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**YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY
QUALITY ASSURANCE CENTRE**

INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY MANUAL FOR DOCTORAL EDUCATION

YEREVAN 2018



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Introduction

This document is intended to serve as the basis for quality assessment and enhancement of Doctoral education in YSU. It serves the purpose of defining minimum standards for continuous development, benchmarking, as well as peer-based quality assurance and accreditation of Doctoral education.

The main quality assurance (QA) policies for Doctoral education at YSU are as follows:

1. YSU Doctoral programmes are supported by internal QA mechanisms, which ensures compliance with formally adopted internal as well as external QA standards/guidelines and regulations.
2. YSU QA processes are established to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of Doctoral education/research training, teaching & learning, doctoral supervision as well as the effectiveness and fairness of the final assessment.
3. YSU Doctoral programmes are subjected to periodic review, which allows for the updating of programme content, structure and delivery in light of achieved programme outcomes.

The main areas of quality assessment and quality assurance in YSU's Doctoral education are as follows:

- I. Organisational Context
- II. Research Environment
- III. Doctoral Education Objectives
- IV. Admission Policy and Criteria
- V. Doctoral Programme (Coursework)
- VI. Supervision
- VII. Student Progress
- VIII. Doctoral Dissertation (Thesis)
- IX. Final Assessment

I. Organisational Context

1. There is a university structure and officer with overall responsibility for Doctoral education.
2. Institutional regulations are in place for doctorate that are clear and readily available to Doctoral students, supervisors, academic and supporting staff, as well as examiners.
3. The terms and obligations of Doctoral candidates, supervisors and the university are fixed in a signed contract/agreement between the three parties.
4. There is a comprehensive and widely used Guidelines (Code of Conduct) that ensures transparency in relation to the expectations and the duties of all parties in the Doctoral studies and covers all matters relevant to Doctoral students, supervisors, university officers and examiners. Matters included cover the full range of main aspects relevant to Doctoral students.
5. The rights, duties and responsibilities of the student commencing a Doctoral programme are defined and communicated clearly to the candidate. These include general matters as well as matters specific to the studentship in question, and cover: attendance and reporting requirements; relevant codes of behaviour and practice; teaching, supervision and mentoring duties; financial support, etc.
6. For supervisors and students there are simple and well-designed forms and written formal procedures that clarify and simplify all important stages of the Doctoral programme, and allow for reasonable flexibility and intra-disciplinary variations.
7. All basic documentation is routinely and readily available in printed booklet(s) and on the university website.
8. University defines and communicates clearly the responsibilities and entitlements of students undertaking Doctoral studies.
9. University maintains a system for data collection and analysis for Doctoral education, including the tracking of Doctoral graduates' career development.
10. University puts in place and promotes independent and formal procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals that are fair, clear to all concerned, robust,



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and applied consistently. The acceptable grounds for complaints and appeals are clearly defined.

II. Research Environment

- 1) A Doctorate is undertaken through research training. The existence of a strong research environment is a obligatory condition for the provision of quality Doctoral education.
- 2) Doctoral students are admitted into a research environment which provides support for conducting a high-quality research.
- 3) The Doctoral programmes are supported with a sufficient number of research-active faculty members, who have proven records of academic achievements.
- 4) An adequate research infrastructure, e.g. ITC hardware and software, access to literature and other databases, well equipped laboratories and libraries, highly qualified academic staff, is provided in support of the Doctoral programmes. A fair and non-discriminatory access is offered for all students enrolled in the Doctoral programmes.
- 5) Doctoral candidates have access to the resources necessary for their research work – hardware equipment, basic and more sophisticated software, etc.
- 6) The Doctoral programmes have sufficient resources for the proper management and monitoring of doctoral studies. This includes the resources needed for selection and admission process, delivery of course work, library and computing resources, for quality supervision, for monitoring of annual student progress and for assessment of Doctoral theses.
- 7) Doctoral students have appropriate opportunities for developing research, personal and professional skills.
- 8) There is an initial, obligatory process/course for all students that introduces them to the central facilities and services of the university and makes them aware of all aspects of the Doctoral programmes, including research plans, performance monitoring and examination procedures. In addition, students' teaching duties, their rights and responsibilities, potential intellectual property issues, the rights and responsibilities of their supervisors, plagiarism, safety and ethical considerations, definitions of research misconduct, basic work conditions and regulations, and the supports available from careers and other student services are explained and discussed.



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- 9) All participants involved in the Doctoral education (including students, supervisors and other academic staff) adhere to an explicit Code of Ethical Conduct.

III. Objectives of Doctoral Programmes

- 1) The Doctoral programmes target the production of analytically rigorous, innovative, and, whenever feasible, practically relevant research outputs.
- 2) The Doctoral degree qualification is a third-level higher education award and corresponds to level 8 in the National Qualification Framework of Armenia (NQFA) and the European Qualifications Framework.
- 3) Doctoral programmes include a mix of coursework, original research under supervision and professional development activities.
- 4) All activities within a Doctoral programme are mobilise both analytical and synthetic skills, and foster critical and methodical thinking. In order to develop the doctoral candidate's academic and scholarly identity and critical thinking, educational training should include elements aiming at the acquisition of advanced knowledge, through exploration of the diversity of paradigms and (qualitative and quantitative) methodologies in the field of research.
- 5) Doctoral programmes are associated with a number of explicitly stated learning objectives/outcomes in the NQFA.

IV. Admission Policy and Criteria

- 1) Admission procedures for Doctoral education are clear, consistently applied and demonstrate equality of opportunity.
- 2) Faculties and research centres plan for the recruitment of Doctoral students to ensure that local facilities are sufficient to provide them with a high-quality research training.
- 3) Doctoral students are not recruited unless certain minimum common and individual facilities are available for their use.
- 4) Doctoral candidates are selected with consideration of existing strengths and specialisations by research-active faculty members and field supervisors. Preference is given to applicants with matching research interests.
- 5) The process of selection of Doctoral students is open, competitive, fair and transparent involving all interested stakeholders from the university.
- 6) The admission decision is collective, collegial and coordinated at the programme level to ensure fair treatment and homogeneity of selection criteria and quality expectations across cohorts. Faculty members with the same subject specialisation as the proposed Doctoral work and/or in the research group or environment where the doctoral work is to be done are involved in the selection process.
- 7) University considers admission criteria related to (i) prior academic results and achievements, (ii) quality and feasibility of the envisioned research project and (iii) adequacy between the profile of the candidate, his/her project and supervisory competences and capacities within the faculty.
- 8) Research projects/proposals and possibilities for their realization are evaluated before enrollment of Doctoral students.
- 9) Provisions are made to ensure that applicant students from abroad are not disadvantaged and that supervisors of foreign students are supported at all stages during recruitment, registration and throughout their studies.

V. Doctoral Programme/Coursework

- 1) There is a structured programme of professional development and opportunities for skills acquisition for Doctoral students.
- 2) The length of the coursework period is sufficient for doctoral candidates to acquire – under academic guidance and building on the competencies acquired by earlier academic studies – the theoretical and methodological skills necessary for the development and execution of their dissertation project.
- 3) Delivery modes offer a combination of face-to-face teaching, blended learning and independent study.
- 4) The curriculum of the taught part of the programme includes coverage of the literature of the field of specialisation, advanced courses in research methods/methodology, techniques, training in transferable skills, guidance on how to frame a research project, personal/professional development and, ideally, philosophical foundations of scientific inquiry.
- 5) Doctoral coursework involves substantial coverage of research ethics and scholarly integrity. Doctoral candidates are guided towards conducting academic research in a socially responsible and relevant manner.
- 6) Training in research methodologies, good research practices and safety procedures relevant to specific broad disciplines is provided in ways appropriate to the numbers of students concerned.
- 7) Doctoral students have access to adequate training in all appropriate, basic skills including, as necessary, writing, document processing, data processing, presentation, statistics, safety procedures etc.
- 8) Doctoral candidates targeting an academic career path are enabled to gain teaching experience during their doctoral studies.
- 9) Assessment of doctoral coursework is rigorous, targeting the achievement of expected learning outcomes.
- 10) Supports are available to aid students in efficient thesis writing. These include: systematic work planning including scheduled consultations with supervisor; additional or refresher training on work planning, appropriate writing styles,

information technologies and document processing; provision of writing-up facilities.

- 11) As students progress through their research projects, they are (formally or informally) given training on (and/or supervised experience of) applying for grants and writing articles for publication in peer-reviewed journals etc.
- 12) Procedures are in place to allow a regular review and updating of the structure and quality of the programme. These procedures involve at least four categories of stakeholders – research students, faculty members, supervisors and Doctoral programme management.
- 13) The quality, consistency and relevance of Doctoral training is regularly reviewed through formal assessment and student feedback ensuring that ineffectual elements and courses are discontinued or improved/updated as appropriate.

VI. Doctoral Dissertation (Thesis)

- 1) Granting the Doctoral degree entails that the Doctoral candidate has been judged capable of carrying out independent, original and scientifically sound research and able to make an original contribution to professional practice (or policy), while mobilising critical thinking to reflect on the work of others. The quality of the Doctoral dissertation must be the basis for evaluating whether the candidate should be granted the Doctoral degree.
- 2) The format of the Doctoral dissertation can vary – from a research monograph to a body of research papers published or publishable in recognised, peer-reviewed journals.
- 3) The Doctoral dissertation must include:
 - A relevant and up-to-date review of the research literature concerning the themes and questions treated;
 - A clearly expressed presentation of the research objectives;
 - An in-depth presentation of the research design and selected methodology, main findings/results, discussion and conclusions, including implications for theory, practice and policy;
 - A (short) presentation of further issues and challenges emerging from the dissertation.
- 4) In case the dissertation consists of papers it should include a summary presenting the main findings and results and the research context of the papers.
- 5) Parts of paper-based dissertations can be co-authored if the Doctoral candidate serves as the main author. It is however required the submission of at least three single-authored paper.
- 6) The format, maximum length and other attributes of dissertation are specified in the university guidelines, with allowance made for reasonable variation and the different formats that are traditional for specific disciplines.
- 7) University guidelines on thesis preparation cover issues such as plagiarism and the correct usage of quotations, and make clear the importance of the explicit acknowledgment at all relevant places in the dissertation of all contributions of others to the project.



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VII. Supervision

- 1) Doctoral student is appointed a supervisor officially in charge of overall management and supervision of the student's research training, monitoring of progress and to support the Doctoral candidate in the process of writing the dissertation.
- 2) The supervisor:
 - I. Holds a doctoral degree, is research active in the field associated with the area of study/dissertation of the candidate and able to provide guidance and monitoring of doctoral research.
 - II. Has experience with doctoral supervision and a track record of successful completions prior to the appointment as supervisor.
 - III. Is not take responsibility for supervision beyond a number of students compatible with his/her workload and seniority.
- 3) There are clearly defined criteria on the suitability of persons in the university as supervisors of Doctoral students.
- 4) Responsibilities of the supervisors are readily available and clearly communicated to supervisors and students.
- 5) There is a procedure ensuring that a supervisor is capable of taking on a proposed number of Doctoral students. This procedure takes into consideration the experience and reputation of the supervisor, the composition of his/her research group (number of research students and the stage of their training, number of research and support staff, etc.).
- 6) Supervisor is accessible and available for the doctoral student on a reasonable and regular basis and provides timely, effective and constructive feedback on the candidate's work.
- 7) In order to establish an effective working relationship, Doctoral candidate and supervisor formally meet on a regular basis (the frequency mirrors the doctoral candidate's need for guidance and conforms to institutional code of good practice) and maintain a rolling progress report available for programme director/administrator, to access and review.

- 8) Formal mechanisms, such as an annual progress review, are established to prevent Doctoral candidates with low prospects of completing the dissertation from remaining enrolled in the programme.
- 9) University and supervisor assume responsibility for the professional development of the Doctoral candidate (e.g. research writing and presentation skills, pedagogical development, academic etiquette). Progression in the programme should also be formally linked to the Doctoral candidate's achievements in these areas.
- 10) Formal mechanisms are available for the fair and impartial resolution of conflicts between supervisor and doctoral candidate. There are formal procedures allowing the change of a supervisor.
- 11) Adequate training and other provisions are available to enhance and support supervision (e.g. on supervisor's role and duties). Regular activities targeting the continuous development of supervisory capabilities are in place (e.g. mentoring of junior faculty member by senior professors). They are obligatory for first-time supervisors.
- 12) Doctoral student's development needs are identified and agreed jointly by the student, supervisor and appropriate staff at the start of the programme.
- 13) Supervisor ensures that Doctoral student participates substantially, or play a leading role, in the preparation of research papers and articles.
- 14) Supervisor encourages the doctoral student to engage in research stays abroad and to present research outcomes at local, national and international academic/professional conferences.
- 15) Supplementary support measures and training are provided for students from abroad who need such supports.

VIII. Monitoring of Student Progress

- 1) There is an initial formal meeting between the student and the supervisor, at which there is opportunity for clarification of procedures. At an early meeting the proposed research programme is explained and discussed in detail.
- 2) There is a requirement, and a procedure involving the student, for the development of a research plan and its revision at appropriate intervals.
- 3) There is a formal early review of the student's progress (within the first year) with defined options depending on rate of progress and particular circumstances.
- 4) There are formal reviews of progress at regular intervals with defined options depending on rate of progress and particular circumstances. A brief written record is maintained for each review and the procedures for such reviews ensure clarity and transparency for the student.
- 5) There are guidelines that specify normal and minimum degrees and frequencies of consultations between a student and his/her supervisors, and give options when these cannot be maintained due to unusual circumstances.
- 6) The formal decision to proceed to final write up and submit a dissertation for examination rests with the Doctoral candidate, but the candidate must show that s/he has obtained the advice of his/her supervisor before a dissertation may be submitted for examination (defense).
- 7) There is a clearly understood procedure whereby at any time a student may make a complaint related to the project or its supervision in appropriate instances, can appeal any formal decision made by his/her supervisor or progress review board.

IX. Final Assessment

- 1) Doctoral degree is awarded on the basis of a formal evaluation (defense) by a dissertation examination committee which consists of research active members not formally involved in the supervision of the candidate. The committee judges both the written thesis and the oral defense and gives its recommendation with respect to the standards defined below and determines the outcome of the examination process in compliance with national regulations:
 - Examiners are scientifically qualified and have adequate expertise in the field explored by the candidate. They are appointed in compliance with national regulations.
 - Examiners have experience with examining Doctoral degree theses.
 - Examiners do not have any conflict of interest (such as co-authoring parts of the dissertation, etc.).
- 2) There are procedures for the selection, approval and appointment of the examiners. The Doctoral candidate is informed when potential examiners and the overall make-up of the examination board are being considered.
- 3) The final assessment of a Doctoral thesis consists of an examination (review) of the written dissertation/thesis and an oral defense (viva voce) open to the public. The assessment process normally involves multiple steps, such as:
 - Examiners submit an independent evaluation report of the dissertation.
 - Following the oral defense, the thesis examination committee issues a verdict on granting a Doctoral degree.
- 4) There are guidelines for the oral examination process that provide for: format and timetable, length of the overall examination, feedback to the student at the end of the examination.
- 5) Safeguards exist to avoid substantial administrative delays between submission of a dissertation for examination and the examination itself.
- 6) There are defined criteria for the award of the Doctoral degree that take into account the variety of disciplines in which the degree is awarded. The criteria used are clear and readily available to doctoral student, staff and examiners.
- 7) The dissertation is evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

- Theoretical foundation (based on a relevant literature review and the development of a conceptual framework);
 - Rigorous research (e.g. published in nationally or internationally recognised, peer-reviewed journals);
 - Empirical testing (based on methodological framework and rigorous analysis);
 - Implications for theory (innovative contributions to theory application/development);
 - Implications for practice (relevant contributions to the improvement of professional practice and society);
 - Readability of the manuscript, quality of the oral presentation and discussion.
- 8) The National Qualifications Framework of Armenia is used for assessment of the overall achievements/learning outcomes of Doctoral students.
- 9) A clear description of the whole examination process from start to final approval of the examiners' report(s) is available to all concerned.
- 10) A particular internal examiner, with the support of the student supervisor, is responsible for monitoring and assuring the implementation of corrections to the dissertation that were prescribed by the examiners.
- 11) There is a defined appeal procedure that can be used by a Doctoral candidate or a supervisor in cases of disagreement with the examination outcome.