Decision No. EI-2024-21 on the accreditation of the French University in Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia

The President of the High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education,

Considering the Research Code, in particular Articles L. 114-3-1 to L. 114-3-6;

Considering the Board's deliberation of 29th September 2022 on the accreditation criteria for international study programmes (except doctorates/PhDs);

Considering the Decision No. 2023-9 of 16th March 2023 on the international accreditation procedure of the High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education;

Considering the agreement No. 2023-10 of 5th June 2023 - for the evaluation/accreditation of the French University in Armenia with the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance;

Considering the opinion issued by the Accreditation Commission on 25th April 2024;

Decides:

Article 1

Noting that the French University in Armenia (UFAR) meets the six accreditation criteria, voted by the Board of the High Council on 29th September 2022, as follows:

FIELD 1: STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

ACCREDITATION CRITERION 1 - DEFINING THE INSTITUTION'S STRATEGY

UFAR operates in a highly competitive national environment where it stands out for its unique offer of foreign double degrees. The university enjoys a good reputation in the Armenian labour market and has good relations with the public and business sectors. UFAR's integration into national and international academic networks has increased over the years. Although UFAR has developed a strategic plan, governance issues undermine its implementation and institutional development. The university has also adopted a growth strategy based on increasing the number of students, which is inadequate with the resources available. This is expected to affect the quality of the educational offer and to weaken the university's reputation.

ACCREDITATION CRITERION 2 - GOVERNANCE AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

The university operates under an international agreement, which results in a weak governance structure with a lack of commitment from key stakeholders, such as the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. The high turnover of rectors, who are appointed by the aforementioned Ministry, does not allow for a long-term vision at the top of the university. In addition, the Board of Trustees does not address the main problems of UFAR (lack of permanent academic staff, fragile business model, limited real estate policy, etc.). Although UFAR has a highly committed staff and is able to successfully address short-term issues, medium- and long-term problems are neglected by its key stakeholders.

FIELD 2: POLICY ON RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND THE INCLUSION OF SCIENCE IN SOCIETY

ACCREDITATION CRITERION 3 - RESEARCH POLICY

The development of research at UFAR is a relatively recent endeavour, with more significant progress since 2018. This situation is mainly due to the limited number of permanent academic staff since its inception. At that time, UFAR was meant to be business-oriented. Since then, although research is still in its infancy stage, UFAR has introduced a comprehensive policy for resources and a support system that is promising: the creation of a joint doctoral school in computer science with the IIAP, agreements with partner universities to enrol PhD students, the diversification of funding sources, the introduction of a « research incentive scheme » for its doctoral students and academic staff...

ACCREDITATION CRITERION 4 - INNOVATION POLICY AND SOCIETAL IMPACT

Despite a rather weak research base, UFAR has built a solid foundation for innovation through its long-standing relationships with companies and participation in science-related projects and events. The university promotes innovation through compulsory project-based learning in each of its programmes. In 2021, UFAR and five Armenian partner universities launched the «Accelerator 28», an innovative development programme, which aims to promote entrepreneurship in Armenia by providing support, mentoring, and resources. The university's financial investment in innovation and the inclusion of science in society is still modest, but the strategy and initiatives are relevant and beginning to take effect.

FIELD 3: EDUCATION, STUDENT AND CAMPUS LIFE POLICY

ACCREDITATION CRITERION 5 - TEACHING POLICY

In line with the status of French University in Armenia, all the programmes offered by UFAR are double degrees with a French university (Lyon 3 University or Toulouse III University), most of them at the bachelor's level. They require a good command of the French language. They provide the Armenian labour market with well-educated graduates who are highly employable. The success of UFAR's teaching policy is based on its student-centred approach, where the quality of the teaching process is a constant concern. UFAR relies on a very diverse academic staff, including French teachers and external professionals. Further development could be undertaken to simplify the processes of human resources policy.

ACCREDITATION CRITERION 6 - STUDENT AND CAMPUS LIFE

UFAR collects a lot of data throughout the student life cycle and the staff are committed to student success although some structural issues remain such as timetable management, internationalisation of the student body, and high levels of repetition and dropout during studies. Despite its spatial limitations, the university seeks solutions for its students and is willing to improve the working environment. It provides important support to students, including financial support through scholarships, and seeks to involve them in its governance through the Student Council.

Article 2

The French University in Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia, is accredited for a period of 3 years, which may be extended for two years, subject to a follow-up that may include an on-site visit.

Article 3

The decision is accompanied by the following recommendations and comments:
— Strengthen the institutional governance: the President of Toulouse III University should sit on the Board of Trustees and the Board members should better address the main problems of UFAR.
— Recruit permanent academic staff in the three main faculties of the university (law, management and IMA) and develop a genuine research policy.
— Review the university's strategy to make it sustainable and gain support from internal and external stakeholders.
— Introduce a 4-year renewable term for the rector in accordance with usual academic standards.
— Dialogue with the stakeholders to fund new premises – the university will not be able to self-finance its new premises and needs support from its stakeholders, in particular from the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, including its local representatives.
— Implement a stronger quality assurance system based on digital tools, both from an administrative (e.g. dashboards) and pedagogical (e.g. achievement of learning outcomes) perspective. The help of the French partner universities in these areas should be very welcome.
— Develop an "apprenticeship offer" in the master's degrees (i.e. students alternate study at university and work) in order to meet the expectations of the Armenian students to pursue further education while earning money and gaining work experience.
— Develop some courses in English (for example, during only one selected semester) to attract international students and provide current students with the opportunity to benefit from internationalisation at home.

— Adopt a risk-based approach and seek to diversify the partnerships with French universities so as not to become dependent on the relationships with Jean Moulin Lyon 3 and Toulouse III Paul Sabatier universities

Article 4

This decision will be published on the Hcéres website.

Paris, 17 May 2024.

The acting President
signed
Stéphane Le Bouler