QUALITY ASSURANCE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION IN A POST-SOVIET CONTEXT: THE CASE OF ARMENIA

Ruben Topchyan, PhD

Director of ANQA

Susanna Karakhanyan, PhD

Head of Policy Development and Implementation Unit

INQAAHE CONFERENCE 2011
Conference sub-theme:
EFFECTIVE QA PROCESSES FOR DIVERSITY, DEVELOPMENT, and SUSTAINABILITY

OUTLINE

- The context

- QA approaches in Armenia

- Key concepts explored

- Main findings

- Major implications

ARMENIA:
GENERAL INFORMATION ON TERTIARY EDUCATION

Population: 2,967,004 (July 2009 est.)

18 public universities and 13 branches
3 intergovernmental universities
48 private universities
37 private accredited universities
5 branches of international and non-state universities
3 branches of international public universities
83 public colleges
34 vocational institutions
12 private accredited colleges
11 private licensed colleges

POST-SOVIET ISSUES

- Management styles: centrally controlled vs. independent

- Curriculum: "blank" and "black" aspects

- Modernization:
  - Teaching and learning approaches
  - Lack of diversity of sources and resources

- Student demand
  - Explosion in demand for higher education
  - Diversification of provisions (emergence of private sector)
  - Diversification of sources (private funding in public sector)
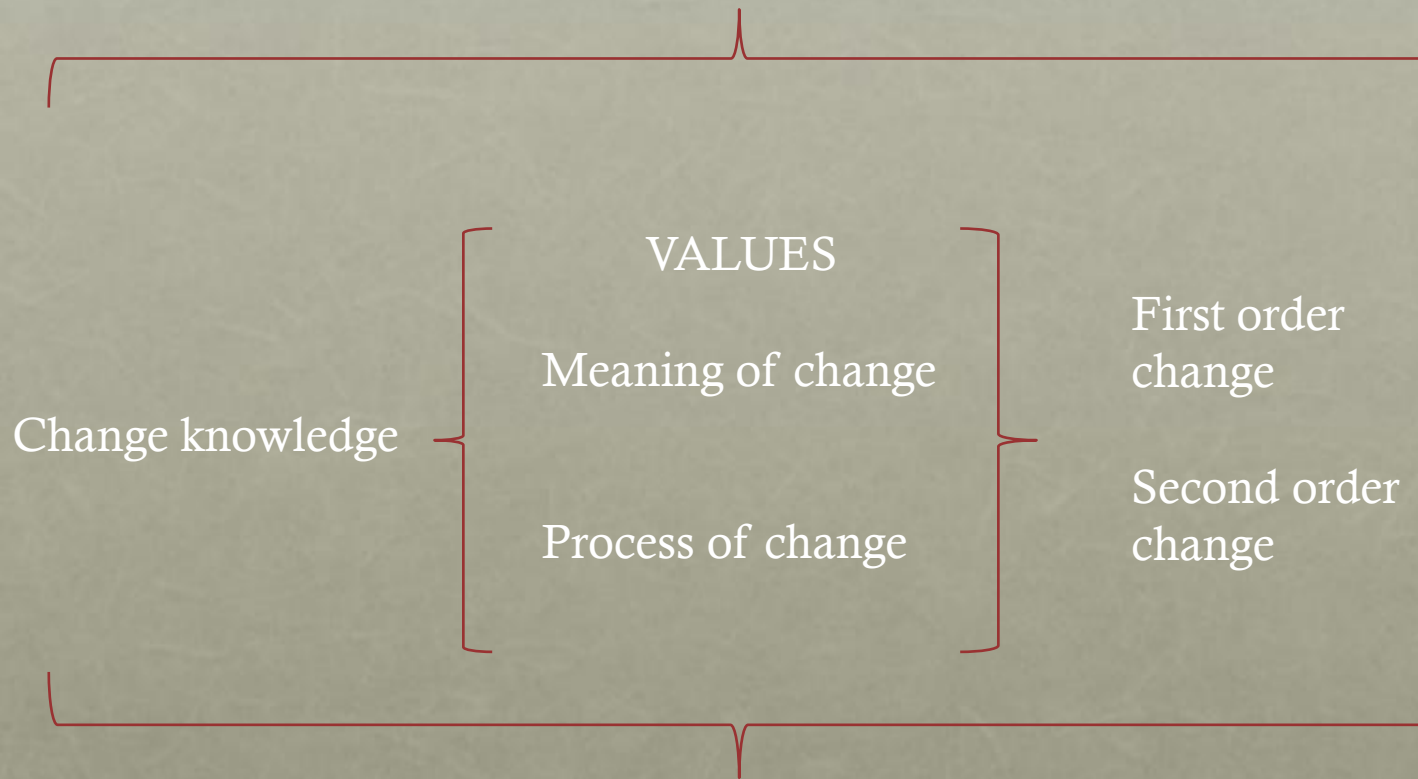
QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ARMENIA

- Two major phases
  - First phase: 2000-2008
    - Administering body: Ministry of Education and Science
    - Accreditation of programmes
    - In case of 65% of accredited programmes the whole university was accredited
    - Participation of only private sector, although the public sector was obliged to do so by law
  - Second phase: 2008 – up to now
    - Administering body: ANQA
    - QA Framework:
      - institutional audit – development
      - Programme accreditation – recognition
    - Transitional period to allow for establishment of the necessary mechanisms for sustainable management.

QUESTIONS EXPLORED

- What is the effect of the new quality assurance approaches on the higher education system in Armenia?

- What is the best approach to quality assurance for the universities in a post-Soviet country?

QA PREREQUISITES

PDCA Analytical Framework

VALUES

Meaning of change

Change knowledge

Process of change

First order change

Second order change

Organizational culture change

ANQA QA APPROACH

- Development and enhancement vs. control

- Ongoing workshops aimed at preaching the philosophy and values of change

- Elaboration on the ESGs to develop own standards and guidelines to be understood by the stakeholders and meet the needs

- Involvement of the teachers and administrators in the development of QA standards, policies and procedures

- A series of pilots at both private and public universities

- Creating favorable background for promoting transformation
  - Ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Education and Science and RA Government to revise approaches to QA

CONCEPTS EXPLORED

- (1) the extent of quality management (here we used PDCA cycle to analyse the quality management approaches),

- (2) the extent of change knowledge of the actual implementers,

- (3) needs to re-culture the system to meet the demands,

- (4) the extent to which ANQA quality assurance approaches impact the performance of the universities in the sphere of quality assurance, and

- (5) the perceptions of the direct implementers about the quality assurance approach that best fits the post-Soviet context.

ANQA PILOTS

- Sample
  - 4 institutional audits - 3 public and 1 private university
  - 6 programme accreditations – 3 public universities, 2 private universities and 1 college

- Data sources
  - Desk-reviews
  - Focus groups – self-assessment team, teachers, students, administrators
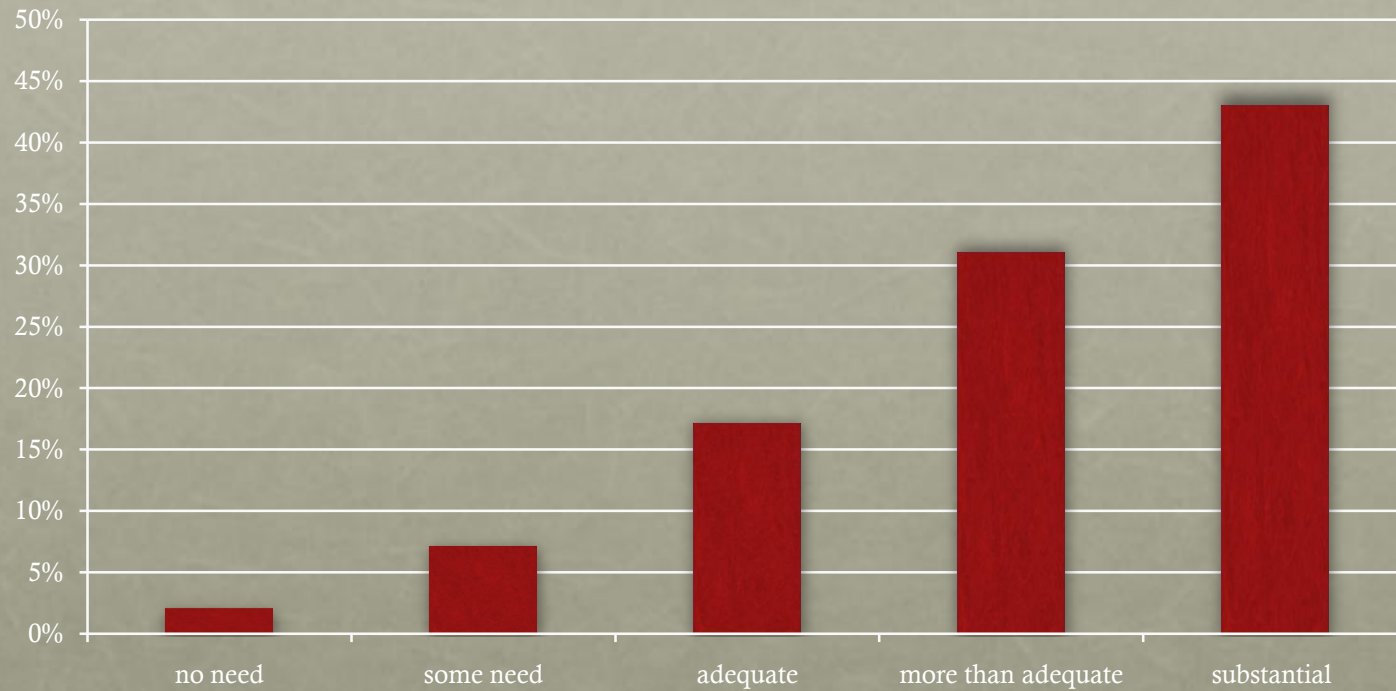 - Questionnaires – on the needs and effects of ANQA approaches
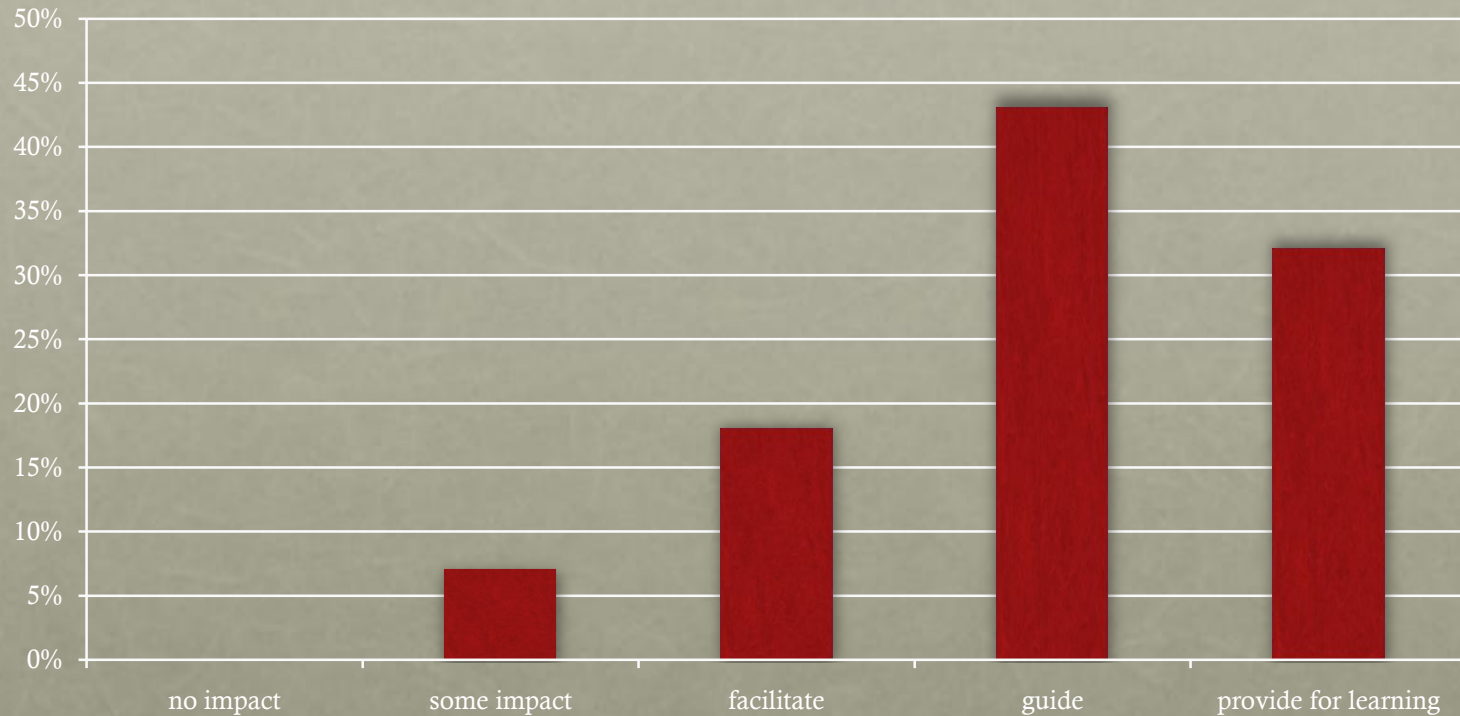
FINDINGS: QUALITY MANAGEMENT
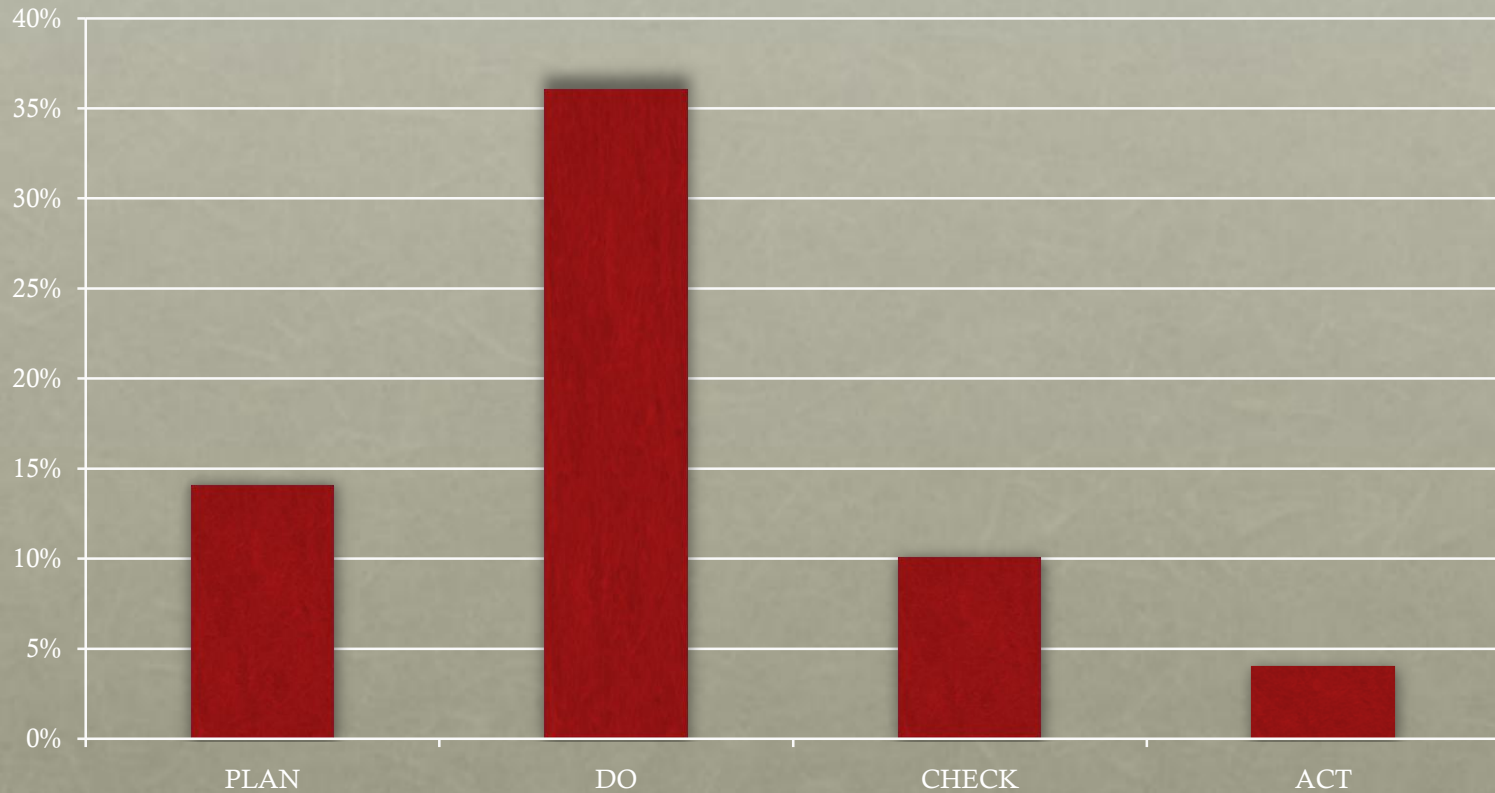
FINDINGS: CHANGE KNOWLEDGE
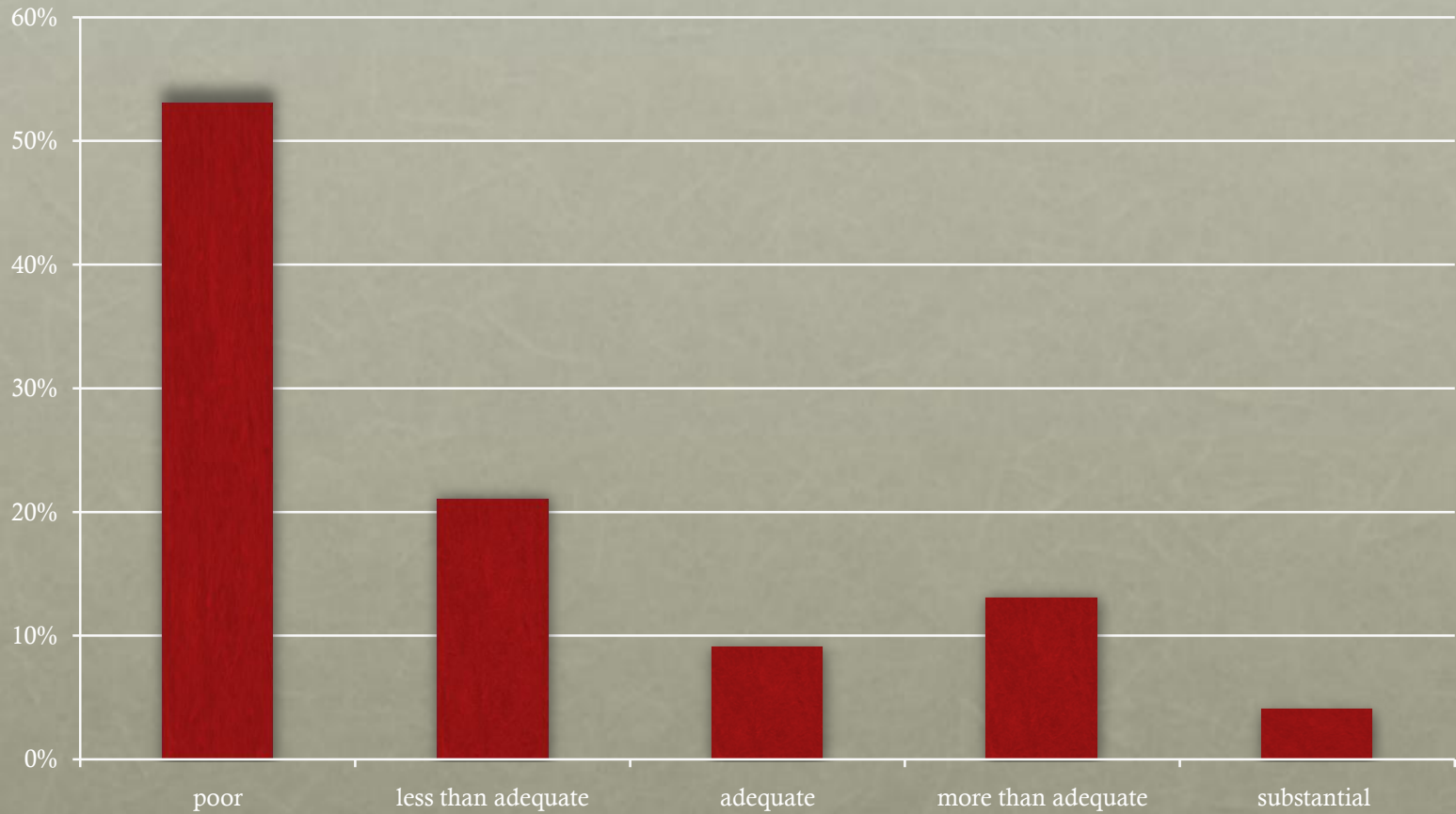
FINDINGS:
NEED TO RE-CULTURE

FINDINGS: ANQA'S IMPACT

FINDINGS: ANQA'S IMPACT

- **Administrator:** *It has been a very productive process… we have come to understand the mechanisms underlying HEI management… Throughout the process we developed almost 50% of our documents workable in real life.*

- **QA Officer:** *This is a challenging process, but it does make you learn a lot.*

FINDINGS: PERCEPTIONS ON THE BEST APPROACH TO QA

- Strategies aimed at supporting universities and promoting development seem to be a priority
  - 77% of the respondents stated their readiness and need to undergo a transitional preparatory phase.

  - 61% of the respondents found institutional audits providing for necessary guidance and training aimed at development of an internal quality assurance system and enhancement to be a necessary element

FINDINGS: PERCEPTIONS ON THE BEST APPROACH TO QA

- 87% of the respondents found voluntary programme accreditation leading to credit recognition, state funding and internationalization to be appropriate only after some preparatory work during institutional audits has been done.

- Only 23% of the respondents considered their institutions to be ready to undergo programme accreditation and institutional audits without any preparatory phase.

MAJOR IMPLICATIONS

- Fitness for purpose vs. transformation

- Role of a QA agency: advising (stimulation and facilitation of reforms) vs. accrediting

- Professionalization: enhancement vs. control

- Depth: teaching and learning level vs. mere procedures

- Role of international organizations: promoting
  - Comparability across diversity of systems –targeting teaching and learning level
  - Qualifications recognition

THANK YOU

www.anqa.am

ruben.topchyan@anqa.am

s.karakhanyan@anqa.am