

**VERITAS: STRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE THIRD CYCLE BASED ON SALZBURG
PRINCIPLES**



**EXPERT PANEL REPORT
PILOT EXTERNAL REVIEW OF
YEREVAN STATE ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS**

Yerevan – 2017

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INTRODUCTION

The external review of the Yerevan State Academy of Fine Arts (YSAFA) was executed within the VERITAS Tempus Project – Structural Development of the Third Cycle Based on Salzburg Principles. The external review process was organized and coordinated by the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (ANQA), Armenia.

The evaluation was carried out by an expert panel that consisted of two local experts and one international expert.

This external review aimed to pilot a new PhD program and newly developed quality assurance (QA) criteria and standards for PhD education.

To ensure that the YSAFA, with the new doctoral program in Research in Arts, is coached throughout the development process, the institution was affiliated to the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) as EU partner. The methods of coaching evolve around consultations, feedback on the developments, support during developments, consultancy on different approaches to PhD delivery and the like.

The expert panel for YSAFA was composed by:

1. John Edwards (Bath Spa University)
2. Zaruhi Hakobyan (Yerevan State Academy of Fine Arts)
3. Elena Aydinyan (PhD Student)

The composition of the expert panel was agreed with the YSAFA.

The works of the expert panel were coordinated by Ani Mkrtchyan from the ANQA.

The timetable of the activities was prepared by the ANQA, agreed with the YSAFA, international partners and the grant holder. Upon finalization of the development of the new PhD program in Research in Arts, YSAFA has implemented an internal self-assessment of the program, drawing on newly developed QA standards and submitted it to the ANQA. The member of the expert panel conducted the desk review based on the self-assessment report, PhD program and attached documents.

The preliminary site visit agenda was drafted by the ANQA coordinator and was circulated among the members of the expert panel for the feedback. The intended meetings with all the target groups, close meetings, documents and resource review were foreseen in the agenda.

The agenda of the expert panel site visit was discussed and agreed with the YSAFA. Discussions were held and mutual decisions were reached referring to the organizational and technical questions of the site visit. Questions related to the conduct and the norms of ethics of meeting participants were also touched upon. The rooms prepared for focus groups were also discussed, the issues related to the equipment and facilities were clarified.

The site visit of the expert panel took place on April 7, 2017. According to the agenda the site visit was launched with a close meeting throughout which the expert panel agreed upon the framework of assessment, strong and weak points of the Institute, issues to be discussed with the

target groups as well as clarified further steps. Representatives of the PhD program management, supervisors and PhD students were selected beforehand. During the site visit the expert panel conducted resource observation and focus group meetings with faculty and students over questions, clarifications and discussions.

The expert panel has conducted preliminary evaluation according to the self-assessment report of the Institute, the documents attached to it and the observations during the site visit. The Chair of the panel drafted the preliminary report which was agreed upon with the panel members and the ANQA coordinator. The report was handed over to the Institute on 20 May 2017.

This report is the result of the external assessment. It comprises findings and considerations according to quality assessment criteria as well as recommendations for improvements.

1. Institutional strategies

Findings and considerations

The university has a new strategic plan from 2017-2021. Research is a major goal, but research here has its peculiarities, so it cannot be compared with research-oriented universities.

There are proposals to develop new methods for implementation of the research programme. Before this there was a scientific method only for research in art history. Now the proposal is also for applied specialties like painting, sculpture. They are proposing two directions: research & implementation. Research will highlight activities and approaches that the researcher will do during their study. The link of research to teaching and learning is important. Some activities have already conducted, and are highlighted in new strategic plan.

To develop the strategic plan. the University is planning different meetings with internal and external stakeholders (within Armenia) to identify their needs, sometimes informally.

There are mechanisms for periodic review, with each unit to develop action plans, to prepare 3 month report, with KPIs (piloted in 2016). Culture change needs to be explained and gradual. A second mechanism with external stakeholders reveals current activities and gaps. Short term reports by units are assessed by a special committee in the academy, with a student representative.

The Supreme Certifying Commissions owns the specialised councils. For art it is very large, including fine art, theatre, and cinema. The head of the council is from the theatre. It is difficult for design students, whose work is sometimes not accepted because it's not seen as real art. The Academy has raised this problem, but a solution has not yet been found. The solution would be to add a design specialist to this council.

Sources of funding for research include external funding such as the Veritas project and Erasmus+. The academy funds small grants. It is an old system, and needs new resources to support unusual research.

The Academy will apply again to the State Committee for Sciences (having failed previously) and look for other sources of funding (home and international).

The budget contains no separate line for research, but the budget allocation is agreed annually. The units' annual action plans request resources and the Vice Rector for Finance allocates the budget. This is a new process over the last 3 years. All procedures are regulated by the university.

The Research Centre strategy is a 3 page document setting out aims and main directions. Interdisciplinarity is encouraged within a framework of subjects. The strategy sets priorities by short-, mid- and long-term plans.

Recommendations

- Research objectives should be made objectives more specific and timetabled.

- The Academy needs more mechanisms to implement changes before it can pursue its goals.
- Ethical review procedures should be included.
- Financial resources should be diversified
- There should be better dissemination of the Veritas project and this new programme.
- Collaborations with other institutions should be developed to enable interdisciplinarity.

II. Doctoral program

Findings and considerations:

The programme is more structured, but flexible in involving two pathways and allowing creative practice. It is aligned with the national qualification framework, mapping learning outcomes as general aims not for specific courses. The curriculum is aligned with the learning outcomes of courses.

Guidance for how to write the thesis has been developed and a student handbook is planned, now in draft. No individual study plans have been developed, but in practice there is only one student per year. The annual research plan has to be approved by the supervisor and chair with comments, both the whole project and the coming year's objectives.

The main achievements in developing the new programme have been to make it more structured and systematised. Learning outcomes have not yet been set for courses.

The monitoring and professional development processes are publication of papers in yearbook, mandatory exhibitions, exams on courses, attestations and annual reports by students and supervisors.

The programme is flexible in having two parts. This is because they had funding for one course, but the next stage would be to divide them into two.

The final assessment for the creative practice element will be for the student to present a research paper and portfolio.

The research directions of the programme address the needs of the home and international labour market by taking into account the programme leader's personal study of art in Armenia and worldwide, including merging some traditional and new technologies. The Academy needs another professional person to undertake market research in design and applied arts. They have had meetings with other chairs to present issues about the new programme, where chairs of graphics and design highlighted their needs and direction.

Interdisciplinarity is one of the main priorities, but nothing has been done because other parties are not interested. The Academy will ask students to choose topics that will be interdisciplinary between different fields of art.

To ensure students become autonomous they are encouraged to participate in international conferences, write articles for peer-reviewed journals, and participate in international projects.

The courses are connected with the research by four conceptual sections to be more flexible, and applicable for each student.

Recommendations

- The Programme specification must include courses and learning outcomes and benchmarking must be done.
- Adding more appropriate members to the specialised council is recommended.
- The creative practice part of the programme needs to be approved.

III. Admission Policy

Findings and considerations

The professional exam is to be done away with. Instead there will be an application with a motivation letter, a research proposal and bibliography, followed by an interview with 3 academics (including 1 external), and presentation of a recently published article. The student is given feedback on how he is assessed.

The admission policy will be available on website and in the student handbook.

Recommendations

- The revised admission policy is a positive move.

IV. Supervisor

Findings and considerations:

For the Creative practice pathway one supervisor should be a professor and an artist.

To qualify as a supervisor an academic will have been teaching here before, having a Masters and PhD, then post-PhD (Dr). To qualify for Doctorate you have to supervise PhD students. 50 hours of supervision is allocated to each student.

Basic research is carried out in the Master's degree, including methodology, then the PhD focuses on the substance of the problem.

Chairs inform supervisors about their responsibilities. Regulations come from the government. Supervisors' responsibilities are to know how to supervise, methodologies. Students approach supervisors for advice. Supervisors should be experienced and renowned, possibly a member of the council, with experience of practice and recognised as an expert.

Supervisors learn through the process of supervising, and advance their research career. Pedagogical

activity is the transfer of knowledge and skills to young generation. Supervisors also learn from PhD students.

There is a training programme, and participation in conferences (especially international) are useful for collecting news and theories.

A tripartite agreement is in preparation. The Academy is planning to prepare a guide for supervisors. For the new programme there will be regular meetings, with frequency and schedule, and what is to be discussed to be negotiated with the student. An annual report will be made when student presents their work.

For co-supervision the main supervisor is responsible for the main organisation of the project, while the second supervisor brings a specific specialisation. For creative practice the second supervisor should be an artist and a current researcher or even current PhD student.

For mobility and internationalisation the university has an agreement to give specialist advice to a Hungarian university, and participation in conferences. Funding is possible, but not usually to support journal publication.

The university does not have QA mechanisms for PhD, but these are planned because the Academy recognises the need, including periodic review. The QA Office will evaluate courses as part of this new PhD programme. It has not conducted a survey yet. They want to evaluate the results of research, but are not yet clear how to do that. The new strategic plan has KPIs to allow them to collect data on research activities.

Applied design is a problem because specialised councils don't cover it. It would be desirable for the academy to have its own specialised council.

The formalities of supervisors working with students include individual plans, regular meetings, with flexible timings. There are problems to create an atmosphere for dissemination.

It is a real issue to create a critical mass of supervisors and students, but it does exist in art history. Individual academics are part of an international research network, but do not look to the university for support.

Where conflicts arise with supervisors they are solved in meetings. The chair can change supervisors where necessary. Co-supervisors system is being developed as part of the new programme.

Recommendations

- Co-supervision, including an artist is a positive development.
- The tripartite agreement should be introduced.
- More formal and comprehensive guidance and monitoring for supervisors is required.
- More financial support is needed for supervisors.

V. Research Environment

Findings and considerations

There is no research unit yet, but in the frame of the project a new one has been proposed as to bear responsibility for research at the academy and the implementation of PhD and an internal grant project (in development). This will involve students in projects and improve research at the academy.

To assess needs and allocate resources there is a questionnaire for students and staff to assess their needs.

Recommendations

- The research environment lacks resources, but regular advice and information is provided.

VI. Doctoral Candidates

Findings and considerations

Students feel they have enough time, that 4 years is enough to write 150 pages.

It is easy to have personal communications with their supervisors and always stay in touch, informally. Supervisors are approachable and very easy to work with.

Students feel they have access to sufficient resources. When researching museums in Yerevan, papers from the Rector can be presented to the museums. The Academy has a good relationship with museums and the Matenadaran.

However, the library at the academy is an issue. Due to funding it has to rely on donations. Students have to find printed books for themselves, which they are used to doing.

Scientific centres carry out research consultations. Staff are very accessible and give as much information as they can. There are announcements about scientific meetings and opportunities to publish in the university yearbook. Guidelines from supervisors and the scientific secretary helps with information on everything they need.

Students have had limited opportunities to contribute to development of the new programme. They were told about parameters changing and there was some consultation. They are generally well engaged in curriculum development, advice to vice-rector. semi-formal, but not systematic. They would like the opportunity to present some creative work, but assessment criteria need to be specified.

Their motivations for being a PhD student include getting into teaching, career and personal development, to continue their studies and become a researcher, to possibly continue abroad.

PhD students do not participate in international projects.

Recommendations

- Involve students in curriculum development and international projects where possible.

VII. Internationalization

Findings and considerations

Veritas is the first step in creating an environment for internationalisation. The new PhD will be the basis for further development, perhaps in joint degrees with international partners.

The plan for internationalisation is to cooperate with one international partner and to implement joint programs long term, inviting one foreign lecturer each year. The academy wants to take part in international projects, but there are no KPIs for this.

Recommendations

- Agree a strategic plan for internationalisation, with KPIs.

VIII. PhD awarding

Findings and considerations

Findings and considerations:

The university does not have a specialized council to award PHD. Hence, the criteria for the nomination of the members of Specialized Council are not clearly defined.

Recommendations:

- Establish a specialized council.

IX. Internal quality assurance

Findings and considerations

These are the first steps in applying quality assurance procedures into research. The QA department has been more concerned with BA and MA. Periodic review with KPIs was piloted, in 2016, and lessons have been learned from that exercise.

Recommendations

- Develop QA system for doctoral education.

