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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 policy document serves as the basis for quality assessment and enhancement of Doctoral education in YSU. It defines minimum standards for continuous development, benchmarking as well as peer-based quality assurance and accreditation of Doctoral programmes at YSU.

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 ensure 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 and research training, teaching & learning, Doctoral supervision, preparation of Doctoral dissertation as well as the credibility and reliability of the final assessment (defense).
3. YSU Doctoral programmes are subjected to periodic review, which allows for the updating of programme content, structure and delivery in light of the achieved programme (learning) outcomes.

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

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

I. Organisational Context

1. There are university structure and officer with overall responsibility for Doctoral education.
2. Institutional regulations are in place for Doctoral education which is 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 are a comprehensive and widely used Guidelines (Code of Conduct) that ensures transparency in the duties of all parties in Doctoral studies and covers all matters relevant to Doctoral students, supervisors, university officers and examiners.
5. The rights, duties and responsibilities of the student commencing Doctoral studies are defined and communicated clearly to the candidate. These include general matters as well as matters specific to the Doctoral studentship 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 maintains a system for data collection and analysis for Doctoral education, including the tracking of Doctoral graduates' career development.
9. University puts in place and promotes independent and formal procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals that are fair, robust, clear to all concerned, and applied consistently. The acceptable grounds for complaints and appeals are clearly defined.

10. 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, quality supervision, monitoring of annual student progress and assessment of Doctoral theses.

II. Research Environment

1. Doctoral education is undertaken through research training. The existence of a strong research environment is an obligatory condition for the provision of quality Doctoral studies.
2. Doctoral students are admitted into a research environment that provides support for conducting a high-quality research.
3. Doctoral programmes are supported with a sufficient number of research-active faculty members, who have proven records of academic achievements.
4. Doctoral candidates have access to the adequate research infrastructure necessary for their research work – hardware equipment, basic and more sophisticated software, ICT, access to literature and other databases, well equipped laboratories and libraries, – and highly qualified academic staff is provided in support of the Doctoral programmes. A fair and non-discriminatory access to research infrastructure is offered for all the students enrolled in the Doctoral programmes.
5. Doctoral students have appropriate opportunities for developing research, professional and personal skills.
6. 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 studies, 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.
7. All participants involved in the Doctoral education (including students, supervisors and other academic staff) adhere to an explicit Code of Ethical Conduct.

III. Admission Policy and Criteria

1. Admission procedures for Doctoral education are clear, consistently applied and demonstrate equality of opportunity.
2. Doctoral students are not recruited unless certain minimum common and individual facilities are available for their use.
3. Faculties and research centres plan for the recruitment of Doctoral students to ensure that local facilities are sufficient to provide them with high-quality research training.
4. Doctoral candidates are selected with consideration of existing strengths and specialisations by research-active faculty members and field supervisors. Preference is given to the 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 student 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 the enrollment of Doctoral students.
9. Provisions are made to ensure that applicant students from abroad are not disadvantaged and international students are supported at all stages during recruitment, registration and throughout their studies.

IV. Objectives of Doctoral Education

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 for LLL.
3. Doctoral programmes are associated with a number of explicitly stated learning objectives/outcomes defined by the level (qualification) descriptors of the NQFA.
4. All the activities within a Doctoral programme 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, Doctoral training includes 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.

V. Doctoral Programme/Coursework

1. There is a structured programme of professional development and opportunities for skills acquisition for Doctoral students. Doctoral programmes include a mix of coursework, original research under supervision and professional development activities.
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 Doctoral programme involves substantial coverage of the literature in the field of specialisation, advanced courses in research methods/methodology and techniques, research ethics and scholarly integrity, 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 is provided in the ways appropriate to the specific broad disciplines
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, including through scheduled consultations with supervisor, are available to aid students in efficient thesis writing. These include additional or refresher training on systematic work planning, appropriate writing styles, information technologies and document processing; provision of writing-up facilities, etc.
11. As students progress through their research projects, they are (formally or informally) given training on (and/or supervised experience of) applying for research grants and writing scholarly articles for publication in peer-reviewed scientific journals, etc.
12. The quality, consistency and relevance of Doctoral programmes are regularly reviewed through formal assessment and student feedback ensuring that ineffectual elements and courses are discontinued or improved/updated as appropriate.
13. Procedures are in place to allow a regular review and updating of the structure, content and quality of the programme. These procedures involve at least four categories of stakeholders – research students, faculty members, supervisors and Doctoral programme management.

VI. Supervision and Monitoring of Student Progress

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. There are clearly defined criteria on the suitability of persons in the university as supervisors of Doctoral students. The supervisor:
 - 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.
 - Has experience with doctoral supervision and a track record of successful completions prior to the appointment as a supervisor.
 - Is not taking responsibility for supervision beyond a number of students compatible with his/her workload and seniority.
3. 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.).
4. Responsibilities of the supervisors are readily available and clearly communicated to supervisors and students.
5. In order to establish an effective working relationship, Doctoral candidate and supervisor formally meet on a reasonable and regular basis. There are guidelines that specify normal and minimum degrees and frequencies of consultations between a student and his/her supervisor. Supervisor provides timely, effective and constructive feedback on the candidate's work.

6. There are formal reviews of the student's progress at regular intervals (normally on a semester basis) with defined options depending on rate of progress (especially during the first year) and particular circumstances. A written progress report is maintained for each review and the procedures for such reviews ensure clarity and transparency for the student. The progress report is made available for programme director/administrator to access and review.
7. There is a requirement and a procedure involving the student, for the development of a research plan and its revision at appropriate intervals.
8. There is an initial formal meeting between the student and the supervisor, at which there is an opportunity for clarification of procedures. At an early meeting the proposed research plan is explained and discussed in detail.
9. There is a formal early review of the student's progress (within the first year) with defined options depending on the rate of progress and particular circumstances.
10. 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.
11. Doctoral student's development needs are identified and agreed jointly by the student, supervisor and appropriate staff at the start of the programme.
12. The university and supervisor assume responsibility for the professional development of the Doctoral candidate (e.g. research writing and presentation skills, pedagogical development, academic etiquette, etc.). Progression in the programme is also formally linked to the Doctoral candidate's achievements in these areas.
13. 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.

14. Supervisor ensures that Doctoral student participates substantially, or plays a leading role, in the preparation of research papers and articles.
15. Supervisor encourages the Doctoral student to engage in research stays abroad and to present research outcomes at local, national and international academic/professional conferences.
16. Supplementary support measures and training are provided for international students who need such supports.
17. The formal decision to proceed to final write up and submit a dissertation for examination (defense) rests with the Doctoral candidate. The candidate obtains the advice of the supervisor before the dissertation may be submitted for final examination.
18. Formal mechanisms are available for the fair and impartial resolution of conflicts between supervisor and Doctoral candidate. There is a clearly understood procedure whereby a student may make a complaint related to the dissertation project or its supervision in appropriate instances, can appeal any formal decision made by his/her supervisor or progress review board. There are formal procedures allowing the change of a supervisor.

VII. 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). The quality of Doctoral dissertation is the basis for granting the candidate a Doctoral degree.
2. The format of the Doctoral dissertation varies – from a research monograph to a body of research papers published in internationally recognized and peer-reviewed journals.
3. The Doctoral dissertation includes:
 - 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 as well 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 required the submission of at least three single-authored papers.
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 dissertation 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 research project.

VIII. Final Assessment (Defense)

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 evaluation criteria defined below and determines the outcome of the examination process in compliance with national regulations.
2. Examiners of the dissertation committee:
 - Are scientifically qualified and have adequate expertise in the field explored by the candidate. They are appointed in compliance with national regulations.
 - Have experience with examining Doctoral degree dissertation.
 - Do not have any conflict of interest (such as co-authoring parts of the dissertation, etc.).
3. There are criteria and 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 committee are being considered.
4. The final assessment of a Doctoral dissertation consists of an examination (review) of the written dissertation 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.
5. 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.

6. Safeguards exist to avoid substantial administrative delays between the submission of a dissertation for examination and the examination itself.
7. 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, academic staff and examiners.
8. 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 or development);
 - Implications for practice (relevant contributions to the improvement of professional practice and society);
 - Quality and readability of the manuscript, and the oral presentation and discussion.
9. The National Qualifications Framework of Armenia (NQFA) is used for the assessment of overall achievements/learning outcomes of Doctoral students.
10. A clear description of the whole examination process from start to the final approval of the examiners' report(s) is available to all concerned.
11. A particular internal examiner is responsible for monitoring and assuring the implementation of corrections to the dissertation that were prescribed by the examination committee.

12. There is a defined appeal procedure that can be used by a Doctoral candidate or a supervisor in cases of disagreement with the examination (defense) outcome.