



Ministry of Education and
Science of the
Republic of Armenia



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



National Center For Professional
Education Quality Assurance
Foundation



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**SYNTHESIS OF ISSUES AND PROPOSITIONS ON
THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE CYCLE 3 PROGRAMME IN ARMENIA**

Yerevan 2018

The synthesis is produced in the framework of the Erasmus+ “Promoting internationalization of research through establishment and operationalization of Cycle 3 Quality Assurance System in line with the European Integration” (C3QA) project.

This synthesis is a collaborative work implemented by all the partner institutions (French University in Armenia, Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan State University, State Academy of Fine Arts of Armenia, the results have been summarized by the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation).

Salzburg principle	Regulatory field	Issue	Proposition for improvement
<p>1. The core component of doctoral training is the advancement of knowledge through original research. At the same time it is recognized that doctoral training must increasingly meet the needs of an employment market that is wider than academia.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation on Organization of Doctoral Education in Armenia. • Decree of the RA Minister of Education and Science of 21 July 2010 N 1167-N on “Introduction of a Credit System in Postgraduate Professional Educational Programmes (Aspirantura and External Researcher)” 	<p>1) Several Armenian HEIs do not meet the increasing needs of the employment market outside of academia as the training by doing research provides doctoral candidates with narrow professional knowledge and skills within a specific discipline while the core transferable skills and competences are not well-developed due to the poor implementation of the educational component of the Doctoral programmes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 3rd level qualification descriptors of the National Qualification Framework for Higher Education of Armenia should be made operational and applied when conferring Doctoral degrees. • Jointly organize (by the Armenian HEIs) inter-institutional modules/courses to develop doctoral candidate’s transferable skills and competences. • Develop an individual research plan for doctoral candidates including components of multidisciplinary research.

		<p>1) HEIs sometimes overemphasize the role of transferable courses hindering research activities and leading doctoral candidates to hunt for credits.</p> <p>The 3rd article of the Regulation on Organization of Doctoral Education in Armenia states that “...the full workload of a PhD student is 180 credits, which consists of two interconnected parts: academic and research”. As an outcome of this broad spectrum highlighted in the regulation, some TLIs might have an irrelevant number of disciplines taught. This might lead to a misbalance between academic and research operations, overload the PhD student and ultimately impede the process of carrying out research.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To settle a maximum number of disciplines a doctoral candidate will have to undertake. • In order to make sure all disciplines included in the curriculum are in line with the specialization and enhance the acquisition of corresponding knowledge and skills, a very meticulous mapping of ILOs must be carried out. The outcomes must be discussed both within Chairs and Scientific Councils and must be ratified by all the members. • Promote the development of research-oriented transferable skills starting from master's degree programs.
		<p>2) The links between the HEIs and labor market are weak (especially in the field of art).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise the Government of the Republic of Armenia to set priority dimensions for innovative research. • Plan the admission should according to the labour market needs and priorities. • Define the market field and market needs for conducting research in design, fine arts and applied arts.
<p>2. Embedding in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government Decision of 	<p>Currently there exists national legislation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to change and amend relevant

<p>institutional strategies and policies: universities as institutions need to assume responsibility for ensuring that the doctoral programmes and research training they offer are designed to meet new challenges and include appropriate professional career development opportunities.</p>	<p>8 August 1997 N 327 on “Procedures for Awarding Scientific Degrees in the Republic of Armenia”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation on Organization of Doctoral Education in Armenia. • The list of the scientific specialties in the Republic of Armenia 	<p>regulating the entrance, study and degree awarding procedures in Cycle 3 programmes. They represent core requirements and principles; however HEIs are free to set further procedures for their Cycle 3 programmes if they are consistent with the national legislation. Nevertheless, the administrative procedures of the legal acts regulating Cycle 3 may be described as more precise than general.</p> <p>Postgraduate academic degrees are awarded by the specialised councils on the basis of formal doctoral thesis defense. The Supreme Certifying Commission of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia confers diplomas to the awardees. The specialised councils are established by the SCC at the scientific and HEIs, scientific manufacturing companies, and scientific technological organizations. The SCC also decides other crucial requirements and procedures on the Cycle 3 level, especially in the process when the dissertation is entering the defence part. Such policy and regulation sometimes are considered as not consistent</p>	<p>national regulations, documentation and legislative frameworks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions posed by the Ministry representatives: In the context of the “Erasmus+ C3QA” project should the admission, study and completion procedures be regulated by the government or should this process be carried out and regulated entirely by the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and other institutions providing Cycle 3 programmes as a core part of their academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Otherwise, should the general framework for admission, study and completion exist on national level, where minimal requirements are set by the national legislation and further requirements are developed and set by the HEIs and other institutions providing Cycle 3 programmes? <p>Within the scope of the C3QA project it is expected to address the following matter: if it is necessary to review the</p>
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		<p>enough with the established EHEA standards and requirements on institutional autonomy and academic freedom.</p>	<p>current procedures on conferring the Cycle 3 degrees in favor of enhancing the role of HEIs and other institutions providing doctoral programmes in this process or the current regulation may not be considered a direct violation of the Bologna Process principles on institutional and academic autonomy?</p>
		<p>1) Professional career development opportunities after graduation are very limited.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To renovate the list of the scientific specialties by including the ones which are more demanded by the labor market outside of the academia, establish professional doctorates in some professional fields. There is a need for creating strong research environments and mechanisms for enhancing quality of research training. • Monitor the scientific progress of the individual doctoral candidates by achieved scientific results and career tracking. • HEIs should amend their strategies selecting several main directions of research thus making doctoral candidates' career development

			<p>opportunities more transparent and complying with the needs of the labour market thus gaining a financial support from the market.</p>
		<p>2) Article II, point 7 of the Regulation on Government “Procedures for Awarding Scientific Degrees in the Republic of Armenia”</p> <p>“... the PhD thesis is considered to be a technical, economic or technological work, which puts forward a solution to a vital issue in the field, or else reveals some new challenges...” This means, there should be a constant and uninterrupted link with the labor market, and the outside world in general, in order to make sure the doctoral candidate has an overall idea of current tendencies, and that the work s/he undertakes is not thoroughly cut from the outside world. This, in its turn, will ensure the doctoral candidate has more opportunities to advance his/her career after his/her research operations are complete.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refreshing the list of scientific specializations to include the ones which are in line with current tendencies. • Discuss the possibilities of involving a labour market representative from the corresponding field, while elaborating the topic of the thesis.

<p>3. The importance of diversity: the rich diversity of doctoral programmes in Europe – including joint doctorates – is a strength which has to be underpinned by quality and sound practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation on Organization of Doctoral Education in the RA • The list of the scientific specialties in the Republic of Armenia 	<p>1) Interdisciplinarity is not regulated yet. In order to have a dissertation topic approved in the border of two specialization areas a special consent of the Supreme Accreditation Committee is required. Regulatory framework for joint Doctorates is not established yet.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop special regulations promoting and encouraging interdisciplinary research and organization of joint Doctorates with foreign and local HEIs. • Study the experience of HEIs who have already carried out interdisciplinary and/or joint thesis. Based on the outcomes revealed elaborate a regulation that will enhance the implementation of interdisciplinary and/or joint PhD theses. • Cooperate with numerous foreign universities and be involved in relevant international projects. • Establish a culture of interdisciplinary research with more than one supervisor.
		<p>2) Another arguable matter creating an obstacle for multi and inter-disciplinary research is a list of SCC specialty codes listing fields of science, specialty and the sphere of awards in which the doctoral candidates are expected to major and be awarded with doctoral degrees depending on what area they have chosen to write a dissertation in. When reviewing the list of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the policy the SCC on the list of specialized councils and specialties in favor of multi and interdisciplinary approaches.

		<p>specialties liable to research degree awards one may question the multi and interdisciplinary opportunities for researchers engaged in Cycle 3 programmes as the disciplines listed in that list are very narrow and concrete.</p>	
<p>4. Doctoral candidates as early stage researchers: should be recognized as professionals – with commensurate rights - who make a key contribution to the creation of new knowledge.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation on Organization of Doctoral Education in Armenia 	<p>1) Currently the regulation and corresponding contracts signed with the doctoral candidates have some articles about the rights and responsibilities of doctoral candidates, yet at times the scope of the rights is not respected.</p> <p>Doctoral candidates are not always treated as early stage researchers, i.e. employees of the institution. They don't have adequate rights and responsibilities like the university academic staff has.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate standards of social security (health care and parental leave, unemployment benefits, contributions to pension schemes, accident insurance, etc.) for the doctoral candidates should be established. These rights and responsibilities should be formulated in agreements between candidate, supervisor and institution. • Reinforce the role of doctoral candidates by including more articles in the contracts, by raising the awareness and by increasing the number of hours taught throughout the academic year. • Increase motivation of doctoral candidates to be engaged in institution's governance • Develop doctoral program handbook

			with detail description of learning objectives and plans of achievement in line with policy of an institution.
5. The crucial role of supervision and assessment: in respect of individual doctoral candidates, arrangements for supervision and assessment should be based on a transparent contractual framework of shared responsibilities between doctoral candidates, supervisors and the institution (and where appropriate including other partners).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulation on Organization of Doctoral Education in the RA 	1) Poor supervision of Doctoral candidates. The supervision doctoral candidates does not always follow and/or have a pre-set scheme or timetable. At times it is quite difficult to set time and venue for supervisor-doctoral candidate meetings, since either both are overloaded, or the supervisor does not necessarily have the skills and/or desire to supervise. As a result there is low quality of the defended dissertations and low completion rate. As a result low quality of the defended dissertations and low completion rate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An institutional regulation on terms and obligations of doctoral candidates, supervisors and the institution should be introduced by universities, which should be fixed in a signed contract (agreement) between the three parties. Set mechanisms for supervisors' professional development (having necessary procedures to train supervisors both methodology-wide and regulation-wide). Develop mechanisms to increase the motivation and professional experience exchange among supervisors.
		2) Supervisors are not encouraged or punished when their doctoral candidates present good or bad results; there are neither state nor interuniversity mechanisms for this.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having necessary schemes and/or mechanisms to monitor the process of supervising to ensure the quality is there.
6. Achieving critical mass: Doctoral programmes should seek to achieve critical mass and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulation on Organization of Doctoral Education in the RA 	1) The necessity to make critical mass stronger is essential especially by involving international actors. The importance of giving doctoral candidates an opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate new internal and international grant projects to enable new cooperation at national and international levels.

<p>should draw on different types of innovative practice being introduced in universities across Europe, bearing in mind that different solutions may be appropriate to different contexts and in particular across larger and smaller European countries. These range from graduate schools in major universities to international, national and regional collaboration between universities.</p>		<p>to work in different research environment including virtual research networks was emphasized by the partner universities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish new institutional centralized structures (units) at big HEIs with the responsibility of admission, organization, monitoring and quality control over the research training of Doctoral candidates. For the smaller HEIs such kind of inter-institutional units and virtual research networks are suggested to create in order to achieve the critical mass of Doctoral candidates and scholars. • Provide doctoral candidates an opportunity to work in different research environments by collaborating with research related institutions at regional, national and international level, as well as with governments and business sector.
<p>7. Duration: doctoral programmes should operate within appropriate time duration (three to four years full-time as a rule).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation on Organization of Doctoral Education in the RA 	<p>1) According to the RA legislation, duration of PhD studies varies from three to five years. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the set duration has not been assessed. Most of the HEIs claim that because of the credit system introduction, the core time spent on research has been reduced, and, as</p>	<p>Take into consideration the impact of various factors while setting the length of doctoral studies and adopt a flexible approach to the timeframe of doctoral programmes (for disciplinary differences, gender issues etc).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce required parallel activities of

		<p>a matter of fact, doctoral candidates have to do their research during the last year of their study.</p> <p>For some specialty areas (professional fields) the duration of Doctoral programmes of a three-year period for full time studies is too short and unrealistic for completion of the dissertation.</p>	<p>doctoral candidates to allocate time to focus on their research as well as to exclude administrative procedures (thesis assessment and defence) from the overall duration of the PhD program completion.</p>
<p>8. The promotion of innovative structures: to meet the challenge of interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation on Organization of Doctoral Education in the RA • The list of the scientific specialties in the Republic of Armenia 	<p>1) Poor implementation of the educational component of structured Doctoral programmes which would develop candidates' transferable/generic skills and competences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and embed the respective transferable skills in the academic programmes. • Establish inter-institutional cooperation amongst Armenian HEIs for uniting and sharing high quality teaching staff to deliver courses for transferable skills.
		<p>2) HEIs sometimes overemphasize the role of these courses hindering research activities and leading doctoral candidates to hunt for credits.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the development of research-oriented transferable skills starting from master's degree programs. • It is suggested that workload of this coursework not exceeds 1/4 of the overall workload of Doctoral programme.
		<p>3) The interdisciplinarity is not promoted.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current narrow specialties of Doctoral education should be revised

			and brought to coherence with state of the art requirements of the knowledge based economy through pulling down the boundaries of traditional disciplines and opening the way to interdisciplinarity. Structures and curricula should be open and flexible enough to allow doctoral candidates to undertake research and theses based on interdisciplinary approach.
9. Increasing mobility: Doctoral programmes should seek to offer geographical as well as interdisciplinary and intersectoral mobility and international collaboration within an integrated framework of cooperation between universities and other partners.		1) HEIs cooperate with universities abroad, there are different contracts signed and in force, however not always the aims and objectives in contracts are realized. There is no sustainable collaboration with other research and scientific institutions. There are still many obstacles limiting mobility such as financial, administrative, legal, language, social, recognition etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and adopt a national regulation on international mobility supportive approach for doctoral candidates (international, interdisciplinary, intersectoral). According to this regulation mobility should be considered as part of doctoral candidate's career development. • Initiate and find new opportunities for cooperation and grant projects enabling mobility.

<p>10. Ensuring appropriate funding: the development of quality doctoral programmes and the successful completion by doctoral candidates requires appropriate and sustainable funding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Decree of the Government of the Republic of Armenia on Funding of Higher Education 	<p>1) Innovative research programs do not find public or private funding sources. There is also no allocation of science funding with separate line in the most of the HEIs budgets. HEIs mostly ensure appropriate funding by participating in a variety of grant programs, another source are fee-paying doctoral candidates who compensate the lack of the funding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To revise funding mechanisms of Doctoral programmes from the state budget and institutional funds taking into account different factors, such as the discipline/research area, need for laboratory work, use of special equipment etc. To adopt financial incentives (tax exempt/reduction etc.) for the private sector to invest in research Doctoral programmes (develop a policy for research investments setting strategic priorities and analysing the effectiveness of the research investments (research as a service to society)).
		<p>2) A very small amount of scholarship is allocated only for the full-time PhD students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give doctoral candidates teaching or research assistantship positions with employment contracts and all social rights providing doctoral candidates with decent salary.

Other proposals offered

N	Current State of Affairs	Proposed Changes
1.	Admission	
	<p>1) The regulation on Procedures for Admissions and Study in Doctoral Programmes (<i>Aspirantura</i>) places more attention to the admission examinations than to the research skills of prospective Cycle 3 students as such, i.e. those who get the highest points in specialisation examination are accepted to study in Cycle 3 programmes (<i>Aspirantura</i>). Applicants also have to undergo an exam in Principles of Informatics and foreign language.</p> <p>In the process of admission to doctoral programmes, the research skills of a prospective Cycle 3 student are to be of crucial significance rather than her/his disciplinary knowledge assessment.</p> <p>For detailed description of the matter see the attachment 1</p> <p>2) Prospective Cycle 3 students should submit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Principle and technical approaches to admissions to Cycle 3 programmes should undergo fundamental changes. Whereof, it is recommended to review the current regulations on Procedures for Admissions and Study in Doctoral Programmes (<i>Aspirantura</i>), with the aim to assess the applicant's research ability, critical thinking, and interest in knowledge creation. For that purpose it is recommended to substitute the entrance specialisation examination as a core component of admission with the applicant's research proposal defence (VIVA examination). For detailed description of the matter see the attachment 1 ✓ One of the requirements for admissions to doctoral programmes according to the current regulation in place is submitting a research paper (referat) no longer than 20 pages from the discipline one chooses to study or a list of publications in peer reviewed journals from the disciplines the applicants wish to study. From the perspective of admissions principles such acceptance criteria is wrong as the applicant is not yet a professional publisher or a research specialist but the candidate for becoming a professional researcher. ✓ In the process of admission to doctoral programmes the research skills of an applicant are to be of crucial significance rather than her/his disciplinary knowledge assessment. In case of the specialisation examination requirement the applicant already possesses her/his Cumulative GPA score that is an evidence of her/his knowledge of the major fields of study. It is suggested to amend the requirement of passing the one at all, except for those cases when the Cycle 1 or Cycle 2 (Bachelor level or Master level) major discipline was other than the one chosen by an applicant. Additional case when such

<p>certificates with foreign language minimum assigned test scores in one of three languages:</p> <p>1) English - 46 from «TOEFL» (iBT) and 5.5 from «IELTS»</p> <p>2) French - 200 from «TCF»</p> <p>3) German - 60 from «on DaF»</p> <p>Those applicants whose professional study languages were English, French or German pass examinations in other foreign languages different from the above mentioned.</p> <p>There are cases when applicants whose professional working or study language was among the three required and they have to take a test in the same foreign language whatsoever according to the law.</p>	<p>examination may be required is when the Cumulative GPA is lower than required for the acceptance to Cycle 3 programmes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ To recruit students to the third cycles of education based on his/her Master's thesis (without an entrance exam) if the thesis includes an element of novelty. ✓ If the prospective student studied in one of the three languages mentioned in the point 14 of the Government Decision N 238-N for one year or longer or majored in those languages it is suggested to provide a waiver from test or examinations in foreign language to such students. Furthermore, it is recommended to conduct a study finding 5 languages that are most often used in world research, i.e. languages in which scientific data is provided the most (publications, textbooks, and other types of academic data) apart from English, French and German and enhance the list. As the main reason behind the requirement of foreign language certificate should be the check of the applicant's ability to participate in the world's research process for which a minimum one language of global academia is necessary, there is no need to pass other foreign language test in case of the applicants proven proficiency in one of the global academic languages. In case of the study or if such studies have already been conducted the subjectivity of languages selected is substituted by validity and reliability check. <p>In order to make the list more comprehensive, the following internationally recognized exams must be added:</p> <p>English: Cambridge Assessment English: 162 minimum threshold from the below-given exams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Cambridge English Preliminary: A2 (grade required: distinction) ✓ Cambridge English First: FCE <p>Other exams of Cambridge assessment English, which target higher levels are also accepted:</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ CAE (C1),✓ CPE (C2) <p>The core justifications of having these exams added to the list are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cambridge English Language Assessment is part of the University of Cambridge.• Cambridge English exams are aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2001) – the international standard in measuring language ability.• Cambridge English exams are known around the world for giving objective and reliable evidence of English language ability. Extensive research and validation ensures that each exam and each grade represent the same level of English, no matter where or when the exams are taken.• Some of the exams are cheaper than TOEFL and IELTS.• Over 5 million Cambridge English exams are taken each year in more than 130 countries.• Around the world over 20,000 universities, employers, government ministries and other organisations rely on these exams and qualifications as proof of English language ability.¹
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¹ <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/177867-the-methodology-behind-the-cambridge-english-scale.pdf>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ If the prospective student studied in one of the three languages mentioned in the point 14 of the Government Decision N 238-N for one year or longer or majored in those languages it is suggested to provide a waiver from test or examinations in foreign language to such students. Furthermore, it is recommended to conduct a study finding 5 languages that are most often used in world research, i.e. languages in which scientific data is provided the most (publications, textbooks, and other types of academic data) apart from English, French and German and enhance the list. As the main reason behind the requirement of foreign language certificate should be the check of the applicant's ability to participate in the world's research process for which a minimum one language of global academia is necessary, there is no need to pass other foreign language test in case of the applicants proven proficiency in one of the global academic languages. In case of the study or if such studies have already been conducted the subjectivity of languages selected is substituted by validity and reliability check. ✓ Not to have an exam "Principles of Informatics", since not all specializations need the skills and the knowledge that are required throughout the said exam. The basic skills and competences that are important include those of word, excel (not in all cases), PP and etc.
2. Doctoral education		
	<p>2.1 During their studies doctoral candidates should take an 8 credit module in specialty (major) course that contains the code of the dissertation topic and pass an examination from that course. The examination pass is necessary during the acceptance to the dissertation defence as well.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ It is suggested to conduct a study on contents of specialisation courses of doctoral programmes in Armenian institutions providing doctoral degree programmes and see in what way they are similar or different from the same courses on first two cycles of study. According to opinions of number of doctoral candidates, teachers and education experts the content is all the same and taking such module on the third level of study is a waste of time and recourses. Another matter of review of the doctoral programme structure in the context of specialisation module is the matter of multi and interdisciplinary research, when the doctoral dissertation is going to have a cross-

<p>2.2 Scientific Research Methodology is another compulsory course to be taken in Cycle 3 studies (<i>Asprantura</i>). According to the Minister decree N 1167-N it constitutes 4 credits.</p> <p>From the perspective of doctoral education the amount of credits and length of the course is too small and needs to fall under review.</p>	<p>disciplinary format. In that case the core course in specialty should be divided into two compulsory courses from the disciplines one is employing while doing her/his research. In that case the amount of credits and core courses will change. More recommendations in such cases are needed in the context of the C3QA project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The cornerstone of doctoral education is the research ability of students and they should gain competent knowledge in advanced research methods on Cycle 3 level. This course should be recognised as the core compulsory course in doctoral degree programmes instead of the courses on specialisation that are central in credit amounts and significance according to the current regulation. ✓ It is recommended to select the examination from research methodology as central in the process of entrance to the dissertation defence process substituting current specialisation examination pass necessity according to the Government decision N 327. Given the fact that for 3, 4 consecutive years a doctoral candidate carries out an intensive research around the topic s/he has initiated there is no sense in overloading the doctoral candidate with the obligation of passing an exit exam from the specialization.
<p>2.3 Internship is another compulsory credit to be accumulated by doctoral students constituting the amount of 10 credits. In the meantime, those doctoral candidates who possess a minimum of 6 month work experience may skip the internship and accumulate credits based on a letter of reference presented from the workplace. The definition of the internship should be more precise. Internship is significant on a Cycle 3 level as it combines a doctoral education with industry as such developing doctoral candidates' empirical skills and knowledge which are crucial for</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ It is recommended to review the definition of internship requirement on doctoral programs with an emphasis on professional internship directly connected with fields of study of doctoral students. Then the footnote of the requirement on internship credit accumulation in the Minister decree N 1167-N (... 6 month of work experience...) may look inappropriate, i.e. one can have a work experience in the sector different from her/his field of research (working as an accountant but enrolled in a doctoral programme majoring in physics).

	<p>completing a research project as well.</p>	
<p>3. Pre-defense</p>		
	<p>✓ Postgraduate academic degrees are awarded by the specialised councils on the basis of formal doctoral thesis defence. The Supreme Certifying Commission (SCC) of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia confers diplomas to the awardees. The specialised councils are established by the SCC at the scientific and HEIs, scientific manufacturing companies, and scientific technological organisations. The SCC also decides other crucial requirements and procedures on the Cycle 3 level, especially in the process when the dissertation is entering the defence part.</p> <p>✓ Notwithstanding the fact that the current system of pre-defense and defense foresees an array of stages a doctoral candidate must go through, and regardless of the fact that thesis stages have been implemented to ensure the postgraduate thesis is of corresponding quality when it reaches the defense, the mechanism does not serve its purpose, since there are numerous cases when the thesis is being turned down by the Supreme Certifying Commission because of myriad issues ranging from plagiarism, to irrelevant ideas embedded in the</p>	<p>✓ Within the scope of the C3QA project it is excepted to address the following matter: if it is necessary to review the current procedures on conferring the Cycle 3 degrees in favour of enhancing the role of HEIs and other institutions providing doctoral programmes in this process or the current regulation may not be considered a direct violation of the Bologna Process principles on institutional and academic autonomy?</p> <p>✓ To make the whole process more transparent the following stages are suggested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • annual presentation of the work undertaken (an acting mechanism currently), • pre-defense with the involvement of representatives of the Scientific Council of the HEI and those of Specialized Councils. The decision on who the latter is/are will be made by the president of the Specialized Council is question. The core idea binding this suggestion is that at times the pre-defense is quite lenient in nature, given the fact that all those present are colleagues and acute criticism might be mal-viewed. The presence of representatives from the Specialized Council will ensure there is an external eye to reveal any issues that might result in turning the paper down at later stages. • During the stage when two opponents and the leading organization are appointed by the PC, the concept of so-called “black opponents” can be introduced as sth mandatory for this stage. Currently, the “black opponent” is appointed in the scenario when there are some “against” votes as an outcome of secret voting. Yet, given the fact that Armenia is a small country, and it is quite easy to find some influential people who would be able to exercise pressing, the idea of someone who’s incognito can be a useful way out. Also, this will eradicate the cases when the paper is turned down after the defense. <p>✓ Given the fact that for 3, 4 consecutive years the PhD student carries out an intensive</p>

	text. ✓ Exit exam from specialization.	research around the topic s/he has initiated, we are inclined to believe that there is no sense in overloading the student with the obligation of passing a exit exam from the specialization.
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Attachment 1

Research Proposal vs Specialisation examination during the admissions to Cycle 3 programmes

The government decision on Procedures for Admissions and Study in Doctoral Programmes (*Aspirantura*) places more attention to the admission examinations than to the research skills of prospective Cycle 3 students as such.

According to the Salzburg Principles: “...the core element of all doctoral programmes is, and should remain, training by doing research. Only training by research can provide doctoral candidates with core skills such as problem solving; innovative, creative and critical thinking; analysing and synthesising knowledge; and developing strategies. Doctoral candidates are young professionals who are trained through research and who make an important contribution to the creation of new knowledge, products, methods and systems, and to knowledge transfer. Training by research is the main element that differentiates doctoral cycle from the first and second cycles in the Bologna Process. With Barcelona and Lisbon goals in mind it is clear that Europe needs more researchers who will be able to work not only in academia, but also in the various sectors of the economy and society, industry, SMEs, public sector, NGOs, etc.” and “...Doctoral candidates should be considered as early stage researchers and research partners and treated as professionals who make an important contribution to the creation of new knowledge. It was noted in the European Charter for Researchers: “Early stage researchers are professionals who are trained through research in the conception or creation of new knowledge, products, processes, methods and systems, and in the management of the projects concerned”.²

² General Rapporteur’s Report, Doctoral programmes for the European Knowledge Society, Bologna Seminar, Salzburg, 3-5 February 2005, available at http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/Salzburg_Report_final.1129817011146.pdf

As cited in the Salzburg II recommendations: “...doctoral education...rests on the practice of research, which makes it fundamentally different from the first and second cycles”³.

The focus on knowledge creation, research skills and competences is key in the National Framework of Qualifications of the Republic of Armenia ⁴.

Article 9 of the draft law on Higher Education of the Republic of Armenia defines the third cycle of higher education as “..aspirant (doctoral) studies during which a student acquires in-depth and complex knowledge, skills and competence in one or several interrelated disciplines to conduct research and professional activities and create new knowledge”. Hence, the development of the Cycle 3 education, including the admission procedures should be carried out in a manner different from the first two cycles. It may not be correct to apply same principles and tools of admissions as are employed in the first two cycles of studies (Bachelor and Master level).

Therefore, in the process of admission to doctoral programmes, the research skills of a prospective Cycle 3 student are to be of crucial significance rather than her/his disciplinary knowledge assessment. In case of the latter assessment the applicant already possesses her/his Cumulative GPA score that is an evidence of her/his knowledge of the fields of study.

This is why the principle and technical approaches to admissions to Cycle 3 programmes (*Aspirantura*) should undergo fundamental changes.

Whereof, it is recommended to review the current regulations on *Procedures for Admissions and Study in Doctoral Programmes (Aspirantura)*, with

³ European University Association (2010), *Salzburg II Recommendations: European Universities' Achievements Since 2005 in Implementing the Salzburg Principles*, Brussels, available at http://www.eua.be/Libraries/publications-homepage-list/Salzburg_II_Recommendations.pdf?sfvrsn=0

⁴ Government Decision of 31 March 2011 N332-N on “*Establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications of the Republic of Armenia*”, Unofficial Translation

the aim to assess the applicant's research ability, critical thinking, and interest in knowledge creation. For that purpose it is recommended to substitute the entrance specialisation examination as a core component of admission with the applicant's **research proposal defence (VIVA examination)**.

The components of a research proposal shall be:

- Clearly defined research question
- Clearly stated hypothesis
- Tentative literature review that demonstrates what research gap is going to be covered by the future research project
- Clearly described methodology of the future research that will include:
 - Detailed Justification of research methods, techniques and tools to be employed for data collection and analysis (i.e. why doing a qualitative research rather than quantitative, why doing an interview instead of a survey, why doing a statistical analysis rather than textual analysis, why focus groups instead of observation, why doing a case study, why doing a single case study instead of multiple case studies, why doing a regression analysis instead of a correlation analysis, why doing a content analysis rather than discourse analysis, why doing a multidisciplinary study?)
 - Detailed justification of the types of data to be collected and analysed
 - Detailed justification of discipline(s) to be touched inside the research.

Such Cycle 3 entrance practice is employed by the world's leading universities (see entrance criteria of the top 100 universities according to the QS World University Rankings, Shanghai Jiao Tong University Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), and others).

A written and presented research proposal shows to what extent the applicant is prepared for a research degree study, what is her/his knowledge of the discipline(s) of study that is now assessed via the specialisation examination, the framework of her/his thinking (i.e. critical and argumentative), extent of applicant's academic autonomy, and her/his ability of knowledge creation. Whereas a specialisation examination can only give assessment of the applicant's knowledge and erudition of the discipline, but not her/his research skills, what is of crucial importance at the Cycle 3 level. Moreover, a specialisation examination cannot demonstrate the aim of the applicant behind applying for doctoral programmes, i.e. what kind of new knowledge the prospective Cycle 3 student is going to create, what research gap is she/he going to cover, what methodology will she/he apply while answering the research question, supporting central theoretical arguments and testing the research hypothesis. This is why it is recommended to select a research proposal submission and defence as main criteria during the Cycle 3 programmes admission process.

Furthermore, one of the requirements for admissions to doctoral programmes according to the current regulation in place is submitting a research paper (*referat*) no longer than 20 pages from the discipline one chooses to study or a list of publications in peer reviewed journals from the disciplines the applicants wish to study. From the perspective of admissions principles such acceptance criteria is wrong as the applicant is not yet a professional publisher or a research specialist but the candidate for becoming a professional researcher. Moreover, such requirements do not show the above stated aims behind studying in Cycle 3 programmes: i.e. what research question is going to be answered, what hypothesis is going to be tested, and what research gap is going to be closed.

Following the above analysis regarding the specialisation examination it is suggested to amend the requirement of passing the one at all, except for those cases when the Cycle 1 or Cycle 2 (Bachelor level or Master level) major discipline was other than the one chosen by an applicant. Additional case when such examination may be required is when the Cumulative GPA is lower than required for the acceptance to Cycle 3 programmes.