such a case, information management is especially important, the approaches of which, however, are not yet fully developed and implemented in GSU. The problem arises because the internal quality assurance system does not yet generate reliable data and analyses, does not show a critical approach, although at the same time carrying out a large-scale work. However, the GSU QA system is based on QAESG requirements, as well as various mechanisms have been developed and are gradually introduced, which allows to have a reasonable optimism that the university is on the path to developing a quality culture. Thus, GSU should be able to measure the achievement of its goals and the quality of processes.

It can be concluded that the stability of the university's development will not be endangered if GSU consistently develops a quality culture, and the internal quality assurance system fully supports the governance system.

GSU strives to be a full-fledged, trustworthy participant in its community, trying to support its applicants, students and alumni, trying to establish as many external contacts as possible, trying to be as transparent as possible, as well as to conduct beneficial research. This aspiration is particularly stressed given GSU's unique role in the region. However, not all processes are fully implemented, mainly due to insufficient attention paid to skills development, such as foreign language proficiency and especially research methods. At the same time, it should be noted that GSU has a strong desire to engage in these processes. Given this, it can be concluded that with the right targeted investments, GSU can ensure its long-term sustainable integration into both the local and international community but must immediately begin to develop research capabilities in particular to bring them to fruition.

The strengths of the TLI are the following:

1. A generally unified perception of the mission among stakeholders;
2. Clearly defined functions of different parts of the governance system;
3. The potential of collegial governing bodies;
4. Procedural bases for the development and implementation of study programmes;
5. Academic integrity;
6. Student satisfaction;
7. TS and SS with appropriate professional qualities;
8. Educational environment;
9. Transparency of activities;
10. Participation in international programmes and mobility opportunities;
11. Internal quality assurance system with resources.

The weaknesses of the TLI are the following:

1. The gaps in the set of goals: vision from stakeholders, goals from vision, actions from goals, review of goals from actions;
2. Lack of clarity of expected outcomes of study programmes;
3. TS workload;
4. Lack of systematic planning and implementation of research activities;

5. Lack of application of modern research methods;
6. Lack of modern literature in the library fund;
7. Restrictions on hosting in mobility programmes;
8. Lack of reliable information on the quality of processes, measurements, analyses and critical approach.

Main recommendations:

Mission and Purposes

1. Clarifying the role of the state, if necessary, to review and simplify the formulation of the mission of the university, at the same time adapting it to the conceived ideas.
2. To formulate a vision of the development of the university, which will be united for the main stakeholders.
3. Based on the logic of the long-term realisation of the vision, to substantiate and define the priorities for the development of the coming years, redistributing the allocated funds accordingly.
4. To ensure the hierarchy of goals, objectives, and actions in such a way that the connection of the actions with the mission and the vision is visible to each subdivision and employee.
5. To launch the SP as needed review mechanisms, responding appropriately to any deviations from the plan implementation.

Governance and Administration

6. To introduce mechanisms for evaluating the efficiency of the governance system, its separate units and allocated resources, as well as to react consistently to the evaluation results.
7. To increase the effectiveness of using the potential of the Board of Trustees by strengthening the involvement of the Board members in ongoing GSU processes.
8. To carry out a systematic and regular examination of the external environment and assessment of the impact of various factors.
9. To introduce evaluation mechanisms for information collection, analysis, application and publication, emphasising the in-depth analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected, while considering opportunities for diversification of information collection tools.

Academic Programmes

10. To differentiate clearly the outcomes of the bachelor's and master's degree study programmes by adapting them to the NQF, as well as to the SQF. To provide a logical connection between the three sets of outcomes, formulate them as clearly as possible, and make them measurable.
11. To take into account the specifics of certain types of outcomes when determining the preferred methods of teaching, learning and assessment.
12. To introduce students' educational workload planning and monitoring mechanisms.
13. To expand the scope and depth of other processes aimed at benchmarking and programme improvement while introducing mechanisms for systematic evaluation of learning outcomes and effectiveness.

Students

14. To clarify the role of student organisations in representing the interests of students and in other processes.
15. To activate student career services and assess their impact on alumni employment rates, thereby increasing the GSU attractiveness among applicants.

Faculty and Staff

16. To assess the efficiency and hazards of the TS workload and make improvements as needed.
17. To make the TS training a priority for the AP teaching, attaching importance also to external vocational trainings, as well as internationalisation.

Research and Development

18. To provide a coordinated approach to the planning and implementation of research activities, including clarifying the process management system, research support and funding processes.
19. To develop the teaching staff's ability to master research methods, and then the students' research skills.
20. To develop existing external links to the internationalisation of research after developing the ability to master research methods.

Infrastructure and Resources

21. To expand and update the library fund, for example by subscribing to digital libraries; and teach students to do research using these modern sources.
22. To introduce mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of financial management, targeting and monitoring trends in budget structure change.

Societal Responsibility

23. To integrate public accountability and feedback as a platform and stimulus for process improvement and to integrate public responsibility activities into strategic management and QA processes.

External Relations and Internationalisation

24. To develop international communication by translating the website and developing programmes and courses for international students.
25. To clarify and revise the internationalisation strategy as necessary, setting clear goals, short-term, mid-term and long-term action plans.
26. To introduce a sustainable mechanism for ensuring foreign language proficiency among internal stakeholders, promoting their international mobility.

Internal Quality Assurance System

27. To clarify the role of the QA Department in the improvement phase, avoiding further conflicts of interest as much as possible. At the same time, to clarify the role of the QA Department in the TLI management processes.

28. Assessing the effectiveness of the QA system and the resources allocated to it and needs, to provide the most targeted and needs-based trainings and resource allocation.

29. To diversify the QA process information collection toolkit and to analyse the effectiveness of the tools by selecting the most effective approaches to working with each stakeholder group.

30. For ensuring the implementation of the QA procedures, to specify clear actions and the frequency of their implementation.

Tigran Mnatsakanyan

Chair of Expert Panel

28.02.2022

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

In 2017, Gavar State University non-commercial organisation was reorganised into Gavar State University foundation. The university has an ambitious mission and strategic plan. GSU is very ambitious in terms of internationalisation. One of the roles of the international expert was to analyse the feasibility of this assignment and to make suggestions for their internal quality assurance system. This was done on the basis of the ANQA quality criteria, based on ESGs. Suggestions and comments will be made based on the SAR and the meetings during the visit.

The TLI ensures its corporate social responsibility providing appropriate services to its region. The TLI plays its role of a social ladder in the region.

Based on the previous accreditation procedure, the TLI has undertaken improvement changes in various spheres.

Academic Programmes

The results of the analysis of academic programmes testify to the reliability of the GSU academic programmes, as they are in line with the academic programmes of the leading universities in terms of comparability and contribute to the academic mobility of the students. The GSU academic programmes are comparable in their structure, academic blocks and number of credits. The ECTS credit system introduced at GSU and the European format supplement are fully comparable with the European credit accumulation and transfer system, which ensures mobility in the European Higher Education Area.

Teaching Staff

The TLI has sufficient teaching staff with the appropriate qualifications to carry out its mission of a teaching institution. GSU attaches importance to student-centered approach. This seems quite clear to the students. The panel positively evaluates the fact that GSU has elaborated procedures on teaching staff and assessment, as well as job descriptions. The teachers seem to be happy with the existing procedures of selection, promotion, and evaluation.

Teaching-Learning

With the ambition of becoming an international student city in the upcoming years, very few teachers are ready to teach in English, additional training in foreign languages would be beneficial to reach the goal.

Learning Environment

The GSU infrastructures and human resources are currently sufficient to carry out the academic process. The TLI has undertaken steps aimed at filling the gap of computers, etc.

However, the expert panel considers that the library of GSU still needs enrichment with professional literature through even a subscription to a digital library.

Research

The Strategy reflecting the ambitions of the TLI in research is not clearly defined yet. The research activity is still limited in terms of implementation of international research activities. There are research directions, but they are not clearly formulated.

There is no regulated research management, and the research outcomes are mainly reached through personal initiatives.

Internationalisation

GSU has partnerships with a number of international partnerships. A number of staff members have participated in seminars, workshops and trainings abroad. It is not clear how the outcome of these international experiences has been translated in best practices.

The university is not ready yet to receive international students, as all classes are in Armenian.

Quality Assurance

The university is moving from a verbal culture to a process culture. They are well on the way to doing this, as they are putting processes in place, but a lot of decisions and discussions seem to happen informally. This is good for the atmosphere and the sense of belonging of everyone to the university, but less clear when it comes to establishing procedures.

The university's Quality Assurance Department is a fully-fledged department, which, according to the visit, is establishing a quality culture in the institution. However, it would be appropriate for this department to receive more in-depth training in order to introduce a more relevant AOL system and a good understanding of the PDCA cycle, which is not systematically included in the documents.

DESCRIPTION OF EXTERNAL REVIEW

COMPOSITION OF EXPERT PANEL

The external evaluation of the institutional capacities of Gavar State University was carried out by the following expert panel¹:

1. **Tigran Mnatsakanyan:** Candidate of Economics, UNICEF Senior Expert, expert panel Chair.
2. **Tatevik Davtyan:** Candidate of Juridical Sciences, Associate Professor at YSU Chair of Civil Law, expert panel member.
3. **Aram Mkhitaryan:** Candidate of Economics, Associate Professor at the European University and Armenian State University of Economics, executive director of "Agroleasing Leasing Credit Company", expert panel member.
4. **Sophie Peters:** Vice-Rector for International Relations and Accreditation at ICHEC Brussels Management School, expert panel international member.
5. **Gevorg Barseghyan:** Master's student at YSU Faculty of Law, student member of the expert panel.

The composition of the expert panel was agreed with the educational institution and approved by the decision 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 Kristine Ohanyan,

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

PROCESS OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW

Application for State Accreditation

To undergo state institutional accreditation, GSU has applied to ANQA filling in the application form according to the set format together with the copies of the license and its appendices.

The ANQA Secretariat examined the information provided in the application and the accompanying documents.

Following the decision on the application, a bilateral agreement was signed between the TLI and ANQA. A work schedule has been drawn up and approved.

¹ APPENDIX 1. CVS OF EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS

Self-assessment

In accordance with the schedule set by ANQA, the institution submitted a self-assessment of the institutional capacity in Armenian, English and a package of attached documents.

The ANQA coordinator reviewed the report to verify its technical compliance with ANQA. There were some technical and substantive shortcomings, due to which the self-assessment was returned to the institution. Then, within the set timeframe, on July 12, 2021, GSU submitted a revised version of the self-assessment, which met the established common format, there were appropriate grounds and the attachments required by the format. Then, the self-assessment and the package of attached documents, the electronic questionnaire completed by the university 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 university. Then, the expert panel summarised the results of the preliminary evaluation and made a plan-schedule for the expert visit².

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

Preliminary Visit

On November 10, 2021, an online meeting with the managerial staff of Gavar State University took place on the Zoom platform. During the meeting, the site visit schedule was discussed with the university, 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, and the rules for organising hybrid meetings in an online environment (because of the pandemic) were clarified.

² APPENDIX 2. SCHEDULE OF SITE VISIT

Site Visit

The site visit took place from November 20 to 23, 2021. The site visit started with a closed meeting, which aimed to discuss with the international expert Sophie Peters and agree on the scope of the expert evaluation, the issues to be studied during the visit, the strengths and weaknesses of the TLI according to the criteria, the focus group procedure, as well as to clarify further steps.

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

The site visit started with a meeting with the university rector and ended with a meeting with the GSU managerial staff. The participants (teachers, students, deans, heads of chairs, employers and alumni) of focus group meetings organised to clarify the questions were selected from the list provided in advance by the university. All scheduled meetings were held. During the planned visit, the expert panel also reviewed documents³ and resources⁴.

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 Gavar State University.

GSU sent its response regarding the preliminary version of the report to ANQA on January 31, 2022. ANQA provided the institution's observations to the experts. On February 11, 2022, ANQA organised an online meeting of the institution and the expert panel, during which the submitted observations on the preliminary report were discussed.

Taking into account the observations of the institution, the expert panel compiled the final version of the expert report.

Meri Barseghyan

Expert Panel Coordinator

28.02.2022

³ APPENDIX 3. LIST OF DOCUMENTS OBSERVED

⁴ APPENDIX 4. RESOURCES OBSERVED

BRIEF INFORMATION ABOUT THE EDUCATION INSTITUTION

History: By the RA Government Decree N660-N, dated June 9, 2016, “Gavar State University” State Non-Commercial Organisation was reorganised into “Gavar State University” Foundation, which is the legal successor of “Gavar State University” State Non-Commercial Organisation, to which the rights and responsibilities of the reorganised legal entity have been transferred in the prescribed manner.

The mission of the University is to take into account the peculiarities of Gegharkunik region of the Republic of Armenia - the quality implementation of higher vocational education programmes in different directions of natural, social sciences and humanities, the preparation of competitive specialists with bachelor's and master's degrees, proper implementation of teaching and methodological, research, educational, as well as socio-cultural functions, external cooperation programmes, conscientious performance of the responsibilities of the employer, protection of the rights of teachers and administrative staff, as well as student rights and legal interests.

Education: The university implements 16 full-time bachelor's degree programmes, 13 part-time ones, 13 master's degree programmes and 1 scientific and educational PhD programme. Up to 2021 (inclusive), for 24 years the University has issued 7607 /4446 full-time bachelor's, 2304 part-time bachelor's and 857 master's/ alumni.

APs are developed and implemented with the aim of training specialists to meet the requirements of the labour market. All the APs implemented at GSU are regularly reviewed due to changes in labour market meets, economic priorities, as well as the needs of external and internal stakeholders. Based on the EHEA quality standards, GSU continuously improves bachelor's, master's degree and PhD study programmes.

Research: At GSU, there is a clear document base for promoting research, regulatory legislation is being developed, research incentives are being implemented, and measurable tools are being evaluated for their effectiveness. The university has sufficient scientific potential, as well as memoranda of cooperation signed with various research institutes, universities, local and international organisations in Armenia, which allow organising conferences, publishing articles, improving the research components of master's and bachelor's degree study programmes, at the same time, if necessary, using the laboratories, material and technical resources of partner organisations, conducting joint research, publishing the results, organising seminars, discussions, and other events.

Internationalisation: GSU supports internationalisation processes in the fields of education and research, the implementation of academic exchange programmes, and establishes close cooperation with universities in different countries. The University is continuously working to expand the international partnership. The University is a member of 21 international programmes for the development of academic mobility and institutional capacity, in collaboration with about 60 partner universities from around the world. According to GSU, the fact that 117 GSU student representatives and 211 GSU TS representatives participated in mobility programmes, as well as

other international programmes and initiatives proves that internationalisation is one of the strategic directions of the University's development.

Quality assurance: At GSU, the priority is to improve the quality of education, to provide a quality teaching, research and educational environment, and to strengthen a quality culture. The key direction of the university's activity is the internal quality assurance, which is characterised as compliance with the university's mission and purpose. The internal quality assurance processes of education at GSU are regulated, the scope of responsibilities and functions of those responsible is defined, as well as the required awareness. Continuous work is carried out at the University in accordance with the requirements of European quality assurance standards in order to improve the seven components of the educational process: internal quality assurance policy and procedure, development of APs, evaluation, monitoring and regular review, learning resources and student support, students' learning assessment, TS's quality assurance and continuous improvement, improvement of information systems, publicity and accountability mechanisms, internal quality assurance procedures, quality management structures.

***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).*

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

I. MISSION AND PURPOSES

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 mission of the university is defined in the founding document - the Charter of the "Gavar State University" Foundation by fixing the main directions, objectives and purposes of the university.

According to the 2017-2022 SP, GSU is the only state higher education institution in the region, which has important educational, research, as well as social, demographic, economic and cultural functions. The GSU mission set out in the strategic plan is (taking into account the peculiarities of the region) the quality implementation of the higher education programmes, the training of competitive specialists taking into account the demands of the labour market, the proper implementation of teaching, research, educational, socio-cultural functions, proper implementation of external cooperation programmes, conscientious performance of the responsibilities of the employer, protection of the rights of teachers and administrative staff, as well as the student rights and legal interests.

The GSU SP has 9 main directions based on its priorities. The latter comes from the formulated mission. Within the framework of each priority direction, actions are envisaged by defining separate goals and formulating the actions to overcome the problems deriving from them.

However, the defined priorities are comprehensive and often intersect.

The vision formulated by GSU is fragmentary and largely uncertain.

During the visit, it was found out that the priority direction of the university's development is different due to the opinions of GSU's different stakeholders. In particular, according to the rector, the important component of the vision is internationalisation, and according to the Board of Trustees, the development of science is a priority. In addition, both external and internal stakeholders mentioned Gavar's vision of becoming a university city.

Although GSU is a state university, it does not receive basic funding. Funding from the state budget refers only to the payment of tuition fees. As it was found out during the visit, the founders of GSU wanted the university to become state-owned. At the same time, during the meeting with the University's Board of Trustees, it was stated that the state poses many problems to the university, does not provide adequate funding, as a result of which the university has to seek funds from other sources.

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

GSU has an SP development and adoption procedure, which envisages the formation of a working group with the involvement of stakeholders, project discussions.

The SP is adopted by the Board of Trustees, which consists of different stakeholders. During the visit, it was revealed that the Board of Trustees is also involved in the development of the SP. At the same time, the Board of Trustees has no influence on the priorities for the distribution of financial resources by approving the projects submitted by the rector.

Many surveys are considered as a means of accounting for the needs of stakeholders, but they do not contain strategic level issues. Their impact on goal setting is at least not visible.

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

The goals are defined for each priority direction, 60 objectives are formulated for their implementation. To achieve these goals, a five-year, mid-term (2.5-year) and annual action plan-schedules are developed at the university and department levels, setting out timelines for action, responsible persons or units, available and required resources, as well as performance indicators for each process.

However, during the visit, it became clear that the university's sectoral strategies (for example, human resource management strategy, academic policy, etc) were not grouped and specified in the SP.

Annual reports are compiled according to the SP objectives. However, no current changes have been made to the SP. According to the members of the Board of Trustees, there is no need to review the SP, as the university managerial staff reacts flexibly to the situation. At the same time, the 2022-2027 SP priorities have already been outlined: innovative technologies, artificial intelligence, science, and the redistribution of funds will be implemented gradually.

Considerations: The mission of the GSU, despite its extensive scope, is clear to almost all stakeholders. It is fully in line with the NQF, as the main activity of the university is in the field of professional education, in accordance with the NQF Levels 6 and 7.

Due to the expert panel, the peculiarities of the state status of the university are not fully revealed, which causes some difficulties in defining the goals and their priorities.

The vision for the development of GSU, despite its current formulation, is unclear, which hinders both the development of a common vision and the consolidation of efforts, as well as the achievement of achievable and measurable goals.

The priorities that should have emerged from the vision and showed the directions of the university development (which are mostly used during the SP timeframe) are in fact formulated in such a way that they cover almost all the activities of the university. In fact, the university has no real and set priorities.

With such a separation of priorities, there is a lack of their interconnection and hierarchy. As a result, it is not guaranteed that goals, objectives, and actions within individual priorities will flow from the mission to the realisation of the vision.

At the same time, there is no common understanding among the stakeholders about the vision of the university development. This indicates a lack of a common platform for vision and goal formulation. The expert panel, however, welcomes the fact that the university's vision is in line with the vision of its community in terms of at least one important component.

However, the influence of stakeholders (represented and unrepresented in the Board of Trustees) on the formation of goals needs to be institutionalised. Despite the formal existence of mechanisms, the activities of external stakeholders are mainly related to the formulations that are not invested in the university and remain at the level of goals, while the actual activities of the university are mainly determined by the executive leadership. The result is a gap between the formed ambitions and more relevant issues. The surveys are not very useful in this regard, as they do not mainly concern the determination of the development directions of the university.

The division of the strategic plan into mid-term and annual plans is mainly mechanical. Such an approach to transforming the strategy into the day-to-day operations of the subdivisions and employees is risky, as the visibility of the strategic approaches decreases. As a result, individual departments and staff members might not have a clear idea of how they contribute to the university's mission and vision. In such a situation, the university can only have an intuitive assumption but not a conviction that its daily activities are aimed at its goals.

Thus, there may be a growing gap between the goals and reality over time. If the SP is not reviewed, the consequence of such gaps may be the weakening of the SP as an activity guideline.

Summary: Due to the expert panel, taking into account the overall shared understanding of the university's mission among stakeholders, its compliance with the NQF, the concepts and procedures outlined in the goal setting and evaluation processes, GSU meets the requirements of the Criterion 1.

Conclusion: The expert panel evaluates the compliance of GSU institutional capacities with the requirements of the 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 upper units of the GSU governance system and their main functions are defined by the charter.

The highest governing collegial body is the Board of Trustees. As found out during the visit, the latter, in addition to approving various programmes and listening to reports, sometimes comes up with initiatives. Such cases, however, are rare. At the same time, the university found it difficult to recall any rejection of the programme by the Board of Trustees, and the session minutes of the Board and other collegial governing bodies do not reflect the course of the discussions.

Regulation and decision-making procedures of collegial governing bodies - Board of Trustees, Academic Council, and Rectorate - are defined in separate documents.

The organisational structure and the composition of the educational subdivisions are approved by the Board of Trustees. The activities of the main subdivisions are regulated by separate charters and regulations. Passports and descriptions of positions have been developed. Almost all the positions are filled with the main staff of the university.

The annual financial estimate envisages the allocation of funds in almost all directions to all subdivisions. In performances, however, there are significant deviations in some areas.

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

Internal stakeholders are involved in collegial governing bodies. However, the real impact of the stakeholders in the collegial governing bodies is neither visible through the protocols, nor was it possible to prove it with concrete examples during the visit.

In addition to a number of procedures involving stakeholders in various processes, there is an online platform for discussing draft decisions. However, some stakeholders were not aware of the latter or had never used it.

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.

The SP is divided into two mid-term programmes: 2017-2019 and 2019-2022. Annual plans are available.

The departments also have annual plans. Faculties have mid-term plans as well. They provide performance evaluation indicators. There are no faculty strategies, however, and the activities of the departments, as it was discovered during the visit, are not clearly linked to the SP.

Indicators are defined as a mechanism for monitoring plans, but they are not always measurable.

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

The main mechanism of data collection is surveys, which are conducted among different groups of both internal and external stakeholders. However, a systematic and regular examination of the external environment, as well as the assessment of the impact of various factors is not carried out. In parallel, personal connections are used as a source of receiving signals from the external environment.

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

The procedure for drafting, adopting, publishing, and amending the GSU SP and in-house legal acts, as well as the QA manual, set out some principles for the administration of policies and procedures.

The main evaluation tool is surveys. However, the improvements, as it was found out during the visit, are mostly minor procedural changes.

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.

While mechanisms for gathering information, such as surveys and discussions of various formats, are in place, there are no mechanisms for evaluating the collection, analysis and application of information. GSU is actually trying to increase the reliability of the information collected by diversifying the number of survey participants and information sources.

The in-depth analysis of the collected quantitative and qualitative data is not carried out. Statistical analytical tools are not used. During the visit, it became clear that significantly more information was being collected than was actually used.

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

The QA manual provides mechanisms for indirectly evaluating the publication of information, in particular surveys. At the same time, mostly intuitively, the volume of feedback received through various channels is estimated, as a result of which the university evaluates which channels have been most effective in disseminating information about GSU. The content of the publications, however, is not evaluated.

Considerations: The expert panel considers it important that GSU defines the functions of the various branches of the governance system, from the statutory functions of the Board of Trustees to the passports of individual positions. Thus, at least preconditions are created for the smooth operation of the governance system.

The expert panel also considers positive the existence of collegial governing bodies and their participation in the governance of the university. At the same time, the session minutes of the collegial governing bodies and the information revealed during the visit do not allow to prove that the full collegiality of the governing body is ensured through these bodies. Of particular concern is the lack of initiative on the part of the Board of Trustees, especially given the high potential of the Board of Trustees, which has been formed by the involvement of representatives of different stakeholders.

No critical issues of the resource management system were identified. The annual financial budget envisages the allocation of funds to all subdivisions. However, it is worrying that there are significant deviations in performance that do not cause changes.

While assessing the approach to deriving plans from the SP to mid-term and short-term plans, inter-university and subdivision action plans, the expert panel nevertheless considers that the mechanical separation of plans may jeopardise the transmission of key strategy ideas to implementers.

The expert panel also welcomes the existence of defined indicators as a mechanism for monitoring the plans but considers their sometimes non-measurable nature to be problematic, which can make the monitoring formal, as a result of which the necessary conclusions will not be drawn.

The expert panel considers it risky not to conduct systematic and regular environmental examinations and impact assessments of various factors. The lack of diversification of tools in

parallel with the diversification of information sources is also risky. As a result, there is a lack of reliable data from the outside world, which leads to non-data-based decision-making.

The expert panel welcomes the existence of a procedure for drafting, adopting, publishing, and amending in-house legal acts and the GSU SP, as well as the desire to assess the effectiveness of procedures through surveys. However, due to the expert panel, the surveys conducted may show the degree of satisfaction of stakeholders with the policy, but not its effectiveness.

The desire to increase the volume of sources of information collected is commendable, but it is worrying that in parallel to it, mechanisms for evaluating the processes related to input information have not yet been introduced. This jeopardises the targeting and usability of the information collection. As a result, GSU spends many resources on data collection, but it is not properly analysed and used.

The effectiveness of output channels is evaluated, but due to the expert panel, the effectiveness of the channel is related to the content of the information itself, and without evaluating the effectiveness of the content, the evaluation of the effectiveness of the channel may not be reliable.

Summary: Given the clear definition of the functions of the various links in the GSU governance system, the potential of the collegial governing bodies, and the provision of the governance system with resources, the expert panel considers that GSU meets the requirements of the Criterion 2.

Conclusion: The expert panel evaluates the compliance of GSU institutional capacities with the requirements of the Criterion 2 as **satisfactory**.

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 GSU mission includes the qualified implementation of higher education programmes in different fields of natural sciences, humanities and social sciences, taking into account the peculiarities of the Gegharkunik region, the training of competitive specialists with bachelor's and master's degrees, taking into account the demands of the labour market.

After the previous accreditation process, GSU continued to implement vocational education programmes in the natural, humanities and social sciences at the RA NQF Levels 6 (bachelor) and 7 (master) with full-time and part-time learning. Moreover, the number of part-time study programmes has been reduced by 3 in recent years. As a result, GSU is currently implementing 16 full-time and 13 part-time bachelor's degree programmes, as well as 13 master's degree programmes. The university is implementing 1 scientific and educational PhD programme. Up to 2021

(inclusive), for 24 years the University has issued 7607 alumni (4446 full-time bachelor's degree, 2304 part-time bachelor's degree and 857 master's degree).

In the "University Mission" section of the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan, GSU included the "Humanities" section, thus responding to the observation made in the previous accreditation expert report, adapting the GSU mission to the actual situation.

The organisation of the educational process at GSU, including the development or improvement of APs, is based on, among others, the RA NQF and, based on it, the GSU-approved "GSU Higher Education Qualifications Framework", dated March 20, 2021. However, there is some inconsistency between the GSU-approved qualifications framework (which defines knowledge-capacities-skills) and the RA NQF, which defines knowledge-skills (in particular, knowledge application skills, communication and general cognitive skills) – capacity (in particular, independence and responsibility). For example, the APs on "Law" (Levels 6 and 7) do not explicitly separate "skills" and "capacities", and they do not comply with the RA NQF in terms of content. In addition, the GSU-approved NQF is a replica of the knowledge-competency-skills content in the "Graduation Requirements" section of the APs on "Law" (point 9).

Based on the recommendations of the previous expert report, GSU reviewed the APs. As a result, the descriptions of all APs set out the admission and graduation requirements, the objectives of the programme, the expected learning outcomes, the methods used, the resources required (including TS), the learner's further learning opportunities, the spheres of professional activities, and the approaches to project sustainability.

The outcomes of the bachelor's and master's APs are in most cases literally identical, and sometimes the differences are defined by just one or two words (for example, in the bachelor's and master's APs on "Law", A1, A4 (b), (c), (d), A5 (mostly), A6, A7, B1, B2, C1, C2 are repeated in the same way).

The APs offer elective courses that significantly enrich the programme (especially in the case of a master's degree programme). However, as a rule, only one of the elective courses is actually implemented, the reason for which, according to the opinions expressed during the meetings, is the lack of the number of students.

One of the mechanisms for incorporating the practical skills required in the labour market into APs is the involvement of employer teachers. However, according to the information received during the site visit, the number of available employers in the region is small.

The logic of the course sequence is chosen taking into account the specifics of each profession. However, as it was observed during the examination of the programme, lesson observations and site visit, there are some interdisciplinary repetitions in terms of content.

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:

All subject programmes included in the GSU study programmes describe teaching and learning methods, as well as the methods of testing and assessing students' knowledge. During the lesson observations, it became clear that the traditional ways of teaching are combined (as much as possible) with the latest methods and modern information technologies. In addition, as confirmed

during the site visit, the small number of students allows for a greater application of the individual approach. It became clear from the site visit that the teachers were allowed to choose the methods: depending on the audience, the methods may change, and students may come up with suggestions on choosing a method.

However, for the competencies of different units, various methods are often listed, without differentiating them according to the outcomes. That is, the methods are various, but they are the same for different competencies. In addition, the examination of the presented materials and documents shows that both teaching and learning methods are diverse, but mainly the methods aimed at acquiring knowledge are used. For example, some assignments - tests and tasks, or the presentation - are aimed at the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, the development of certain critical thinking, but a number of important aspects of skills and abilities are not supplemented by them. Another example is the seminar methods (described in the course descriptions), which are mainly aimed at acquiring knowledge, to certain applicability, but not to a complete skill.

In order to provide methodological assistance to the teachers, GSU regularly conducts training courses with the participation of both RA specialists and representatives of European partner education institutions.

In the AP on "Law", individual work is an issue, as it is mostly of an essay nature, and the topics of individual work in certain courses (for example, criminal law, civil law, etc) are reminiscent of the course exam questionnaire

Gavar State University has adopted a procedure for the development of tertiary education programmes based on educational outcomes, and the calculation of credits for educational modules, but clear calculation and planning of student load are not being carried out yet.

According to self-assessment, student surveys, as well as lesson observations, can be an effective way to assess the effectiveness of teaching and learning methods at GSU. However, there are no visible examples of the changes made based on them.

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

In the subject programmes of the courses and modules included in the curricula, the relevant table on assessment methods has been outlined, which lists all the criteria, and in case of meeting them, the student will receive a corresponding grade. The evaluation criteria, however, are not measurable. For example, it is stated: "The student gets 81-100 points if: the learner has a deep understanding of the required knowledge, as well as he/she gained other knowledge through independent search and research work (A); the learner is able to apply the skills formed on the basis of the acquired knowledge perfectly in various new situations. Permanently performs and presents quality work (B); the learner demonstrates unique approaches, demonstrates an individual proof system, has analytical, comparative thinking, gives assessments on new theories, and performs analyses completely independently".

Assessment methods are the same and are repeated for different parts, for example, verbal survey, written survey, test assessment, public defence of individual work, assignments, exercises, assessment, and participation assessment.

The "Procedure for Preparation and Evaluation of Bachelor's and Master's Theses at GSU" was launched at the university, which underwent substantive changes in 2019. The changes made based on the recommendations provided in the previous expert report were mainly focused on the content components - innovative, research, and creative, which, in the opinion of the reviewer, were separated as components of evaluation.

The examination of the supervisor's responsibilities in Section 4 of the procedure (in particular: (a) the composition of the work, thesis assignment, the formulation of the objective, (c) the selection of literature and other sources on the topic) shows that they jeopardise the student's individual research.

The GSU student and teacher guidelines and principles of learning and teaching in the credit system have been developed and are being implemented. In 2021, the GSU academic integrity concept was approved (as amended). The GSU academic integrity concept and the GSU ethics are posted on the GSU official website (www.gsu.am), which allows students to be more aware. For the purpose of objective and transparent assessment of the knowledge, at the beginning of each course, the teacher introduces all the criteria, and in case of meeting them, the student will receive a corresponding grade.

Surveys on the quality of teaching and assessment, as well as the degree of satisfaction with the educational process conducted among the students, show that the students are satisfied with the methods of assessment, teaching and learning used at the University. In addition to these surveys, no other analyses of the effectiveness of the evaluation methods were presented.

Due to coronavirus / COVID-19 /, in the online learning process, the GSU teachers use tools adapted to the specifics of distance education in order to test and assess the students' knowledge.

In terms of achieving the educational outcomes of the student, the role of educational, industrial, scientific and research, as well as scientific and pedagogical internships are very important; they start in the first year for several specialities. Most of the students have internships in partner organisations, with which relevant contracts are signed. In the end, the students prepare internship reports according to a pre-approved programme and are assessed according to the organisation of the educational process through the credit system and the assessment of students' knowledge.

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

GSU has a benchmarking procedure by Gavar State University (approved on February 25, 2015). The University implements a policy of ensuring the comparability of study programmes between GSU and other universities. According to the self-assessment report, when conducting a comparative analysis, it is taken into account that each comparable university has its own unique structure, direction, human and material resources, and other features. However, as during the previous accreditation, this time also, in the case of some APs, it is not clear what methodology was used, what components were borrowed, there is no reason why those universities were selected; and when choosing universities, although it is stated that their peculiarities have been taken into account, it is not substantiated that they have been taken into account, what works and what does not. Detailed benchmarking has not been done at the level of course content. There is no analysis

of the need to apply the experience and the existence of actual change. Visible examples of changes and improvements are not presented.

In the "Computer Engineering" study programme, however, taking into account the results of the observation, subject additions were made. The bachelor's degree programme has been supplemented with "Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning", "Server Programming" courses, the master's degree programme - with "Neural Networks", "Distributed Big Data Processing Systems" courses, changes have been made to the "Web Programming", "C# Programming", "Modern Information Processing Systems and Technologies", "Artificial Intelligence Software Tools" subject programmes. Team projects are implemented in several courses: "Database Design Technologies", "Web Programming", "Server Programming", "Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning". Changes have also taken place in a number of professional subjects.

For compiling the curricula of the Computer Engineering Department, the international document on "Computer Engineering Curricula 2016, CE2016" Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and the IEEE Computer Society was taken as a basis.

The ECTS credit system introduced in GSU and pan-European format application are fully compatible with the European system of credit accumulation and transfer. The university implements 21 international programmes, 13 of which are teacher and student academic mobility programmes. Up to 2021, 117 GSU students and 211 teachers have participated in mobility programmes (lectures and trainings), and 3 students from Spain and Greece have studied at the University. 43 teachers from Germany, Spain, Bulgaria, Hungary, and other EU countries have taught or carried out research at GSU.

Academic exchanges of University teachers and students are carried out through GSU international programmes. There is a lot of output, but little input.

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

GSU has a procedure for developing, approving, monitoring, and improving APs. The monitoring of the programmes is carried out also through lesson observations, discussion of the reports of the final attestation committees, analysis, and compliance of the topics of the final works with the established norms, surveys among external and internal stakeholders, surveys on alumni satisfaction with the education received.

Based on the reports of educational and industrial internships, the effectiveness of study programmes and compliance with the requirements of the labour market are clarified. The results of the monitoring and evaluation are presented in the annual reports of the deans and heads of chairs. However, all this is not systemic and regular. Periodicity is provided for in the AP improvement procedure, which is reviewed at least once a year, but there have been no substantiating documents.

Students are involved in the improvement process through surveys referring to the course, and the teachers - through discussions at the chair level.

Considerations: The expert panel positively assesses the efforts of the university managerial staff to improve the APs and fulfill the mission of the university. The university enjoys a great

reputation in the whole Gegharkunik region, among all the stakeholders, and it has a key role and importance for the region.

The expert panel welcomes that some improvements have been made in terms of APs since the previous accreditation, but they need to be continued to align with the RA NQF and the University's mission. It is especially urgent to make a clear distinction in terms of the outcomes of the master's and the bachelor's degree programmes, and, due to that, other components. Otherwise, this can lead to a misunderstanding of the continuity of education, a misunderstanding of bachelor's and master's competencies by external stakeholders. In addition, it is necessary to strengthen the logical connection among the units of individual APs (A, B, C), as well as between them and the RA NQF characteristics. It is important for the AP outcomes to be clear, measurable, and realistic in the context of the chain of teaching, learning, and assessment methods and available resources. GSU should take steps in terms of redefining the AP outcomes (considering distance learning), the NQF compliance, outcome clarity, measurability, differentiation between bachelor's and master's AP outcomes.

It is preferable that the learning outcomes present the general provisions and characteristic features of the programme. These APs, on the other hand, stand out as being more than the preferred size of learning outcomes, which exaggerates and puts in danger their scalability in terms of a current number of class hours, volume, teacher workload, variety of methods used, and the ability to actually implement them in terms of testing.

While the methods of teaching and learning are multifaceted, they are aimed at encouraging student activity in the classroom, and the ability to provide teamwork opportunities, their actual and full provision at GSU is problematic, first and foremost due to unclear outcomes, and as for the methods, they are also general and identical for all A, B, C competencies. In addition, the conditions of the pandemic, the workload of the teachers, the teaching of several extensive courses by the same teacher (each of which requires special methods to be developed and prepared), the lack of necessary trainings, the volume of courses, the time allotted, and a number of other factors must be taken into account in order to ensure the actual applicability of these various methods.

The fact that the methods are aimed at testing mainly knowledge can jeopardise the achievement of the intended outcomes.

It is commendable that, based on previous accreditation recommendations, positive changes have been made to the "Procedure for Preparation and Evaluation of Bachelor's and Master's Theses at GSU", focusing mainly on the content components - innovative, research, and creative, which in the opinion of the reviewer were separated as components of the evaluation. However, the requirements for the reviewer may also include components for testing overall outcomes, such as assessing the student's ability to work independently, process data, draw conclusions, evaluate the practical offers in work, etc, which will further increase the efficiency of the process and will contribute to the development of the student's independent research skills.

Although the definition of the legal basis for benchmarking and its actual implementation is commendable, there is still a need for changes in terms of content. It is necessary to clarify the periodicity, methodology, the criteria for the selection of universities, the actual implementation of benchmarking - the analysis of the issues of the university being compared, as well as the challenges and opportunities of the compared AP. The submitted documents lacked content

analysis, which limits the effectiveness of comparative analysis and possible introduction of best practices.

The expert panel welcomes the existence of other mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of surveys, final attestation reports, deans' reports and study programmes, but there is no evidence of improvement based on them.

Summary: Taking into account that based on the previous accreditation recommendations, GSU has reviewed its APs, reformed its AP development and approval policy, reviewed the order of preparation and defense of graduation theses to develop students' research abilities and skills, developed and implemented elective and optional course procedures, attempts have been made in APs to match the evaluation methods to the outcomes, GSU conducts chair discussions and surveys among stakeholders in order to monitor study programmes, the expert panel considers that GSU meets the requirements of the Criterion 3.

Conclusion: The expert panel evaluates the compliance of GSU institutional capacities with the requirements of the 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.

The policy of student recruitment, selection and admission to the university is implemented in a coordinated manner. A complex action plan has been developed, which is implemented during the academic year. There are memoranda of cooperation signed with schools and colleges, as well as with the Department of Education, Culture and Sports of RA Gegharkunik Regional Administration. Mutual visits are organised to the primary and secondary vocational education institutions of the region in order to acquaint the students and college students with the GSU professions and to assist them in their professional orientation. Meetings are organised with teachers, school principals (by regions), workshops are held to provide teaching and methodological assistance, to clarify the topics suggested by the schools.

The university holds student subject Olympiads, essay competitions, intellectual tournaments. Students take part in various lectures according to their preferences, and during the pandemic, they participate in online lessons and events in the virtual classrooms of the University.

GSU holds "Open Doors" days, holding classes, meetings, events at all GSU faculties. Pupils from many schools in the Gegharkunik region participate in practical science classes at the GSU Science Laboratory and a special history class at the GSU History Museum after Varsham Avetyan.

There is also an "Applicant" section on the university website, where the necessary information about the admission process can be found. The University has an active Facebook page.

At the university, the admission to the bachelor's programme is carried out in accordance with the RA Government's regulation on the "Admission for State and Non-State Higher Education Institutions (according to the bachelor's degree programme)". The admission to the full-time bachelor's programme is carried out as a result of joint national exams, and in case of part-time learning, the university itself organises and conducts entrance exams according to the RA part-time learning admission rules and in accordance with the admission procedure for part-time learning bachelor's degree at Gavar State University⁵. Admission to the master's programme is carried out in accordance with the order of master's admission and learning in RA universities, and in accordance with the order of admission and teaching in Gavar State University. Thus, the admission to the full-time bachelor's study programmes is organised and implemented by the ATC in a unified manner, and the admission to the part-time learning and master's systems is organised at the university based on the relevant GSU acts and regulations approved by the education management authority.

Despite the mentioned measures aimed at recruiting students, there is a gradual decrease in the number of applicants due to the negative social and demographic processes, as well as the increase in emigration from the region.

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

There are various mechanisms for identifying the educational needs of students at the University, the implementation of which is an ongoing process. Documents regulating the improvement of study programmes have been adopted and are implemented, various questionnaires on the components of the educational process have been developed in order to organise paper-based and electronic surveys among certain target groups, informal meetings are organised, and many other feedback methods are used. The Quality Assurance Department of the University carries out continuous work to identify the needs of students. The Department develops questionnaires, and anonymous surveys are conducted. Faculty QA officers work with the GSU Quality Assurance specialists.

During the site visit, it became clear that the students can apply to the teachers, heads of chairs, deans, vice-rectors, and the rector with their problems. The role of student organisations is extremely important in terms of representing the legitimate interests of students in terms of raising and resolving issues. However, as it was observed, student organisations do not play a significant role in terms of identifying and solving problems, which may be an issue of lack of awareness about student organisations.

During the site visit, it became clear that the students were not aware of the high-impact journals and the criteria for being publishing in them.

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

The university supports the students by providing additional classes and consultation. The purpose of the work done in this direction is to improve the learning outcomes of the students, to prepare them for the mid-term and final exams, tests, term papers, bachelor's and master's theses.

⁵ The idea was reformulated based on the observations of the university.

At the same time, support is provided to students with low academic performance to make up for the lack of knowledge.

Additional consultation at the university is provided to students with poor academic performance before the exams and graduation. Additional consultation classes are conducted by the teachers of the subjects, the supervisors of the master's theses, and the heads of the chairs, the leading specialists can take part in the process. The effectiveness of the process of organising consultation classes is conditioned by the involvement of qualified teaching staff in all professional courses and taking into account the educational needs of students.

The self-assessment does not mention the role of student organisations in the conduction of additional classes.

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

Sufficient legal and organisational bases have been established at the university so that, if necessary, students can apply to the administrative staff for additional assistance and guidance. In this regard, the dean's offices and departments are effective, with which students communicate directly and actively, as well as through e-mail and other Internet tools, and due to the spread of the pandemic, the process of online application to the administrative staff has become more widespread. The University focuses on tuition discounts, transfers, rotations, restorations, deferrals, expulsions, dismissals, which are discussed and resolved based on student applications or internal memoranda from relevant departments. Students can also appeal to the administrative staff.

The official website of the university contains, among other things, the documents on "First-Year Undergraduate Student Guide" and "Master's Student Guide", where the administrative staff's telephone numbers and e-mail addresses are posted.

4.5 The Institution has student career support services.

The university has adopted regulations, developed programmes, established cooperative relations with employers, the purpose of which is to ensure the competitiveness of alumni, to develop professional skills, to increase their demand in the labour market, to constantly replenish the database on alumni. Alumni employment promotion policy is implemented in different directions: an examination of employers' needs and expectations, implementation of additional study programmes, signing of memoranda of cooperation, assistance in employment issues, provision of reference letters, organisation of internships with potential employers, involvement of employers in the final attestation process, distribution of vacancy announcements, etc. In the mentioned directions, discussions are held with the participation of employers, visits, excursions to various organisations, student conferences, seminars and courses, which are organised and held jointly with representatives of various universities, scientific and cultural organisations and centers, banks, law enforcement agencies and various companies. Recently, such remote communications on online platforms have increased.

The process is carried out by the GSU university-employer cooperation, Alumni and Career Center (hereinafter referred to as the Center). The existence of the Center at the University, as well as the policy of promoting alumni employment allow to record certain results. University alumni

are employed in public schools, the banking system, law enforcement, and the University itself. By participating in various vacancies, the university alumni, demonstrate appropriate professional knowledge, skills and abilities, and are successfully hired.

During the site visit, it became clear that the university actively cooperates with employers, involves them as trainers, participates in the development and review of existing study programmes, and processing of bachelor's and master's theses topics.

During the site visit, it also became clear that very few students were aware of the Career Center. Students mainly apply to the teachers and rector for employment issues.

During the visit, it became clear that the Center is not a separate structural unit.

According to the self-assessment, in order to raise the level of legal awareness of the socially vulnerable layer of society, provide legal consultation at the University, there is a legal clinic at the university, which provides free legal advice to the residents of the Gegharkunik region, involving law students in the process, thus providing them with an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in practice and to gain some professional experience.

In this context, the legal clinic can be considered as a career support service.

4.6 The Institution promotes student involvement in research activities.

The University is working to provide the necessary environment for the organisation of the research process, to involve students in research activities, to combine educational and research processes. One of the priorities is the establishment of structures promoting joint student and teacher research activities, the presentation of co-authored scientific reports at conferences, and their publication in the GSU collections of scientific articles. The goals and objectives of the policy to ensure student participation in research are set out in the GSU five-year SP and Student Scientific Society Charter. The activities of university and faculty SSSs contribute to the development of students' professional qualities, the discovery of scientific interests, and the development of research capacity. For this purpose, student conferences, seminars, discussions, and other scientific-oriented events are regularly organised. Such events are both intra-university and republican.

Examinations are carried out in the main directions of research activities approved by GSU chairs, which are expressed in one way or another in bachelor's and master's theses. At the Faculty of Philology, two of these directions have become research projects related to the collection of folklore materials in the region and the recording of dialects.

During the site visit, it became clear that the students were not aware of the journals with a high impact factor and the criteria for being published in them.

From the self-assessment and site visit, it became clear that the connection between the SSS and chairs is weak. There are no SSS officers in the chairs, the connection is mainly provided by the executive assistants of the chairs. There are no topics of SSS scientific works approved by the heads of chairs.

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

Students can defend their rights in the following university bodies: GSU Board of Trustees, Academic Council, Rectorate, Faculty Council, Student Council, Final Attestation Committee,

Appeals Committee, Academic Dishonesty Committee, etc. The mentioned bodies include students, through whom the students can present their complaints and grievances.

In the self-assessment, the Student Council, as the main body responsible for the protection of students' rights, is not given enough attention.

As a result of the site visit, it became clear that the SC (as a body responsible for the protection of students' rights) is passive, it is not viewed by students as a body that advocates for their needs. Students often turn to the rector, deans or heads of chairs to protect their rights, which indicates the SC's passivity on such issues.

The University has the GSU Student Council Charter, which regulates, among other things, the Council's goals, functions, competence, structure, functions, and financial management. The University also has the procedure for discussing and resolving the complaints and appeals of Gavar State University students (with changes).

According to the self-assessment, students' initiative is weak, as well as their interest in decision-making processes in the governing bodies. It is also mentioned that students have a passive participation in the development of strategic documents and internationalisation policy.

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

The effectiveness of the university's educational, consultation, and other support services and quality assessment mechanisms is determined by student surveys, which are conducted twice a year, at the end of each semester. The results of the student surveys are discussed in the chairs, the faculty council, the Rectorate, the Academic Council, and if necessary, can be discussed in the Board of Trustees. As a result of the discussion, conclusions and recommendations are made, and accordingly, measures are developed and taken to make corrections and reforms. The internal quality assurance system of education includes a number of departments of the University, which carry out education quality assurance processes within their powers. The rules and procedures adopted for student education, consultation and other support services provide an opportunity to respond directly to the issues raised by students and to provide immediate solutions.

Alumni can play a role in ensuring the quality of student education, consultation, and other services. However, according to the self-assessment, the feedback with the GSU alumni is not coordinated.

Considerations: Examining the information provided to the expert panel and obtained from the site visit, it can be stated that the institution assists students in ensuring the effectiveness of the educational environment. Students are satisfied with the education provided by the university.

In recent years, there is a tendency for a reduction of the number of students, which is a great risk for the university from the financial point of view. The main financial means of Gavar State University are derived from student tuition fees, therefore there is a need to assess and prevent this risk. Although the university uses a number of mechanisms and complex measures for recruiting students, however, their use has not led to an increase in admission rates, which is also due to the objective fact.

Due to the expert panel, there is a need to take steps to assess the effectiveness of these mechanisms and measures, as well as to find the target audience.

The expert panel considers positive the fact that there is a number of mechanisms for identifying the needs of students, including surveys, meetings, discussions. At the same time, the frequency of application of these mechanisms and analysis of the results was not visible to the panel.

The role of student organisations is extremely important in terms of representing the legitimate interests of students by raising and resolving issues. However, as it was observed, student organisations do not play a significant role in terms of identifying and solving issues, which may be a problem of lack of awareness about student organisations. The Student Council is not perceived as a body for the protection of students' rights, the latter's connection between the students is weak. Due to the expert panel, in this regard, the university should take certain steps to increase the role of the Student Council.

There is a weak connection between the chairs and Student Scientific Society. The work of those in charge of SSS issues is not coordinated. The topics of the SSS scientific articles approved by the chairs are missing.

During the site visit, it became clear that the students were not aware of the high-impact journals and the criteria for being published in them. In this regard, SSS should take additional measures with the involvement of teachers.

The expert panel positively assesses the fact that the university conducts additional classes and provides consultations. From the point of view of organising additional classes, it should be noted that student organisations should play an important role in the process. However, there is no mention of this in the self-assessment. The university should promote the implementation of additional activities and classes by student organisations.

There is a Career Center at the University. During the site visit, it became clear that very few students were aware of the career center. Students mainly apply to the teachers and rector for employment issues. During the visit, it became clear that the Center is not separated as a separate structural unit.

The expert panel positively evaluates the existence of the legal clinic and crime laboratory. The legal clinic can be considered as a career support service. The University should take steps to use the legal clinic and the crime laboratory for research purposes. Students' initiative is weak, their interest in decision-making processes in the governing bodies is weak. Alumni can play a role in ensuring the quality of student education, consultation, and other services. However, according to the self-assessment, the feedback with the GSU alumni is not coordinated. The GSU alumni and the Career Center can play an important role in solving this problem. Therefore, the university must take concrete steps in this direction.

Summary: Considering that the university has mechanisms for student recruitment, selection and admission, the university has made some improvements based on the previous accreditation expert report, students have no complaints, they are satisfied with the education provided, there are some mechanisms for identifying student needs, administrative and teaching staff are quite responsive and available, the university provides appropriate support to students to improve the

educational environment, due to the expert panel, Gavar State University meets the requirements of the Criterion 4.

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

V. FACULTY AND STAFF

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.

In 2019, the GSU teaching staff formation and incentive regulation (with amendments) was approved, which defines the categories and relevant requirements, placement criteria and cases.

The replacement of the TS positions at GSU is done through competitive selection, which is regulated by the relevant RA legislation and university regulations and procedures, as well as there is the institute of guest teachers. The formation of the SS positions is carried out according to the position passports, job descriptions, which define the functions, rights and job responsibilities of the employee.

Employment contracts are concluded with the teachers for the implementation of academic programmes at the university on a main, internal and external compatibility, and hourly basis. There are employees who are paid per hour: they are employers with big scientific merit and extensive work experience, as well as practical skills, or well-known specialists in the relevant field.

The university TS also includes 21 employers, who contribute to the process of training specialists who meet the requirements of the modern labour market. The GSU alumni with excellent academic performance are also employed at the university.

Since 2007, GSU teachers have been hired on a contractual, compatibility, and hourly basis.

The effectiveness of the university's TS and SS selection policy is assessed through student surveys, lesson observations, peer reviews, the conclusions of the final attestation committees, and the quality of the GSU TS. According to the statistics presented in the self-assessment, the results are satisfactory, so the election policy has been effective for the timeframe under review. No analysis has been done on the effectiveness of the selection of the support staff.

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

Based on the recommendations presented in the previous accreditation expert report, the requirements of the personal, pedagogical and professional qualities of the teaching staff were revised and fixed in the specifications of all APs of the University. In 2020, the university revised the clear requirements for personal, pedagogical and professional qualities presented to the AP teaching staff of all specialities. The requirements for the TS are defined in the qualification descriptions, and the teacher's job description. The courses are taught by teachers with relevant

basic education. However, the same requirements apply to all the master's and bachelor's degree APs. In addition, the study of the submitted documents allows to prove that GSU, in fact, lacks clearly defined mechanisms by which it is possible to check the compliance of teachers with the established requirements.

In 2017, the regulations on the implementation of the Gavar State University TS qualification improvement programme were developed and implemented. Under the supervision of the Academic Policy Department, TS qualification programmes are implemented, credits are awarded, and certificates are issued. The Quality Assurance Department monitors the level of satisfaction of the stakeholders from the conducted trainings. According to the self-assessment report, joint in-depth analyses are carried out by the APD, QAD and professional chairs on the lesson observations, the results are published, and appropriate measures are taken. However, there are no visible examples of such in-depth analyses or the specific measures taken as a result.

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

A TS pedagogical and professional quality assessment system has been introduced, in which points are allocated for teachers' scientific and pedagogical, teaching and methodological, as well as organisational activities, activities aimed at the development of education and science system development, which were taken into account while providing incentives. During the site visit, it was confirmed that the teachers who showed the best results and received high scores are presented for encouragement by the decision of the Academic Council - material, moral, work promotion.

One of the mechanisms of the TS assessment is the lesson observations, the regulations of which were revised in February 2021 and amended by the GSU Academic Council. In addition, GSU runs a teacher portfolio that presents each teacher's achievements and accomplishments.

The work of the TS members is overseen by the GSU Academic Policy Department. The compliance of the course programmes with the defined requirements, the completion of the relevant areas of the e-learning system, the current implementation of the educational workload are checked. The activity of the teachers is also evaluated through surveys conducted among the students, according to which the quality of the teaching and the effectiveness of the educational process are studied. There is a survey policy. Thus, surveys are conducted among students, alumni, colleagues, the results are discussed at the sessions of the chair, faculty, council, rector, Academic Council, and they are taken into account in the formation of points for teacher evaluation. However, the effectiveness and impact of the listed mechanisms are not assessed by the analyses performed.

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

Based on the previous accreditation expert report, the regulations on the GSU TS qualification improvement programme implementation were approved (with amendments) in 2020, according to which the TS credit qualification development programme is implemented in a five-year cycle with a total load of 30 credits in three equal educational units (pedagogical, languages, professional). The training programme is defined for 2017-2022. However, the training courses are not always

based on the needs identified as a result of internal and external evaluations. Analyses in this regard are lacking, as are sufficient analyses on the impact of training.

Due to the need for online learning, some additional technical training was also provided.

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

The TS number has not changed significantly in 2016-2021: about 75 main and 50 part-time, with small variations. Gradual increase in remuneration contributes to the stability of the teaching staff. In the manner prescribed by RA legislation, children-students of the University staff receive partial reimbursement of tuition fees. The GSU teacher's guide to organising the educational process in the credit system is a way to promote quality sustainability.

Examination of the accreditation documents showed that in all the APs subject to assessment (Law, Finance, Computer Engineering), the same teacher often teaches 3-6 extensive courses, which, moreover, are not always subject to the same code. The university also mentioned the workload of the GSU TS members and the busy work activity as a weak point for this criterion.

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

There are different categories in the University, and different amounts of salary are defined for them. The university has regulations for organising mentorship for young teachers and staff members. University teachers' articles, other research results are published free of charge by GSU and are provided to teachers.

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

The formation, rights and responsibilities of the administrative and support staff at the University, as well as the position passports, job descriptions, selection, and promotion, are regulated by the GSU charter, department charters, regulations and procedures.

Position passports and job descriptions of administrative and support staff members have been developed and approved, which clearly define the scope of functions, rights and responsibilities of each employee, which allows for more effective work activities. The staff list is approved annually by the Board of Trustees. The administrative staff is 13 people, and the support staff is 66 people.

The quality of the activities of the administrative and support staffs is ensured by a number of mechanisms. These include the action plan of the subdivisions, the monitoring plan, the annual reports of the subdivisions on the work done, the semi-annual and annual reports of the administrative and support staffs, the participation in the trainings, the assessments given by the teachers and students, the incentive, etc. At the end of each semester, all the employees of administrative and support staff prepare reports within the scope of their functions. The reports are discussed by the members of the Rectorate and are evaluated. Surveys among students and teachers evaluate their satisfaction with the work of the Rectorate, dean's office, chair, library, Quality Assurance Department and other departments.

Considerations: Examining the GSU documents and the information obtained during the site visit, the expert panel can conclude that GSU is generally provided with a TS and SS with appropriate professional qualities. Study programmes are mainly provided by teachers with relevant qualifications, academic degrees and titles.

Although all the AP specifications have been revised and specific requirements for the personal, pedagogical and professional qualities of the teaching staff have been fixed by taking into account the outcomes of a certain programme, in fact, there are no clearly defined mechanisms for checking the compliance of the teachers with the requirements. In addition, the requirements for the teaching staff of bachelor's and master's programmes are not different from each other.

Although the University regularly uses various TS assessment tools, including lesson observations, surveys among students, alumni, and partners, however, there are almost no in-depth analyses of the effectiveness and impact of the listed mechanisms. In addition, at least the internal assessments and surveys among internal stakeholders in the very friendly atmosphere of the university (student and teacher, teacher and teacher), which was proved during the visit, can be problematic in terms of revealing the objective reality.

The expert panel considers it positive that the university realises the need for the development of teachers. Although the teacher training process, based on the recommendations of the previous evaluation report, has become more defined, the emphasis has been placed on identifying teacher training needs and developing training programmes based on them, but the validity of the trainings is still insufficient and their relevance of to the AP outcomes, as well as there are no analyses evaluating the effectiveness of the trainings. Evaluating the readiness to conduct trainings as positive, the expert panel, however, believes that conducting only in-house trainings limits the possible development of the TS.

The involvement of employees with practical and rich experience in terms of ensuring educational outcomes is commendable. However, as noted in the previous report, the TS sustainability is risky given that 3-8 courses are taught by the same person, and if this person quits (for various reasons), it will jeopardise the ability or even the continuity and quality of several courses. Therefore, the university must take active steps to attract new teachers.

The expert panel stresses that the GSU administrative and support staff are largely staffed, and their functions are clearly defined in the relevant documents.

Summary: Given that GSU is staffed with TS and SS having relevant professional qualities, there are proper policies and procedures for their selection, recruitment, dismissal, some mechanisms for identifying the needs of the teaching staff are in place, the expert panel considers that GSU meets the requirements of the Criterion 5.

Conclusion: The expert panel evaluates the compliance of GSU institutional capacities with the requirements of the 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 strategic plan of the university envisages the development of research directions. The integration of education and research is defined as a priority in the TLI strategy. The Board of Trustees believes that science should become one of the TLI's priorities, especially in conducting research on regional issues.

As it was found out during the site visit, in the next strategic plan, it is planned to set an objective for the TLI in the areas of science development and research on local issues.

The TLI has teachers with international experience who work mainly part-time and are not involved in research.

The University has a collection of scientific articles approved by the SCC, which is a prerequisite for the development of science and research.

The TS representatives of the GSU Chair of Biology, Ecology and Healthy Lifestyle have patents and invention copyrights.

The university also wants to increase its research and development budget, but no concrete steps have been taken yet. The printing of the monographs is not funded by the TLI, but there have been cases where the monograph composed by the main staff was funded by the Gavar Municipality with the support of the university.

There is a person in charge of science, but this position is combined with other jobs.

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

During the site visit discussions, as well as the examination of the documents, it became clear that in the case of the TLI, short-term research programmes are implemented by the chairs, long-term programmes are planned in a strategic plan, and mid-term programmes are outlined in the documents in very general terms.

The TLI has the potential to carry out research. Some of the chairs carry out active scientific and practical work, in particular, the Chair of History, the Chair of the Faculty of Natural Sciences, the Chair of the Faculty of Philology. However, during the visit, it became clear that the TLI staff and students are not aware of the research topics of the chairs and some of them are not involved in the research work. There is some group research work in the chairs, but not all chairs carry out short-term research programmes in groups. At the same time, on the one hand, the TLI SP emphasises the University's research activities, yet lacks any action plans for the development of documented research plans, short-term goals, action plans for key indicators, timetable and toolkit for achieving goals.

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

At the TLI, at the level of chairs, research topics are brought up both by the chairs according to the specialisation of the teachers, by the objectives and preferences, as well as by the suggestions and needs received from the employers. For example, the employers submitted proposals on the research topics of the master's degree.

In recent years, the university teachers have won a Science Committee thematic research programme, and one programme will be implemented in collaboration. Two normative acts have been developed, aimed at the regulation of scientific research works, in particular, a joint research concept for the implementation of scientific activities, which presents general approaches, directions, and structures.

6.4 The Institution emphasises internationalisation of its research.

In order to increase the internationalisation of the TLI teacher and student research, the University provides information on international conferences to stakeholders. There are no publications by students in international scientific conferences. During the site visit, it became clear that the TLI had not funded the publication of articles by the university's internal stakeholders in international journals.

Although there has been cooperation with a number of local research organisations, in particular with the Buniatyan Scientific Research Institute of the RA NAS, the Scientific Technological Center of Organic and Pharmaceutical Chemistry, articles have been published, there are no cases of such cooperation with international partners. Over the past three years, the TLI has implemented internationally funded projects, in particular the Refine and ABioNET projects, which, however, have had only an indirect impact on the internationalisation of science.

According to statistics provided by GSU, there are publications in international scientific journals. During 2019, 8 scientific articles were published by the TLI teachers and students, and in 2020 – 10 articles, only a part of which is accepted in international scientific databases or in journals accepted by the state for writing doctoral dissertations. The methodology underlying most of the publications differs from the accepted modern research methods, which are usually required by indexed international journals. In 2020, there were also participations and publications in 5 international conferences.

Experience exchange programmes with the teachers of international TLIs have been implemented at universities in Bulgaria, Spain, Hungary and Germany, but are not yet used to promote the internationalisation of science.

However, links made through international projects are not yet used for joint research projects.

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

The existence of practical classes at the university, scientific experiments in laboratories, bachelor's and master's theses, as well as scientific and pedagogical internships allows students to carry out research work, conduct joint research with teachers and provide certain interconnection mechanisms. At the same time, by examining bachelor's and master's theses, it becomes clear that a low threshold is set for the research work carried out by students at the TLI. The works do not use modern sources, quantitative or qualitative research methods.

Student conferences are held at the university together with the teachers of the chairs. The best bachelor's and master's theses are presented by students in the form of reports, and in some cases their results are published in scientific journals.

The effectiveness of research internships is measured through the verification of characteristics, diaries, live communication between students and employers, and the quality of the report. During the site visit, it was found out that both the university staff and the students were satisfied with the quality of the internships, and no improvement measures had been taken recently. However, a review of internship diaries and reports revealed that research internship does not provide research capacity building or knowledge of methods.

In some cases, the teachers apply the experience gained during their research or scientific work in the form of scientific experiments, practical work, and in some cases, the teachers also proposed changes in the curriculum as a result of scientific and practical achievements. For example, the introduction of the subject of social entrepreneurship was proposed in the TLI, which was due to the results of the research.

Considerations: GSU does not have a clear plan for the implementation of research activities, and the priorities set out in the strategy are very general. Despite the TLI's approach to developing research, no steps have been taken to fully achieve these goals. The university has a vision (although it is not very clear) that expresses its interests and ambitions in the field of research but its implementation is endangered without a plan for the successful implementation of concrete steps.

The TLI does not use links obtained with the help of Erasmus+ and other international projects to conduct collaborative research. Scientific and practical works are carried out on the initiative of active members of the university, but they are few. It is commendable that the IT Department has experience in interconnecting research, practice and learning, which contributes to the interconnection of learning and research.

The TLI has teachers with international experience who work mainly in collaboration, are not involved in research, but can play an important role in the development of the TLI research by exchanging experience, implementing joint programmes with the University's main TS.

An obstacle to the internationalisation of the TLI research is the insufficient level of language proficiency among teachers. Assistance in the development of science can be provided by raising the level of language proficiency of the teaching staff and providing additional English language courses or proficiency levels. Lack of familiarity with modern research methods is also a significant obstacle to the development of research activities.

The TLI has a collection of scientific articles that publishes the main scientific results of faculty and students, but only a small part of the publications is based on current issues or short-term strategic plans of the chairs. The application of stricter standards and reviews will not only improve the quality of articles in the collection of articles, but also help prepare stakeholders engaged in active research at GSU to be published in reputable international journals.

There is no institutional department for the development of science and research at the university. There is no fundraising specialist; the rector, the Quality Assurance Department, the Foreign Relations Department jointly perform that function. Some research processes are coordinated by a science officer who combines responsibility with another position. The lack of a

fundraising specialist does not allow the TLI to find research grants from outside sources, and the workload of the university's middle unit managers does not allow them to deal with this issue in parallel.

Although the TLI has introduced a grade criterion for active participation in research projects, as a result of which teachers get incentives, as well as there is a significant increase in international publications. However, science officers have not mastered the statistics, in particular, how much scientific publications have increased or decreased, how many articles are published in impact journals and other important information, as well as the sequence of steps to be taken to achieve the goals.

The development of clearer standards of scientific activity, the definition of minimum requirements for research by students, the development of methodological guidelines for conducting research in master's theses, the provision of regular training for teachers on modern research methods, can contribute to increasing the effectiveness of scientific work.

Welcoming the implementation of steps to activate science and research at the university, the expert panel is concerned about the slow growth of research work, as well as the uncoordinated approach, which may hinder the achievement of the TLI research goals.

It is true that the TLI has established a mechanism to encourage the most active teachers this year, but it is still impossible to evaluate the latter due to the lack of statistics.

Summary: Given the generality of the research objectives at the TLI, the lack of a clear action plan, the ambiguity of the coordination functions of the research work, the lack of international research cooperation, the expert panel considers that the University does not meet the requirements of the Criterion 6.

Conclusion: The expert panel evaluates the compliance of GSU institutional capacities with the requirements of the Criterion 6 as **unsatisfactory**.

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.

The TLI operates in a complex of three buildings. There are renovated classrooms, laboratories, courtyards, where open lessons and lectures can be conducted, and a library with two branches and a reading hall. All faculties have a number of computer classrooms, projectors, and a technically equipped stadium. The university also has a first-aid post, a dormitory, canteens, which provides a safe environment for students, teachers, teachers from Yerevan and other regions. WiFi connection is available throughout the university.

The university laboratory is used to conduct lessons and experiments for both students and schoolchildren, which has a double positive effect to assist partner educational institutions with

resource utilisation, as well as to introduce the potential TLI stakeholders to the university environment.

The TLI has recently opened a classroom called Smart Center, which is a multifunctional auditorium equipped with computer equipment, furniture, projectors, where it is planned to hold events in various formats in the future. At present, as the audience is new, no active measures have been taken yet, so the results have not been evaluated.

The Faculty of Foreign Languages has a linguaphone room equipped with modern computers and furniture, which allows for professional events.

During the previous accreditation, it was reported that about 1% of the library stock was digitised. During the site visit, it became clear that about 10% of the library's book stock was digitised. However, the observation of the library fund revealed that the literature was old with the exception of a few books in foreign languages that had been obtained through grants. The students also expressed a desire to have new literature and affirmed the importance of having it.

In addition to existing buildings, equipment and facilities, the TLI also has access to electronic learning platforms and an electronic library. The e-learning.gsu platform has been operating at the university since 2011, through which the university's online classes are carried out together with Zoom⁶.

The availability of an e-platform has helped the university make the rapid transition to online learning at the beginning of the pandemic. The necessary information about the downloaded subjects is available on the electronic platform. Students have input data according to their groups, through which they gain access to the necessary data, and are acquainted with the materials.

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

The TLI funding is planned on an annual basis. Each year, the University Board of Trustees makes an estimate of income and expenses, which reflects the main expected incomes of the next year and projected expenses. More than 60% of the university's income comes from tuition fees, and more than 65% of the output goes to salaries. During the visit, it was found out that the salary fund includes the payments for trainings and seminars for specialists invited from other universities, institutions, but they do not make a significant sum.

Gavar State University's fixed financial means are derived from student tuition fees, but in recent years, there has been a decline in the number of students. GSU does not receive state basic funding. Funding from the state budget refers only to the payment of tuition fees.

The university, although state-owned, has no state funding. The state only provides tuition-free education for some students. The university strives to provide maximum tuition-free education through philanthropists, governmental and non-governmental organisations and various programmes.

The overview of the budget of recent years has a negative trend. This is mainly due to the lack of students, which is due to the problem of regional migration.

⁶ The idea was reformulated based on the observations of the university.

The printing of the monographs is not funded by the TLI, but there have been cases when the monograph prepared by the main staff has been funded by the Gavar Municipality with the support of the university.

The University also wants to increase its research and development budget, but no concrete steps have been taken yet. Recently, the teachers' salaries have been increased evenly.

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.

The distribution of actual financial resources at the University is based on the income and expenditure estimates. Financial management is carried out by the rector and chief accountant. It is clear from the issues raised during the visit that the middle unit managers positively assess the directions of budget distribution. The needs of the faculties are taken into account when planning the financial resources, which ensure the continuous improvement of education.

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 previous accreditation, it was reported that the laboratory did not have the appropriate tools and materials to be used effectively. During the current site visit, it became clear that in recent years, a number of university classrooms have been renovated, furnished, laboratories have been equipped with new equipment and materials, which has made the organisation of students' educational process more efficient. Classrooms have been renovated at the Faculty of Philology; there is a room for meetings and discussions, as well as a newly opened Civil Defense room.

Most of the university's financial resources are directed to the salary fund, and the opportunities to supplement the budget from other sources are limited.

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

At Gavar State University, the information and management of the documentation process is carried out in accordance with the GSU clerical procedure, which defines the registration and circulation of all the input and output documents at the university.

The TLI receives information both on paper and electronically. During the site visit, it became clear that the paper letters were sent to the Rectorate, and the e-mails were handled by the Foreign Relations and Media Department, but as soon as they received the letters, they also sent them to the Rectorate.

The following e-learning and management systems were used at GSU: Learn.gsu.am, Distance.gsu.am, Dekanat.gsu.am, Anhatakan.gsu.am and Diplom.gsu.am.

The "Projects" section of the website is separated, where the drafts of rules, procedures, and other in-university acts being developed at the University are posted, so that internal and external stakeholders have the opportunity to express their opinions and observations on the draft documents.

There is an archive at the university, where all the necessary documents are stored from the opening day of the university, the minimum security requirements are preserved, and in 2021, equipment was purchased, through which it is planned to digitise the archive.

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 the minimum necessary conditions from the point of view of health. The first-aid post employs a qualified employee.

During the site visit, it was found out that in order to ensure the minimum requirements due to the pandemic, there are sanitisers and masks at the entrance to the TLI, corridors are disinfected around the clock twice a day, there also forehead thermometers at the entrance to the university buildings, and staff have vaccination certificates, as well as COVID test results at regular intervals.

The university pursues the safe storage and use of laboratory equipment, materials; there are cameras, and security guards to provide a safe environment for students and teachers. University entrances are adapted for people with disabilities and there are ramps at the entrance to the university, but the TLI buildings do not allow access to the upper floors for the disabled.

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.

Information on the opinions concerning the applicability and availability of the GSU resources is collected through surveys. Survey results are largely positive.

Each chair presents resource requirements at the beginning of the year, discussions are held, and the TLI officials work to satisfy the requirements as soon as possible.

Considerations: The expert panel welcomes the fact that GSU is committed to the availability and development of its building resources. It is especially commendable that students are generally satisfied with the resources available, the learning environment, although they have the opportunity to voice their needs.

Most of the GSU budget is salaries, and staff salaries have been increased proportionately over the past year. Consequently, it becomes especially important to have a mechanism for ensuring cost-effectiveness in this area. In particular, the implementation of differentiated incentives for employees will ensure more efficient use of financial resources, more targeted incentives for employees, which will increase the efficiency of employees, as well as save additional funds for more efficient organisation of educational process, research and other investments.

Opportunities for replenishment of the budget from other sources are limited, which does not allow to allocate additional funds for the implementation of programmes in the field of important specialties.

During the previous accreditation, it was reported that about 1% of the library stock was digitised. During the site visit, it became clear that about 10% of the library's book stock has been digitised, which is still quite a low indicator. During the meeting with the person in charge of the library, it became clear that the chairs present the list of required literature, and the TLI acquires it upon request. However, the observation of the library fund revealed that the literature was old,

with the exception of a few books in foreign languages obtained through grants, the rest were largely ineffective in conducting modern research. The students also expressed a desire to have new literature and affirmed its importance.

On the positive side, there are a number of online platforms available at the university, but implementing some courses on other platforms, as well as being on different platforms, can be a burden for both teachers and students.

The expert panel also stresses that GSU has a secure environment that facilitates effective learning.

Summary: Taking into account that Gavar State University has a sufficient classroom fund, equipped with the necessary equipment, an educational environment equipped with a library fund, financial distribution aimed at ensuring the stability of education, as well as a safe and secure environment for students and teachers, the expert panel considers that Gavar State University meets the requirements of the Criterion 7.

Conclusion: The expert panel evaluates the compliance of GSU institutional capacities with the requirements of the 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.

During the previous accreditation, it was reported that GSU lacks a separate reporting procedure. As a result of the current visit, the expert panel found out that improvement work has been done in this direction, and accountability at the university is regulated by an internal procedure, such as feedback, which involves reporting at almost all levels. During the site visit, discussions with heads at various levels made it clear that joint discussions at the university were frequent; there was also informal vertical and horizontal accountability. The TLI has a Board of Trustees, which discusses various general issues, develops a strategy, and reports on achievements.

The TLI's annual financial statements are audited by an independent auditing firm and published on the university's website. The rector's annual reports are also available on the website.

There are no accounting assessment indicators or mechanisms at the university. Despite the fact that the university operates on the principle of transparency, the information provided is mainly informative, positive events and achievements are presented.

During the site visit, it became clear that formal and informal meetings between the TS, middle management, and senior management at the university were frequent, ensuring the rapid transfer of information between officials at different levels of the TLI.

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

Information about the reforms being implemented at the university is mainly reflected in the news section of the website, as well as through the Facebook page. The university website provides enough data on the general information about the TLI, in particular the founding documents, departments, science department, information on quality assurance, news accessed by both students and TS, and other stakeholders. The English version of the site, however, does not have all the information available.

Gavar University newspaper, local television and press are also used to increase access to news on the TLI.

The university has a Foreign Relations and Media Department, the employees of which provide public relations and presentation of information. The department conducts various events, press conferences, discussions in schools, other institutions, presents various TLI events, achievements, and available opportunities.

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

The feedback function is mainly performed by the Foreign Relations and Media Department. The means of feedback are the Facebook page, e-mail, and paper mail. The Facebook page has 5500 followers, which speaks of having an active page. The main publications refer to working meetings, conferences, council/board meetings. The small number of comments does not allow to unequivocally evaluate the effectiveness of the Facebook page as a means of feedback.

During the discussions during the visit, it became clear that discussions had taken place between the TLI and employers, as a result of which proposals for professional programmes were made, the “Information Law” subject was introduced, and the number of English classes was increased.

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

The organisation of regular lectures, seminars and conferences by the university is a certain mechanism of knowledge transfer to society. At GSU, various activities are carried out both for the transfer of university experience and for discussions to identify issues in the region. A number of important trainings have been conducted at the TLI, including procurement training for regional corporate executives. The laboratory at the TLI is used to conduct experiments for schoolchildren.

GSU conducts a number of activities for the development of public relations, including press conferences, in-house and extra discussions, such as meetings at schools, colleges and other institutions, as well as various awareness campaigns through television and other media outlets.

Considerations: The expert panel positively assesses the existence of internal accountability mechanisms in the university, which promotes external accountability. There is a modern website where financial and non-financial reports are published, including the rector's annual reports. Through the Facebook page, the university shares the details of various events and achievements, due to which a part of the processes taking place at the university becomes transparent for the public.

University stakeholders can find the information they need on the TLI website, but it is only partially available in the English language version of the site, which can be an obstacle to attracting

international partners. The university's website contains a number of transparency documents, in particular the decisions of the University Board of Trustees and the Academic Council, but it should be noted that in some cases no updates are made, and in some cases the information is partially missing, which, regardless of the reasons, can damage the trust in the university.

Despite the fact that the university is implementing a number of public relations activities, some of them are aimed at increasing the number of students, rather than increasing the university's achievements, capabilities, accountability and transparency.

Summary: Given that Gavar State University's reporting system allows for the identification of a variety of issues and information that can positively impact the university's sustainable development, the university conducts a series of surveys with various stakeholders, which provides feedback to the TLI, seeks to ensure the transparency of its activities through the website and other means, the expert panel considers that GSU meets the requirements of the Criterion 8.

Conclusion: The expert panel evaluates the compliance of GSU institutional capacities with the requirements of the 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.

External relations and cooperation are one of the priorities of the GSU Strategic Plan. Based on the previous expert report, the Public Relations and Media Department of the university was reorganised into the Foreign Relations and Media Department, its functions were clarified. In addition, the "Strategic Programme for Internationalisation of Gavar State University" was approved. The latter defines the directions, goals and objectives of internationalisation, the general list of responsible bodies; however, the terms are not clearly defined, as well as the measurability of the goals. Moreover, it or any other accompanying document does not set out specific steps and mechanisms for the implementation of those objectives or annual action plans and effectiveness evaluation mechanisms.

Activation of external relations and implementation of internationalisation programmes are encouraged at the faculty and chair level. The University's internationalisation processes are covered on the GSU official website, GSU Facebook page, YouTube and other social platforms. Information and open door days are organised, during which the international programmes implemented by GSU, the programmes of academic mobility, the procedures for their participation are presented. However, there are no clear procedures in place to encourage the establishment of external relations. The approaches for selecting universities for cooperation, the process of defining the goals or objectives of the Foreign Relations and Media Department by years are not described.

As weakness in terms of this criterion, the university noted the lack of relevant experience of staff in raising funds for internationalisation purposes, as well as the lack of a separate department for management of grants and international programmes.

The university aims to become an attractive environment for attracting students and teachers from foreign higher education institutions. To achieve this goal, specific steps or action plan or real implementation opportunities and challenges are not described as well; therefore, this goal is mostly of a declarative nature. The very low inflow of students/teachers testifies to that.

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

GSU's internationalisation functions are performed by the University's Foreign Relations and Media Department, whose activities and staff responsibilities are defined by the department's regulations.

One of the tasks of the Foreign Relations and Media Department is to promote cooperation with foreign universities, research centers, government agencies, international organisations and other organisations, as well as to organise (resulting from the GSU's statutory goals for internationalisation) documentation work related to the business trips of staff members, researchers, students for participation in international workshops, conferences, trainings and other events, to coordinate international programmes of teachers' and students' academic mobility, to disseminate bilingual information about the programmes, to organise the mobility process, and after its completion also to organise reporting meetings.

The examination of the submitted documents by the expert panel during the visit revealed that there are no documented procedures for internationalisation and foreign relations. For example, there is no procedure for selecting participants in exchange programmes, no procedure for establishing partnerships with organisations, etc.

9.3 The Institution effectively collaborates with local and international counterparts.

The University is a member of 21 international programmes aimed at developing academic mobility and institutional capacity, collaborating with about 60 partner universities from around the world. 117 GSU students and 211 TS representatives participated in academic exchange programmes, as well as other international programmes and initiatives. Within the framework of the EU Erasmus+ "SMART" project, the "GSU SMART" center has been established, which is a connecting link between students, entrepreneurs, and teachers who want to implement their business ideas, providing appropriate space and educational resources.

GSU is the first in the RA HEI system to be included in the "Janus" University Network, which offers online lectures by renowned experts who impart knowledge to students about areas of social entrepreneurship and other promising areas, present their success stories, and develop the entrepreneurship skills. The university also has memoranda of cooperation with separate state and non-governmental organisations.

Establishing ties mostly comes from the framework of personal connections. The scope of cooperation in the field of research activities is weak, and the cooperation with employers is mainly aimed at organising internships. There are no clear approaches to evaluating the effectiveness of the process.

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

In order to increase the foreign language proficiency among internal stakeholders, GSU organises multi-level foreign language courses for the administrative and teaching staffs, as well as students. Foreign language teaching at GSU, according to the bachelor's and master's programme curricula, is carried out for at least 3 semesters, with the "Professional Foreign Language" course being taught in all the master's study programmes.

There are is an English language course consisting of 34 lessons for the staff of the university (during one semester).

As mentioned, one of the goals of the university is to become an attractive environment for involving students and teachers from foreign higher education institutions, while very few teachers are still ready to teach in English, so additional retraining in foreign languages can be beneficial.

Considerations: It is commendable that the recommendations of the previous evaluation report have clarified the functions and regulations of the internationalisation and foreign relations department at GSU, as well as the strategic development of GSU, taking into account the goals of the University's internationalisation. The active participation of the university in various international grant programmes is commendable, as it promotes the exchange of experience.

However, a review of the submitted documents, as well as the meetings during the site visit show that the relevant procedures are not clear, and there is a need to describe them in more detail and to make them transparent, as well as there is a need for a clear targeting or outcome evaluation mechanism, the lack of which may jeopardise the stability of foreign relations and cooperation.

Although the university considers the internationalisation and development of foreign relations as one of its strengths, with the help of which the achievements have registered a dynamic growth, however, the scope of cooperation does not fully meet the ambitious strategic goals in terms of education, research, internationalisation and mobility. The establishment of foreign relations and internationalisation can be more stable if it is based more on institutional policies than on personal connections. In addition, the scope of cooperation in the field of research activities is weak, and the cooperation with employers is mainly aimed at organising internships, which does not allow to reap the full benefits of the established connections.

Summary: Considering the importance of the internationalisation process at GSU, active participation in international programmes, as well as some measures taken to improve the level of foreign language learning among students and faculty, the expert panel considers that GSU meets the requirements of the Criterion 9.

Conclusion: The expert panel evaluates the compliance of GSU institutional capacities with the requirements of the 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 scope, principles, approaches, structure and tools of the GSU Quality Assurance System are set out in the QA Manual. The latter is the methodological basis of the TLI's internal quality assurance system. The manual clearly defines how the university perceives quality assurance and the link between the QA mechanism and the goals reflected in the strategic plan.

According to the QA manual, the basis of the internal quality assurance system is ESG (Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area).

Improvement procedures are defined for individual major areas (APs, resources, TS, etc). These documents, however, are not procedural in nature; clear actions and the frequency of their implementation are generally not defined.

Surveys are seen as a key quality assurance tool. The methodology of the surveys, however, is not clearly defined. GSU reports from various units are one of the main QA tools. In the case of problems identified by them, the QA Department is usually involved in resolving the issue, such as the development or processing of a document.

As it turned out during the visit, the QA Department considers that the priorities for improvement at GSU should be inclusive education, stakeholder engagement, material resource improvements, and the introduction of a new AP. These priorities are only partially based on survey data.

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

The central unit in the internal quality assurance system is the QA Department, the functions of which are defined by the Department's regulations.

As a structural unit, the QA Department is overseen by the rector. However, as it was observed during the visit, the QA Department addresses its results not to the rector herself, but to internal and external stakeholders.

Currently, the department has 3 employees. Their functions are fixed in the passports of relevant positions, job descriptions. The QA staff have received some training but have not been involved in QA processes at GSU.

According to the information received during the visit, the QA Department does not see the need for resources. The university provides the necessary material and financial resources for the implementation of the processes. However, the resource efficiency of the QA processes is not evaluated.

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

The bodies involved in the GSU QA system and their functions are defined in the QA manual. The manual also describes the mechanisms for involving internal and external stakeholders in the university QA processes.

The main feedback collection mechanism is the survey among almost all stakeholders. During the visit, it was found that employers are relatively passive in terms of involvement in the QA processes.

In addition to surveys, the described means of involving external stakeholders in QA processes are few in number.

Informal approaches (based on interpersonal connections) to the selection and involvement of external stakeholders in the QA processes are also used.

10.4 The internal quality assurance system is periodically reviewed.

The objectives of the internal quality assurance system are not clearly defined, so there is no basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the system. However, a QAD performance evaluation questionnaire has been developed.

A comparative analysis of IQA systems with 3 HEIs was carried out, as well as with the ESG requirements. As a result, some mechanisms and changes have been developed in the guideline.

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

In 2021, the self-assessment process was largely based on the results of the internal quality assurance system, but additional surveys were conducted as well. In addition, a mid-term self-assessment was conducted at GSU for 2017-2019.

However, the effectiveness of the QA toolkit (including data collection tools) is not analysed.

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.

According to the QA manual, transparency and openness are among the QA principles. Almost all the results of the internal quality assurance system are published, made available to internal, external stakeholders through the website and other means. However, these results generally do not contain reliable information and analyses of the quality of processes. Statistical analysis of the collected data is almost non-existent, and the reliability is ensured by the number and variety of sources. As a result, the information provided by the internal quality assurance system is generally not of critical nature.

Considerations: The expert panel welcomes the fact that at the document level GSU has relevant evidence of its activities: the QA policy and procedures that can contribute to the development of a quality culture within the university. The expert panel emphasises the need to define the scope, principles and structure of the GSU QA system in the QA manual, as well as to

ensure that the internal quality assurance system complies with ESG. However, due to the expert panel, the implementation of the QA procedures may be jeopardised if the specific actions and their frequency are not fixed.

The GSU approach to involving almost all stakeholders in many surveys is commendable, but at the same time, if the survey methodology is not substantiated, there can be no confidence in the survey results.

The integration of the GSU reports into the QA system observations is positive as it allows to focus on the processes actually implemented. However, the active involvement of the QA Department in the solutions provided is problematic, as the QA Department will evaluate the quality of its own procedures in the future.

The university has not yet introduced measurable indicators of quality progress. In the case of incomplete reliability of the information collected by the quality assurance system, the QAD also takes an intuitive approach, which is reflected, for example, in setting priorities for improvement at GSU.

The expert panel considers it positive that the QAD functions are defined by the Department's rules of procedure, and the employees' functions are enshrined in the relevant job passports and job descriptions. The QAD value is high in GSU, and the Department communicates with almost all units. The QAD reports are developed for publication rather than for GSU managerial staff. This results in a break in the PDCA cycle.

The QAD has and receives resources. The expert panel considers that this is a certain guarantee for the possible development of the QAD stability and capacity. The effectiveness of the resources invested, however, is not evaluated. The same goes for training. As a result, the further development of training and other investment targeting is endangered.

The expert panel welcomes the GSU approach to involving internal and external stakeholders in QA processes, which is enshrined in the QA manual. The main tool is chosen, the survey, however, needs justification and evaluation of effectiveness. Due to the expert panel, each group of stakeholders can have its own peculiarities, and the same tool may not work in all cases with the same efficiency. As a result, some groups, especially external stakeholders, have only passive participation. For example, the lack of direct involvement of employers and alumni does not help to identify the needs of the labour market, and the lack of involvement of government agencies and potential sponsors hinders the development of the TLI as well.

The expert panel is concerned that the effectiveness of the QA system is almost not estimated. However, due to the expert panel, performance appraisal will not be appropriate unless the objectives of the internal quality assurance system are clearly defined. At the same time, it is commendable that a comparative analysis of the IQA systems has been carried out.

Due to the expert panel, not analysing the effectiveness of the QA toolkit (including data collection tools) at the TLI does not allow the external evaluator to consider the IQA data to be reliable.

Highly appreciating the GSU's principles of transparency and publicity, making the disclosure of almost all information available to stakeholders, the expert panel nevertheless believes that there is a lack of reliable information on the quality of processes, measurements, analyses and a critical approach.

Summary: Given that the GSU has developed a QA manual and toolkit, the QAD is active, and though resource allocation for QA processes is incomplete, internal and external stakeholders are involved, the internal quality assurance system is mostly transparent, the expert panel considers that GSU meets the requirements of the Criterion 10.

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

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

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

Tigran Mnatsakanyan
Chair of Expert Panel

28.02.2022

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. CVS OF EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS

Tigran Mnatsakanyan: In 2008, he graduated from the Armenian State University of Economics with a degree in "Management". In 2011, he was awarded the degree of Candidate of Economics. In 2011-2019, he was an assistant teacher at ASUE Chair of Management, in 2019 - ASUE Vice-Rector for Science. Since 2014, he has been involved as an external expert in the external evaluation processes of a number of TLIs. In 2021, he was the coordinator of the beneficiary engagement of the "Ayb" educational foundation, from the same year he has been a senior expert at UNICEF.

He has published a number of scholarly articles on the theory of management, the history of public administration, modern issues of public administration, methodology and improvement of efficiency assessment, and issues of local self-government. He has participated in international conferences on improving the quality of higher education.

Tatevik Davtyan: In 2003, she graduated from the Faculty of Law with a bachelor's degree in "Law", and in 2005, received a Master's degree at the same Faculty with a "Master of Laws" qualification. In 2009, she received the degree of Candidate of Juridical Sciences. In 2013, she entered, and in 2015, graduated with honours from Georgetown Law School (Washington, DC, USA) with a Master of Laws degree and was awarded the "Dean's List" award. In 2016, she received a NYS Attorney License, and in 2019, an RA Attorney License.

Since 2007, she has been teaching at YSU Chair of Civil Law, since 2011, she has been an associate professor at the same chair. In 2010-2013, also taught at the French University in Armenia. She has worked for the RA Human Rights Office, the RA Department of Justice, and the ABA Rule of Law Initiative headquarters. Since 2013, she has been a member of the Georgetown Union of Foreign Lawyers, since 2014 - the International Women Lawyers Forum, since 2016 - the scientific-professional group "Professionals in the field of intellectual property".

Aram Mkhitaryan: In 2007, he graduated from the Faculty of International Business of the French University in Armenia. In 2009, graduated from the RA NAS Institute of Economics after M. Kotanyan, receiving the degree of Candidate of Economics. In 2017-2020, he studied at the University of Sheffield, UK, and received a master's degree in "International Business". In 2020, received a 7th level diploma at the Institute of Licensed Management in London.

In 2006-2012, he was the head of marketing and leasing of "Agroleasing Leasing Credit Organisation", and since 2012, he has been the executive director and chairperson of the board. Since 2010, he has been an associate professor at the Chair of Banking and Insurance of the Armenian State University of Economics, and since 2013, he has been an associate professor at the Chair of Economics and Management at the European University. In 2015-2016, he was an expert of the Bank for Reconstruction and Development. From 2017 to 2018, he was a member of the SME Development Council attached to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, and from 2017

to 2021, he was the head of the Young Scientists Support Programme of the RA State Committee of Science.

He has authored a number of scholarly articles and books, and is the co-author of a textbook.

Sophie Peters: In 1986, she graduated from the Catholic Institute of Higher Business Studies in Brussels. Then worked for the British insurance company and ICHEC School of Management. In 1990-1991, was the representative of the British Embassy in Congo. She is a member of the Bologna Process Working Group. Has established a network of 120 international universities. Until 2010, she was the Head of International Relations at the ICHEC School of Management in Brussels, and since 2010, she has been the Vice-Rector for International Relations and Accreditation.

She has been involved as an expert in the evaluation process of a number of higher education institutions.

Gevorg Barseghyan: In 2014-2020, he studied at the Faculty of Law of Yerevan State University. He is currently a master's student in "Complex (theory-practical) Legal Studies" at the Faculty of Law, YSU. He is the chairperson of the Student Scientific Society of the YSU Faculty of Law.

In July-November 2018, he worked as an assistant to the RA National Assembly deputy. In 2021, he was a chief specialist at the Department of Scientific and Research, Programme and Methodological Work of the Academy of Justice, then the acting head of the same department. From April 2 to July 2 of the same year, he was a member-secretary of the editorial board of the "Academy of Justice Banber" scientific-practical journal. Since 2021, he has been the RA Deputy Prime Minister's assistant. He is a member of the Board of Trustees at Brusov State University.

APPENDIX 2. SCHEDULE OF SITE VISIT

20.11.2021 - 23.11.2021

	20.11.2021	<i>Launch</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Duration</i>
1	Meeting with the GSU rector	09:30	10:30	60 min
2	Meeting with vice-rectors	10:45	11:35	50 min
3	Meeting with the self-assessment group members	11:45	12:30	45 min
4	Break, session of the expert panel	12:40	13:40	60 min
5	Meeting with the deans	13:50	14:40	50 min
6	Meeting with alumni	14:50	15:50	60 min
7	Meeting with employers	16:10	17:10	60 min
8	Review of documents and closed session of the expert panel	17:20	18:20	60 min

	21.11.2021	<i>Launch</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Duration</i>
1	Meeting with the heads of chairs and staff members responsible for academic programmes	09:30	10:30	60 min
2	Meeting with the members of the Board of Trustees	10:50	11:40	50 min
3	Observation of GSU resources and infrastructures	11:50	12:50	60 min
4	Break, session of the expert panel	13:00	14:00	60 min
5	Meeting with 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
7	Meeting with the heads of the Departments of Academic Policy, HR Management, External Relations and Information, ITs, Economic Issues, University-Employer Cooperation, Alumni and Career Center, Accounting Department, Library, Archives, and First-Aid Post	16:40	17:50	70 min
8	Review of documents and closed session of the expert panel	17:50	19:00	70 min

22.11.2021				<i>Launch</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Duration</i>
1	Meeting with staff member(s) responsible for the academic programme on "Computer Engineering"	Meeting with staff member(s) responsible for the academic programme on "Law"	Meeting with staff member(s) responsible for the academic programme on "Finance"	09:30	10:30	60 min
2	Meeting with teachers of the academic programme on "Computer Engineering"	Meeting with teachers of the academic programme on "Law"	Meeting with teachers of the academic programme on "Finance"	10:45	11:45	60 min
3	Meeting with students of the academic programme on "Computer Engineering"	Meeting with students of the academic programme on "Law"	Meeting with students of the academic programme on "Finance"	12:00	13:00	60 min
4	Break, session of the expert panel			13:10	14:10	60 min
5	Meeting with members of Student Council and Student Scientific Society			14:20	15:10	50 min
6	Open meeting			15:20	16:20	60 min
7	Review of documents and closed session of the expert panel			16:30	18:30	120 min

23.11.2021		<i>Launch</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Duration</i>
1	Review of documents and closed session of the expert panel	09:30	11:30	120 min
2	Meeting with the staff members of the Quality Assurance Department	12:00	13:00	60 min

3	Break, session of the expert panel	13:00	14:00	60 min
4	Meeting with members chosen by the expert panel	14:10	16:10	120 min
5	Closed session of the expert panel	16:20	17:20	60 min
6	Meeting with the managerial staff of GSU	17:30	18:00	30 min

APPENDIX 3. LIST OF DOCUMENTS OBSERVED

N	Name of the Document	Criterion
1.	Analysis of revenue and expenditure estimates and reasons for performance deviations	2
2.	Student Scientific Society reports	2
3.	Annual plans of faculties, chairs, subdivisions	2
4.	Reports of chairs and faculties	2
5.	Minutes of the sessions / for the last three years of the chairs and faculties, one from each quarter /	2
6.	Bases of courses in the combination of traditional and modern teaching methods, and modern information technologies	3
7.	Examples of improvement measures developed based on student feedback and suggestions on improving the quality of teaching	3
8.	Bases of trainings, seminars on plagiarism, quoting, paraphrasing and other materials	3
9.	Bases of programme monitoring and examples of subject descriptions changed as a result of lesson observations	3
10.	Timetables / for this academic year /	3
11.	Registers, internship registers / for selected programmes, one from each year /	3
12.	Bachelor's and Master's Theses / binary examples for each study programme for the last three years /	3
13.	Lesson observstion registers / one from the each chair/	3
14.	Teacher portfolios, teachers' plans / five from each chair	3
15.	Internship diaries / for 3 selected dtudy programmes - 4 each/	3
16.	Staff of training consultants, consultation topics and meeting schedule, register	5
17.	Chair staff list	5
18.	Educational workload norms	5
19.	Teacher training schedule	5
20.	Training packages	5
21.	Lists of scientific, teaching and methodological works of the teachers of the chair	5
22.	Schedule of scientific seminars, protocols	5
23.	Young staff training plan	5
24.	Survey analyses, improvement plans / for the last two years	5
25.	Teacher needs analyses	5
26.	Basis and patents for confirming research results	6

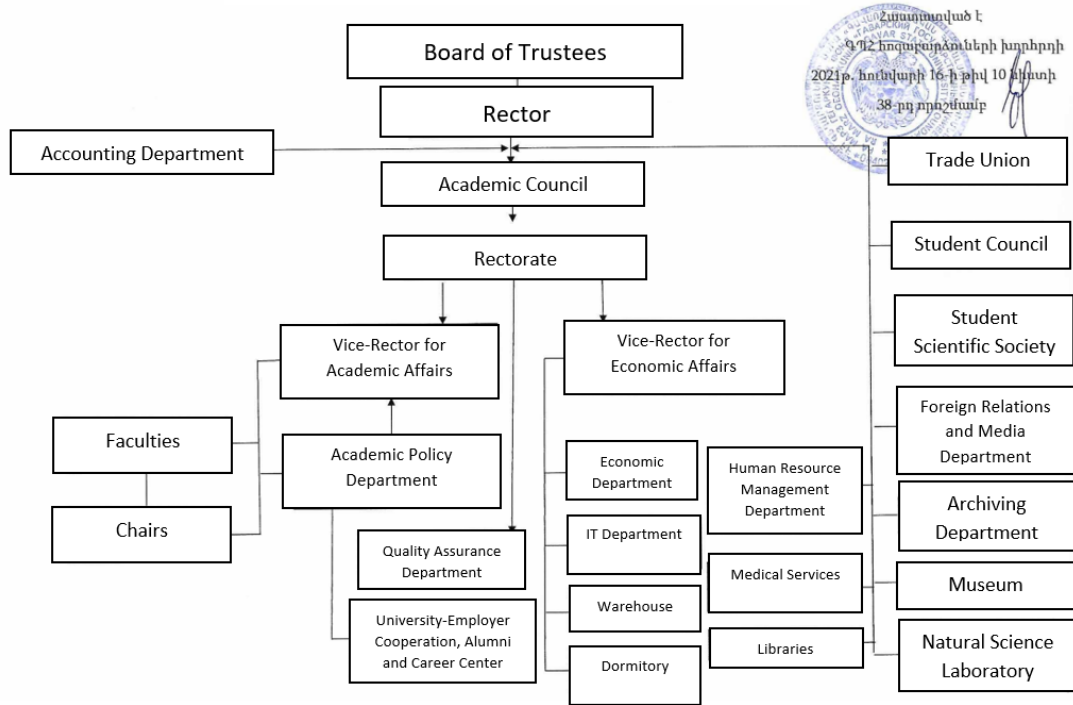
27.	Memoranda of understanding with international organisations to conduct joint research programmes or publish academic articles	6
28.	Financial management efficiency analysis in terms of achieving the SP goals	7
29.	Reports of teachers leaving for a business trip	9
30.	Internationalisation strategic plan report	9

APPENDIX 4. RESOURCES OBSERVED

1. Classrooms,
2. Computer classrooms,
3. Laboratories,
4. Subdivisions,
5. “Smart” center,
6. Library,
7. Reading hall,
8. First-aid post,
9. Museum.

APPENDIX 5. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION INSTITUTION

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF “GAVAR STATE UNIVERSITY” FOUNDATION



APPENDIX 6. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANQA – National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance

AP – academic programme

GSU – Gavar State University

KPI – Key performance indicators

NQF – National Qualifications Frameworks

QA – quality assurance

SC – Student Council

SP – strategic plan

SS – support staff

SSS – Student Scientific Society

TLI – Tertiary level institution

TS – teaching staff