

**C3QA: PROMOTING INTERNATIONALIZATION OF RESEARCH THROUGH  
ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATIONALIZATION OF CYCLE 3 QUALITY ASSURANCE  
SYSTEM IN LINE WITH THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**



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

**EXPERT PANEL REPORT  
EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT OF DOCTORAL PROGRAMME IN FINE ARTS, DESIGN AND  
DECORATIVE APPLIED ARTS AT STATE ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS OF  
ARMENIA WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE ERASMUS+ C3QA PROJECT**

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## INTRODUCTION

The external assessment of the Doctoral Programme in Fine Arts, Design and Decorative Applied Arts at State Academy of Fine Arts of Armenia (SAFAA) was executed within the framework of the Erasmus+ C3QA project: Promoting Internationalization of Research through Establishment and Operationalization of Cycle 3 Quality Assurance System in Line with the European Integration. The external assessment 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 consisted of three international experts and one local doctoral student:

1. Maciej Zdanowicz (Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach, chair of the panel)
2. Galina Seitmagzimova (Auezov South Kazakhstan State University, expert)
3. Amarzaya Amartuvshin (National University of Mongolia, expert)
4. Meri Arzumanyan (Yereva State University, student expert)

The composition of the expert panel was agreed with the SAFAA representatives.

The process of external assessment was observed by Adilgazinov Gaynelgazy from the Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, Kazakhstan. The translation of the process was provided by Diana Sisakyan.

The process was coordinated by Lilit Pipoyan from the ANQA.

All the members of the expert panel as well as the observer, translator and coordinator signed the commitment on confidentiality.

This external assessment aimed to pilot the new doctoral program and developed quality assurance (QA) criteria and standards for doctoral education.

The timetable of the activities was prepared by the ANQA coordinator, agreed with the SAFAA, international partners and the grant holder. The Academy has implemented an internal self-assessment of the program the report on which was submitted to the ANQA. The members of the expert panel conducted the desk review based on the self-assessment report, doctoral program and attached documents provided by the Academy.

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 SAFAA representatives. 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 room prepared for focus group meetings were also discussed, the issues related to the equipment and facilities were clarified.

The preliminary meeting of the expert panel took place on April 29, 2019 at the ANQA premises. During the close panel meeting the expert panel agreed upon the framework of assessment, strong and weak points of the Academy, issues to be discussed with the target

groups as well as clarified further steps. The site visit of the expert panel was conducted on April 30, 2019. According to the agenda<sup>1</sup> the site visit was launched with the meeting with the Vice-Rector for Scientific Affairs of the Academy. During the site visit the expert panel conducted focus group meetings (participants of the focus group meetings were selected beforehand), resource observation and document review (the list of the documents to be observed by the expert panel was submitted to the Academy a week prior to the site visit). The site visit was summarized by outlining feedback of the panel to the HEI leadership.

The expert panel has conducted preliminary evaluation according to the self-assessment report of the SAFAA, the documents attached to it and the observations during the site visit. The Chair of the panel drafted the preliminary report which was circulated among the members of the expert panel. The report has been finalized by the Chair of the panel based on the feedback of the experts. The final report agreed upon with the panel members and the ANQA coordinator. The report was handed over to the Academy on 30.05.2019.

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.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix 1: Site visit agenda

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## *I. Institutional strategies*

### **Findings and considerations:**

SAFAA Strategic plan for 2017-2021 pays great attention to research development, provision of current and competitive academic programs and internationalization; it also considers improvement of governing and quality assurance systems. Realistic goals for high performance are set in the Plan.

SAFAA has developed Research Strategy for 2019-2022 in the directions of art research development and provision of academic environment for a researcher. Research strategy is in alignment with mission and goals of the Academy. It defines research priorities, namely practical-applied research and scientific-theoretical research for different research area. As it was revealed, the doctoral program is mainly designed for doctoral candidates training in the area of Art Theory and History. The second direction of practical-applied research is not yet properly introduced in the Program.

The Research Center coordinates the research area. Formal mechanisms and procedures for assessment of improvements and effectiveness in this area are stated in Quality Assurance Handbook.

The Strategic plan states establishment of electronic database and electronic governing system to the second half of 2018 but it was not operating at the time of the site visit.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The Academy should accelerate the implementation of e-government system to provide supporting services to doctoral candidates.

## *II. Doctoral program*

### **Findings and considerations:**

SAFAA has a doctoral program in the field of history and theory of art since 2017, as a result of EU TEMPUS “VERITAS” project. Doctoral program is elaborated according to the National Qualifications Framework of Armenia, as well as principles of Bologna Process and Salzburg principles. Current doctoral program is preparing future scientists to individual independent research activity and didactic work at the higher levels of education.

The Program includes several obligatory and optional lectures and classes connected with history and theory of art, developing research and teaching skills, communication in foreign languages. Each course specifies ECTS points, number of teaching hours. The elements of approval of the thesis topic, research work, preparations of the thesis, thesis defense are involved in the Program curriculum but there is a lack of information on pedagogic internship. The new program developed by the SAFAA will start functioning in the beginning of new academic year in October of 2019. Conception of curriculum includes new direction, which is new element of Armenian’s system of scientific titles – Fine Arts, Applied Art and Design.

Conception is still in progress, as mentioned during the expert panel visit to the HEI- related to the comments and requirements of National Qualifications Framework of Armenia, as well as principles of Bologna Process and Salzburg principles. Unfortunately, during a site visit at the HEI, the experts couldn't get details about that. There were no official documents of the new program which contain curriculum, new requirements for practical doctoral thesis (in the field of fine arts, design, applied arts). Short description of the program contains only vague definitions of a major directions of studies, research areas, learning outcomes – only six outcomes for each field without classification into knowledge, skills and social competencies. The expert panel couldn't meet with the academic staff who represent artistic disciplines to discuss about the new program, curriculum, doctoral thesis in fine art, applied arts and design. According to the Strategic Plan the Academy plans to ensure interrelation between research and teaching by means of development of a research component in the academic programs. The presented doctoral curriculum shows low research component percentage and big number of disciplines studied in 2-4 semesters. The expert panel considers that some of the basic disciplines can be studied within the Master program. Moreover, the self-assessment report describes that the first semester includes development of an individual research plan of a doctoral student and research topic and structure, there is no any classes in this semester. It would be more effective to learn some of discipline in the first semester, related to the student work planned, for example “Research theory”, which is suitable here as directly related to the process of research design.

### **Recommendations:**

1. SAFAA should complete the Program especially for the new directions in the field of artistic practice. It should contain:
  - wider list of learning outcomes, classified into groups such as: outcomes in the field of knowledge, outcomes in the field of skills, outcomes in the field of social competences,
  - description of the content for each subject according to the learning outcomes,
  - curriculum of doctoral program with wider offer of obligatory, elective artistic and design studios, as well as supplementary lectures and theoretical classes helpful in research, classes which develop communication in foreign languages (English), pedagogical skills and social competences, which are necessary in art education in higher levels,
  - requirements of the doctoral thesis in the field of fine arts, applied arts, design (structure of thesis, proportions between theoretical, research part and practical part).
2. Content of each subjects, modules of curriculum should be based on the latest research results, literature of subjects (among others critical methodologies of humanistic research, neuro-history of art), according to the current tendencies, movements in the art, design and art theory (reference to the Salzburg Principles). This recommendation should be implemented among others by the process of internationalization, scientific and didactic exchange, as well as organization of several international conferences, art projects like art camps, summer academies, workshops, expositions etc.

3. Curriculum should contain offer of elective studies which develop students' creativity, artistic researching in contemporary medias, in the context of intermedia, multimedia, transmedia tendencies, current post media tendencies in art, striving for interdisciplinary creative activity.
4. The Academy should ensure the interrelation between research and teaching by expanding the research component in the curriculum of the Doctoral program.
5. SAFAA should change the structure of the Program curriculum in the relation to the research activity of doctoral candidates and their preparations of doctoral thesis. First year of studies should give doctoral candidates an opportunity to define the subject of their research and get prepared to do a research by several courses connected with methods and methodologies of researching.
6. SAFAA should consider the role of other obligatory and elected theoretical lectures/classes and decide on their role as subjects (subjects in core discipline areas and subjects in transferable skills)

### *III. Admission Policy*

#### **Findings and considerations:**

SAFAA developed the regulation on the admission for the doctoral studies ("SAFAA Procedure for Postgraduate Admission".) The admission procedure seems to be transparent (experts couldn't read the regulation carefully as the document was available only in Armenian).

SAFAA publishes the information related to the admission on its official website.

The Academy has a sound plan for future analysis of the effectiveness of applicant's assessment system.

SAFAA isn't yet prepared for the applicants from abroad (there is no special requirements for them).

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Selection criteria for doctoral studies in the field of history and theory of art and practice in fine arts, design and applied arts should be different and carefully described (assessment of the rank of scientific / artistic achievements of the candidate: e.g. international achievements counted from the moment of graduation).
2. SAFAA should develop regulations for admissions of foreign applicants, especially define requirements considering the diversity of the worldwide system of higher education and of higher education system in Armenia ( graduates of different types of universities and majors, also majors on the border between visual arts and other artistic disciplines, or even on the border between art and science like advertising, digital media and others), as well as specify the level of language proficiency which will allow to study and prepare for the doctoral thesis.

#### *IV. Supervisor*

##### **Findings and considerations:**

The Academy has clearly stated responsibilities and workload for the supervisors. The responsibilities between a supervisor, a doctoral candidate and the Academy are defined in the tripartite contract (the agreement is not yet actual, it will be introduced from the next academic year). Each supervisor can have maximum 5 doctoral candidates. The Academy has 3 professors who are able to supervise.

The supervisors are well motivated by themselves, their individual priorities and their sense of mission as a tutor.

According to the strategy of the Academy it has a mechanisms of motivation for supervisors to be involved in active researching and be part of the relevant scientific networks but there were no records such as training, research activates, etc. organized by the Academy for this purpose. Besides, there was no stated financial support by the Academy for this purpose. The supervisors were not involved in any local or international research project with doctoral candidates which could provide financial support for a candidates' research.

The mechanisms for the evaluation of the effectiveness of supervisors by doctoral candidates have been developed but are not yet applied by the Academy. The questions in the evaluation survey mainly consider the knowledge of a doctoral candidate on the responsibilities of a supervisor, working environment between two of them, expectations from the supervisors, sharing the materials, etc. These parameters are important for improving the effectiveness of supervision.

##### **Recommendations:**

1. To have a well-established base to develop research environment the Academy should be a part of common research projects (local and international). In that sense, the Academy should provide support for the supervisors such as trainings in finding and applying to grant projects. This will be beneficial not only for supervisors but for doctoral candidates' research and for the institution overall.
2. It is important to publish the results of research done by supervisors in international journals with impact factor which will provide an opportunity to attract possible applicants and external research opportunities as well as to collaborate and develop abilities as a supervisor.
3. The Academy should provide opportunities for its supervisors to participate in international exchange programs.
4. The effectiveness of supervision should be analyzed, be available for the stakeholders and be improved.

#### *V. Research Environment*

##### **Findings and considerations:**



SAFAA provides necessary human and minimum of material resources for the implementation of doctoral program goals and content. Academy established Research Center to support the scientific activities of the University and doctoral program. Academy provides access to the working areas, laboratories, libraries and other archives of the internal and external partners, opportunity and support to publish works in local and international reviewed scientific journals, support in participating in local and in international workshops and conferences. SAFAA has spaces equipped for the needs of art, design and exhibition studios for the presentation of doctoral theses. The laboratories provision of the Academy is improved annually, doctoral candidates have working places and tools for the research if needed. At the same time most of doctoral candidates are studying in the field of Art Theory and History, that is why there is no need to provide them with the material research tools. In addition, distance learning at 3rd cycle proves that doctoral candidates can carry out their research in remote mode and use only information resources. The good practice is observed that doctoral candidates have access to research works in other scientific institutions, museums and libraries and can participate in exhibitions at international and national levels. However, there is no evidence that teaching staff and doctoral candidates participate in programs of academic mobility.

SAFAA has modest collection of books in own library. There is a lack of the latest publishing from the field of art, design, applied arts, history and theory of art. SAFAA doesn't have access to the platforms of the best scientific e-journals from abroad. Overall, the research environment is not included into the internal quality assurance system. Electronic database of local scientific editions is available free for doctoral candidates in the Academy's library which mainly accounts textbooks and study guides edited in the 20th century (from 30th to 90th). There is no rare literature digitization in the library. At the same time there is no free access to international electronic databases like Thomson Reuters, Web of Science, Scopus at the Academy for doctoral candidates.

SAFAA monitors the scientific progress of the doctoral candidates by an annual individual report of candidates' scientific and artistic activity by cooperation with supervisor/supervisor team. Supervisors are responsible for the effective implementation of individual research plan, present an annual report on the candidates' research work. Supervisors are responsible for the effective implementation of doctoral candidates' individual research plans.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. SAFAA needs to provide doctoral candidates a free access to international electronic databases and local electronic information resources both at the Academy and remote access.

#### ***VI. Doctoral Candidates***

#### **Findings and considerations:**

The institution has set mechanisms to provide high-quality relations between supervisors, doctoral candidates and the Academy which is stated in the tripartite agreement

(the agreement is not yet actual, it will be introduced from the next academic year). The main weak point is that there is no regulatory mechanism provided by the Academy in case of conflicts between a supervisor and a doctoral candidate.

The Academy supports doctoral candidates by providing a full information on the doctoral program. Nevertheless, during the site visit it was revealed that that some candidates didn't understand their responsibilities or how do they need to gain credits, etc., even though they signed a trilateral contract.

The relationship between the supervisors and the doctoral candidates were described friendly and the candidates can contact their supervisors anytime they need.

Doctoral candidates are not involved in the management processes at the Academy and do not participate in the decision-making procedures.

The interviewed doctoral candidates were participating in international conferences and have their own research projects.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The Academy should develop mechanism for doctoral candidates to realize their rights, especially their own role in shaping of the University's management processes. The Academy should consider the voice of doctoral candidates in the management and quality assurance processes to increase the effectiveness of doctoral education.
2. The mechanisms for the conflict management between supervisors and candidates should be developed by the HEI.

## ***VII. Internationalization***

### **Findings and considerations:**

SAFAA has a wide cooperation with local art institutions and is extending international collaboration through participating in various grant projects. In the recent years the Academy has participated in 8 international projects and has coordinated 2 Erasmus programs. In the area of doctoral education the SAFAA has participated in two international grant projects (EU TEMPUS "VERITAS" and EU ERASMUS+ "C3QA"). The Academy has established new cooperation with about 20 foreign universities since the last project ( 25 universities from Europe and Asia are listed on the Academy's website). Though there is no information about the scope and effectiveness of the signed agreements.

The participation of the SAFAA's students in international exchange programs is negligible. It is sure that SAFAA has not yet carried out mobility of doctoral candidates and supervisors as the mobility of doctoral students is a new phenomenon for the post-Soviet area. There is a plan to launch mobility activities for doctoral students with the start of realization of new doctoral program.

Problematic is that the financial resources for internationalization are not yet specified. The financial resources for supporting doctoral candidates and supervisors are not confirmed.

The process of internationalization also hinders the fact that a minimal information is published in English on the website of the institution.

**Recommendations:**

1. There is a need to change a low number of outgoing and incoming students and teaching staff through mobility by: promoting international activity of the SAFAA, exchange programs and possibilities to study at SAFAA or an abroad, establishing new cooperation with foreign universities (especially with universities offered doctoral studies in the field of fine arts, applied arts, design or history of art), art institutions, providing substantial information on doctoral program, social conditions, fees etc. in English on the Academy website to attract doctoral applicants to the Academy and positioning the doctoral program at the international level .
2. Academy needs to find relevant financial resources for supporting the mobility activities of doctoral candidates and teaching staff. It will help doctoral candidates to successfully defend a doctoral thesis and be recognized by the world scientific community.
3. SAFAA should be much more active in organization of scientific and artistic activities with international range with the involvement of doctoral candidates. Organizing conferences, seminars, group exhibitions, art projects even at the Academy's galleries, lecture halls will give an opportunity to doctoral candidates to evaluate their achievements, will contribute to find new contacts with foreign doctoral candidates, supervisors, scientific and artistic institutions. Thus will create positive atmosphere, great ground for future research, artistic and cultural activities, reinforcement of the all Academy.

*VIII. PhD awarding*

**Findings and considerations:**

There is no specified mechanism for monitoring and assessment of the research results at the SAFAA. The Academy is planning to formulate a Specialized Council for this matter.

**Recommendations:**

1. The Academy should develop mechanisms for monitoring and assessment of the research results in each of artistic and scientific fields. Such competences should be held by the Scientific Council (of each artistic and scientific discipline like fine arts, applied arts, design, history of art) composed of scientific employees with the academic title of professor who have scientific and artistic achievements in these disciplines.

*IX. Internal quality assurance*

**Findings and considerations:**

SAFAA Quality assurance policy is defined by several documents: "Regulation on annual planning, monitoring, evaluation and improvement of the activities of SAFAA structural

units”, “Quality assurance handbook for 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle” (developed in 2019), “Handbook on the development and revision of academic programs” etc.

Quality Assurance Handbook for 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle includes very brief information and does not disclose all the sides of quality assurance, for example, public information, international collaboration; it does not contain approved positions on quality assurance mechanisms in various areas. The assessment of effectiveness of various processes, the satisfaction of stakeholders, the effectiveness of cooperation with external stakeholders, especially their influence on the doctoral program and its realization are not yet considered by the SAFAA.

There is no evidence of C3QA project results within which the revision of the QA system should be already completed. The internal quality assurance system of doctoral education is still in the phase of development. Though the relevant documents and tools have been developed by the Academy but there are not yet applied .

#### **Recommendations:**

1. A special commission should be composed to ensure the functionality of the quality assurance system for doctoral education. Members of this commission can be professors who work in the specific discipline in which doctoral studies are conducted.
2. QA processes should be implemented in all the phases of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle.

**SITE-VISIT AGENDA**

External assessment of the Doctoral Programme in Fine Arts, Design and Decorative Applied Arts  
at State Academy of Fine Arts of Armenia within the framework of the Erasmus+ C3QA project

**29.04.2019**

	<b>29.04.2019</b>	<i>Start</i>	<i>End</i>	<i>Duration</i>
	Transfer from the hotel to ANQA	10:30		
	Closed panel meeting	11:00	13:00	120 minutes

**30.04.2019**

	<b>30.04.2019</b>	<b>Start</b>	<b>End</b>	<b>Duration</b>
	Transfer from the hotel	09:30		
1.	Meeting with the Vice-Rector for Scientific Affairs	10:00	10:30	30 minutes
2.	Meeting with doctoral candidates	10:40	11:20	40 minutes
3.	Meeting with the academic program management/head of chair and C3QA local management teams (Units for doctoral education included)	11:30	12:30	60 minutes
4.	Break and closed panel meeting	12:40	13:30	50 minutes
5.	Meeting with supervisors/teaching staff and QA representatives	13:40	14:30	50 minutes
6.	Resources review (auditoriums, libraries, laboratories, cabinets, scientific databases etc.)	14:40	15:30	50 minutes
7.	Document review	15:40	16:40	60 minutes
8.	Closed panel meeting	16:50	17:50	60 minutes
9.	Outline feedback of the panel to the SAFAA leadership	17:50	18:05	15 minutes