

**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  
PILOT EXTERNAL REVIEW OF  
UFAR (Université Française en Arménie)  
/ French University in Armenia**

**Yerevan – 2019**

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## INTRODUCTION

The external assessment of the Doctoral Programme in Law at French University in Armenia 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. Marie-Elisabeth Baudoin, (Université Clermont Auvergne, France, chair of the panel)
2. Manibadar Suvd (Otgontenger University, Mongolia, expert)
3. Grair Magakian (Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego W Kielcach, expert)
4. Mariam Hovhannisyan (SAFAA, expert)

The composition of the expert panel was agreed with the representatives of French University in Armenia.

The process of external assessment was observed by Zhanna Akhmediyeva from the Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, Kazakhstan.

The process was coordinated by Varduhi Gyulazyan from the ANQA.

All the members of the expert panel 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 French University of Armenia, international partners and the grant holder. The University 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 University 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 French University of Armenia. 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 29, 2019. According to the agenda<sup>1</sup> the site visit was launched with the meeting with the Rector of the French University of Armenia. 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

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

of the documents to be observed by the expert panel was submitted to the University 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 university, the documents attached to it and the observations during the site visit. The panel members drafted the preliminary report which was circulated among the members of the expert panel.

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.

## *I. Institutional strategies*

### **Findings and considerations:**

The Institutional strategies are adopted at the Higher Education Institutional levels and the Quality Assessment Criteria and Standards for Doctoral Education. (Annex 1 for the Long and short term strategic document 2017-2021).

French University in Armenia (UFAR) was established 15 years ago by the collaboration of Armenian and French governments. UFAR tries to contribute in labour market educating future professionals in the fields of Law, Management, Marketing and Finance.

According to the related documents, UFAR's objectives are the following:

1. The involvement of the UFAR deans in development of scientific partnership in collaboration with the colleagues from Lyon 3 University,
2. The establishment of a structure in charge of training the students enrolled in thesis in France and Armenia, including thesis French supervisors and research laboratories in France.
3. Setting an annual flow of 5 to 6 new doctoral students,
4. Obtaining necessary funding for allocation of scholarships for the doctoral thesis, allowing students to devote full time to their thesis,
5. Recruitment of up to 30 % of the future doctors and the constitution of a team of 15 full time researchers in 10 years,
6. Capacity to have the indicators for publication and research. Those objectives conformed during the site-visit.

The UFAR research strategy is adopted in line with UFAR's mission and vision. The research strategy focuses on the knowledge creation, transfer of French scientific traditions into Armenian reality, contribution to social and economic development of the Republic of Armenia, establishment of the bank of teachers, who will become a valuable asset of the French University.

Research strategy reflects the needs of the internal and external stakeholders and includes ethical concepts.

### **Recommendations:**

- review of UFAR Long and short term strategic document 2017-2021 and include the directions of Law in line with Armenia's labor market.

## *II. Doctoral program*

### **Findings and considerations:**

Doctoral academic programs are the ones of the French partners (Lyon III University and Clermont Auvergne University), considering Armenian sensitivities. Indeed, doctoral theses are chosen by UFAR after assessing the needs of its partner organizations. As it was clearly explained by the Rector of UFAR during the site-visit, several tools are used to assess the needs of the labour market or public administration: 1) the first one is accurate surveys. Data on job placement were provided showing where students are working after their studies on a long-term period. This is a strong instrument to know what sectors of activities are of interest; 2) the second one is the considering of the dynamics of Armenia's economy. With 2000 alumni, UFAR has now a strong network.

These tools are therefore used to define the doctoral topics which will better address issues that are important for Armenia, such as surrogacy, counterfeit drugs or the evolution of parliamentary law. Becoming experts in the field, PhD students will have greater chances to be employed in the future.

Furthermore, the concept of doctoral programs and the profile of the doctorate are the ones ratified by corresponding doctoral schools and they correspond to the below-given regulations, in-laws, and national documents:

- Doctoral contract between the French University in Armenia and the doctoral student

- National charter of ethics of research professions (France)
- PhD charter of the doctoral school the student is attached to
- Internal Regulation of corresponding Doctoral School
- Rules of procedure of the attached doctoral school
- Order of 25 May 2016 setting the national training framework and the procedures leading to the award of the national doctoral degree.

All doctoral schools in France are being accredited by the High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Hcéres) which is an independent administrative authority which seeks to follow best international practice. The last assessment report regarding Lyon III Doctoral school done by Hcéres in 2014-2015 was presented in Annex 3. This report is highlighting “a very active governance” and “the dynamism” of the Doctoral School, with a “real scientific consistence” and “doctoral programs well adapted to the needs of doctoral students”.

Being enrolled at the Doctoral School 492 of Lyon III, the doctoral students of UFAR benefit from its research environment. According to the students interviewed during the site-visit, the program is useful. They can attend courses in Lyon III (sometimes with invited professors from the United States or other countries), to participate in scientific manifestations and legal conferences which are important for their own reflection. While they are in France, their work is progressing faster, as they have the possibility to meet with other PhD students and to discuss fruitfully on their topics.

The only less positive aspect for the students is the lack of big seminars or conferences in Armenia.

PhD students are officially attached to the research institute in France. They travel to corresponding doctoral schools 2 or 3 months a year to work with their thesis director and to participate in the research activities of the research center.

In Lyon III, for example, they have access to a wide range of training courses, aimed at developing skills for the PhD (“writing scientific articles in English”, “writing a scientific paper step by step”, “communicating science to a larger audience”...) as well as cross-functional skills (“Managing stress”, “How to conduct meetings?”, “From manager to leader”...) or career and employment perspectives (“Consulting career for PhDs”, “From PhD to job market”...) or disciplinary skills (History of sciences and epistemology”...).

PhD students have also a referent within UFAR. They receive assistance from the General Secretary, as well as from the Dean of the Law School and the Rector for any administrative issues or questions they might have. They are requested to present the progress of their work twice a year and have monthly meetings.

In line with article 3 of the French decree of 25 May 2016 setting the national training framework and the procedures leading to the issuance of the national doctoral degree, the doctoral school ensures a quality approach to training by setting up training programs, individual monitoring committees of doctoral students by offering doctoral students’ supervisors specific training and support.

According to the French legislation, an individual follow-up committee of the PhD students from UFAR as of every French student ensures the smooth running of the courses. It evaluates, throughout an interview, which takes place once a year (starting on year 2), the conditions of the training and the progress of the research. A written report, based on the interview, is sent to the director of the doctoral school (see Annexe 4 for an example of report). The PhD director does not participate to this individual follow-up committee to avoid any interference in the discussion.

As mentioned in point 2.4, the French University in Armenia also supports doctoral students by organizing regular meetings with all doctoral students, in the presence of the Rector, the General Secretary and the Dean. These meetings also allow the students to give their feedbacks on the training courses, as one of the PhD students explained it during the site-visit.

Every French doctoral school has set mechanisms and procedures to ensure the development, approval and monitoring, and periodic review of doctoral programs which ensures active involvement of internal and external stakeholders. These tools are also assessed in the Report of Hcéres. Here the only aspect missing is an involvement of Armenian stakeholders. Because of the specificities of the program – based

on French doctoral schools –, it is more difficult to have a periodic review done by Armenian internal or external stakeholders.

UFAR doctoral programs are in line with the French and European standards. Many efforts are done in order to help the PhD students to conduct their researches in a stimulating environment. They are supervised both scientifically by their French PhD director and administratively by their UFAR referent and team. There are also enjoying spending several months in France, although, according to some of them they would appreciate to have more possibilities to travel to international conferences or to go more frequently to France.

#### **Recommendations:**

- the establishment of more “institutionalized” links between Armenian external stakeholders and UFAR doctoral programs
- the establishment of more “institutionalized” links between UFAR referent and French PhD supervisor.

### *III. Admission Policy*

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

The framework of the UFAR’s standard are based, among others, on the rules of the admission to the Doctoral School, undertaken in line with the Order of 25 May 2016 setting the national training framework and the procedures leading to the award of the national doctoral degree in France (Annex 5) and according to the requirements set up by Internal Regulations at the school (Annex 6).

In line with the above-mentioned requirements and Regulation on Doctoral Student Selection and Advancement (Annex 7), the admission process of doctoral students at UFAR follows some steps which can be treated as precise (positive) actions to be carried out:

- public announcement for all the candidates who have been awarded second degree UFAR diplomas or diplomas from any other Higher Education Institution,
- shortlisting candidates for an interview,
- interview conducted by Armenian deans and French Associate deans of the faculty concerned, the Rector and General Secretary,
- final decision,
- soliciting French partners to find a thesis supervisor based on the topic of research.

In this case the problem of ensuring that the mechanisms work is almost for 100%, because of the implementation of French experience.

Moreover, UFAR has prepared appropriate procedures for the implementation of these tasks and Selection criteria of doctoral candidates are transparent, publicly available and are in line with the explicit outcomes of doctoral program.

According to the procedure on selection and accompaniment of doctoral students at UFAR, the following selection criteria will be used (Appendix 7):

1. Interest of the research topic,
2. quality of the project,
3. respect of the conditions for an admission in a French doctoral school (minimum note in master and the memory),
4. motivation and professional project,
5. ability to conduct research and integrate into a scientific team.

The above-mentioned criteria are very important, however the point 2 is always a controversial concept especially when it is in the (logical) framework of country market:

- the quality is high when it meets the requirements of a specific market in a specific place and at a specific time

- but the modern market is evolving very fast and changing according to the requirements of globalization.

#### **Recommendations:**

- clearly define the quality criteria of research work.

#### *IV. Supervisor*

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

In line with national requirements, French Doctoral Schools have set standards and criteria for the selection of theses supervisors. Those are clearly stated in their regulations and are publicly available. The responsibilities of the supervisor and/or the team are also clearly indicated in the contract that is being signed between the doctoral students and his/her supervisor.

The supervisor is present at each stage of the program: from the selection of the topic, to providing documentation and helping with the bibliography, helping drafting the structure and the development of the thesis and finally organizing the defense committee.

In addition, there is also a supervision team at UFAR, headed by Rector and including the Secretary General responsible of Doctoral Service at UFAR (see Annex 7).

According to French legislation, either a University Professor or an Associate Professor with an accreditation to supervise researches (Maître de Conférences–HDR) are allowed to supervise PhD researches. Depending on doctoral schools there is also a limited number of doctoral students per supervisor (6 or 8 maximum).

The rules regarding the UFAR supervisory team are also clearly indicated in Annex 7.

The mechanisms existing at UFAR are in line with national requirements.

In France, the position of an associate professor and that of a professor are anchored around three pillars:

- teaching activity for a total of 192 hours per year,
- administrative follow-up of formations,
- research activity.

The supervision of PhD students is one of the criteria for evaluating the activities of a teacher-researcher and also a key element to apply for an additional payment for doctoral and research supervision (based on decree n° 2014-557 of May 28th, 2014), that can be given based on the quality of research and doctoral supervision.

The evaluation of the teaching and research activities of teacher-researchers is done periodically (every 4 years) by the Hcéres. It is based on a report of activities covering all the undertaking within the laboratory and the teaching unit.

Furthermore, the award for doctoral and research supervision mentioned *supra* in point 4.3 is attributed for high level scientific activity, by a committee including Professors which are from another University.

The professional progress of supervisors mainly relies on the political action of the laboratory. Research budget as well as European contracts are used to encourage the best teachers-researchers to develop their own research activities.

The supervisors are selected according to their academic status (Professor or Associate Professor with accreditation to supervise researches) and according to their ability to supervise the topic (depending on the specialization in private law, public law...). According to French regulation, there are some specific tools which guarantee the quality of supervision: limited number of students per supervisor, considering of the quality of research of the supervisor, possibility to be awarded for the quality of supervision.

In the specific case, one of the major difficulties is of course the geographical distance between the PhD student and his/her supervisor. Nevertheless, this obstacle is overcome thanks to skype conference and the two or three months-stay per year of the PhD student in France.



**Recommendations:**

- more frequent stays of the PhD students in France in order to strengthen the dialogue with the supervisor.

*V. Research Environment***Findings and considerations:**

The university provides students with relevant human, material and financial resources in accordance with the program content during their study and research. Providing proficient human resources both in Armenia and France the students acquire field-specific and appropriate knowledge and experience. The meeting with PhD students showed that they are satisfied with the experience and the knowledge, which they get from the university.

The university managed to offer relevant material resources to the PhD students for effective research conduction. They have separate working area, access different scientific data bases both in Armenia and France. PhD students mentioned that they have access to various French data bases also from Armenia, as they are given login and passwords. The students also make use of scientific equipment, laboratories available at the university. During the resource review/observation it was clear that the university has relevant material resources for the effective research environment: IT rooms, library with necessary field-related books, comfortable classrooms, court for role-playing games etc.

University's PhD students receive a monthly scholarship to be full-time present at the UFAR and carry out their research. In this way the university motivates them and promotes to the effective study and research conduction at the same time.

Students have their individual research plans based on which they conduct their research. The plan coordinates their working activities and puts in a logic frame. During research conduction they are closely in touch with supervisors, administrative staff and other relevant stakeholders. The university has a weekly presentation system, where PhD students present the activities done in front of their peers and supervision team. Besides, each supervisor tracks his/her PhD student all the time thus taking responsibility for the quality of the work done. Currently the Rector of the university also tracks PhD students working individually with them and on their work. Meeting with PhD students confirmed that they are satisfied with the university's staff support.

The launch of career development of PhD students starts by the teaching process at the university. The teaching content is in accordance with the research and its direction. They have also a unique opportunity to go France, to be involved in French scientific life, to teach there, to participate in different scientific discussions, seminars, workshops, debates etc. PhD students mentioned that the period they have in France is very productive for their research conduction as the relevant field is more developed than in Armenia.

During study and research PhD students mentioned that they get relevant support from the different staff members. Issues and/or problems arisen during study and research are solved on the spot depending the kind of issue/problem. During their study and research students receive useful and regular information on different scientific events by the university, in which they may be interested. It is mentioned by the PhD students that the research environments are varied a lot in Armenia and France. There are many specialists by their research directions in France, the field is more developed, and they have more expended opportunities compared with Armenian reality. The university

promotes its PhD students in many ways but in terms of joint-research conduction and/or working with other research teams or groups it does not have.

Taking the time imperative and the fact that research is the substantial way to have professors, the university embeds a doctoral program having low budget. The university taking account this low-budget issue started to find different partners such as sponsors, private donors, different companies and institutions, Central bank etc.

So far, the university has been able to provide finances for the effective implementation of the program and the money for the program is included in the university's budget plan.

Meeting with different internal stakeholders they are satisfied with the university in general, its resources, support etc. But it is also clear that there are not any officially approved mechanisms in place for the evaluation of the effectiveness, applicability and availability of resources. Students mentioned, once they organized a meeting to discuss and reveal some issues and then submitted to the relevant administrative and management bodies. The latter bodies welcomed their initiative and heard their voice.

Throughout these years, efforts have been made by the university for the effective implementation of the program. For the effective research environment, the university has relevant and appropriate human, material and financial resources, which makes the university competitive in Armenian labor market.

The University has support, development and other mechanisms for PhD students. It is praiseworthy that the university financially supports its students giving a very competitive scholarship compared with other Armenian universities, provides interesting research environments in Armenia and France, gives regular and useful information on different scientific events etc.

Considering the small majority of PhD students, currently financial resources are somehow sufficient but for the further development and management of risks the university should have a sustainable budget and effective allocation methods for the program. Besides, the university does not have officially approved quality assurance mechanisms for the evaluation of its research environment.

#### **Recommendations:**

- review university's budget allocation approaches targeting also research and its development.
- expand the cooperation with local and other European (not only French) scientific organizations, universities, institutions etc. Organization of different scientific events may support PhD students to share and get new experience in national and international levels.
- develop quality assurance mechanisms for the evaluation of research environment.

#### *VI. Doctoral Candidates*

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

A contract for 3 years to regulate relations between candidate, supervisors and institution where the rights and responsibilities of doctoral candidates are clearly formulated. (Annex 12)

A contract is signed between the doctoral students and the UFAR where the rights and responsibilities of both parties are stipulated. When we met with doctoral students, they were satisfied with their doctoral study and written agreement. Doctoral candidates are engaged in governance at the university and participate in decision making-process.

**Recommendations:**

- reflect in written contract any possibilities of financial support to participate in international conferences (not restricted to France and Armenia, but conference organized by other countries) and some incentive mechanism.

*VII. Internationalization***Findings and considerations:**

The UFAR promotes (on the base of its existence) the fruitful and effective collaboration with local and international counterparts aiming to create critical mass and networking as well as to implement joint research and doctoral programs. Moreover, UFAR is an intergovernmental institution of higher education *per se*, and all its activities, including the third cycle of education, are international, giving UFAR the “privilege” of training the doctoral candidates who are attached to corresponding French Doctoral Schools (with huge scientific and administrative experience) and doing a part of research activities in France. The research they conduct is international in the truest sense of the word, since it encompasses the recent trends, gaps and demands of Armenian or/and French labor markets.

However, the institution assumes that the internationalization of the research will also ensure the needs of UFAR’s partners on local market.

The assumption is very appropriate and relevant. However, it seems that the "merger" of these two markets is not easy due to their level of development, demands, social, business and political players, etc. As we know, not always they can go together in different countries.

The next problematic point is the length of students' stay in France: 2 months are definitively too short to be efficient.

**Recommendations:**

- explain more specifically the meaning of the internationalization process and local market’s needs of “co-operation” (to export some of the local products, to access to the local market knowledge etc).
- extend the period of stay of students even for 3 months.

*VIII. PhD awarding***Findings and considerations:**

In accordance with article 19 of the French decree of 25 May 2016, Specialized Councils have PhD awarding criteria that are applied and periodically reviewed. They consider the innovative nature of the research and also the ability of the PhD student to situate them in their scientific context.

In this case, the comparative aspect of the research (French and Armenian Law) as well as the utility of the research for the evolution of the Armenian legal system will be of great importance to assess the quality of the PhD work.

According to French regulation, the number of jury members is between four and eight. It is composed of 50% French and 50% foreign experts, external to the doctoral school and the enrolled institution of the doctoral student and chosen because of their scientific or professional competence in the field of research concerned. There is also a parity criterion which is considered.

So far, none of the UFAR PhD has defended his/her thesis, therefore it is difficult to give general consideration. PhD awarding is organized in line with the French regulation.

**Recommendations:**

- invite Armenian Professors to be part of the Specialized Council due to the comparative dimension of the PhD and also to facilitate a better employability of the PhD students.

#### *IX. Internal quality assurance*

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

In 2018, the university developed a Quality assurance handbook, which is actually the only officially approved document for the quality assurance processes. The handbook includes quality assurance policy and shows the university's approaches to quality assurance in general. The handbook is not available on the website.

Some established processes such as monitoring system of PhD students' work can be considered as one of the internal quality assurance tools for doctoral program.

The university always tracks its alumni evaluating their satisfaction level, understanding and identifying their role in labor market etc. This mechanism is set and conducted periodically. But there are not any officially approved mechanisms for the involvement of internal stakeholders in quality assurance processes.

The internal quality assurance mechanisms are weak at the university. Internal stakeholders give the university feedback in an informal way. As mentioned, PhD students they organize a discussion by their own initiative and then submitted to the university relevant bodies. The latter welcomed it very much. Lack of mechanisms may have its negative influence on the university's further development and activity planning as many ideas, thoughts and opinions are hidden.

It is mentioned in the self-assessment report that the review process is foreseen in the end of 2019, but it is not clear how they are going to do it. Quality assurance handbook does not include revision process of the quality assurance system.

It is praiseworthy that the university developed a Quality assurance handbook and has a set mechanism for tracking its alumni and other external stakeholders.

Internal quality assurance processes are not coordinated at the institutional level as there are not any mechanisms not only for the identification of stakeholders' educational and working needs and demands including management, teaching, administrative, support staff but also for the evaluation on the effectiveness, development and revision of different processes etc. The university should ensure balanced involvement of all stakeholders in the quality assurance processes. The lack of mechanisms and the insufficient involvement of stakeholders may diminish the effectiveness of university's activity planning process. Besides, there is not a separate unit for quality assurance process. This diminishes the overall effectiveness of even existing quality assurance processes, as work burden of some employees may be huge and they may not cover all the activities effectively.

Taking into account all the gaps mentioned above the university does not comply with criteria 9.

##### **Recommendations:**

- develop tools for the identification of internal and external stakeholders' educational needs.
- To expand existing quality assurance processes.
- develop tools for the evaluation on effectiveness of existing QA tools.
- organize meetings with stakeholders for raising stakeholder's awareness on the quality assurance thus creating solid ground for quality culture.