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|  | **NEWS RELEASE**  |

**World Bank Places Governance at the Heart of Higher Education Reform**

YEREVAN, May 7, 2013 – **“Higher Education Reform in Armenia”**, a one-day conference, on May 7, organized by the World Bank and the Ministry of Education, with participation of Government agencies, representatives from tertiary education and research institutions, as well as employers and student bodies will share the latest trends in higher education reforms, the progress in the Bologna Process in Armenia and abroad, as well as the major findings of the report on university governance.

The author of the **“Addressing Governance at the Center of Higher Education Reforms in Armenia”** report, through the first step towards an extensive stakeholder consultation series, hope to facilitate the explorations of an adequate balance between suitable roles for the government and higher education institutions (HEIs) in terms of autonomy and accountability.

Since joining the Bologna Process in 2005, the Armenian government and HEIs have made significant progress in reforming the higher education system. However, the public perception of higher education governance and management still needs to be improved. Reasons for the poor public perception of higher education governance are primarily embedded in system-wide factors.

*“The World Bank has always been keen on supporting the Government in reforming its education system, specifically highlighting the need for modernization of tertiary education,”* said **Jean-Michel Happi, World Bank Country Manager for Armenia**. *“The government and higher education institutions have made impressive progress in reforming the higher education system. All the necessary constructs are arranged for a new system to come about. It needs yet another conclusive step to remedy the perception of the public.”*

Recent research has identified that governance structure and regulatory framework is the key to the development of overall higher education system. A strong governance framework and favorable regulatory conditions at the national level combined with good governance and management at institutional level can enable HEIs to effectively exercise their autonomy and accountability, and promote innovative behavior among institutions and effectively accomplish educational and other purposes *“Autonomy needs to be balanced with accountability. Good governance is all about ensuring ethical decision-making and efficient provision of human, material, and financial resources for students’ successful learning and overall institutional performance,”* said **Sachiko Kataoka, Lead Author of the Report.**

The findings elucidated by the author of the report suggest that the underperformance of the higher education system is associated with the incoherent legal framework and the weak capacity to effectively exercise autonomy and accountability. To maximize the benefits of various on-going reforms and further develop higher education, the expert team of the World Bank, suggests the government together with HEIs to place university governance and management at the heart of system-wide higher education reforms.

Hence, the author calls for a need to develop a strong governance framework as well as leadership and management skills among university and systems leaders who would be responsible for any reforms to be successfully implemented in a sustainable manner.

Other key recommendations substantiated in the report and planned to be discussed during the conference are as follows:

* Establish a diversified, cohesive tertiary education system by integrating university and non-university tertiary education (*i.e.,* vocational and technical colleges), as well as higher education and research;
* Continue strengthening the quality assurance system by further supporting the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA), shifting from state educational standards to learning outcome based quality management at institutional level, developing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and linking the outcomes to labor market;
* Advance the already initiated comprehensive reform of higher education financing, mobilizing both public and private funding;
* Build system-wide and institutional capacity for policy-making in order to balance the functions of autonomy and accountability.

It is expected that the conference will help initiate the discussion and brainstorming around the highlighted recommendations to outline possible scenarios for finding the suitable balance between the autonomy and accountability of HEIs in the contexts of the bigger agenda set by the Bologna Process and internationalization of higher education in Armenia.

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