

**Rejection of the Application
by National Center For Educational Quality
Enhancement (NCEQE)
for Renewal of Inclusion on the Register**

Register Committee
26-27 November 2024

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Ver. 1.0
Date 2024-12-11
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Application of:	2023-04-04		
Agency registered since:	2019-04-01		
Type of review:	Full	Site visit:	2023-11-05
External review report of:	2024-03-26	Submitted:	2024-04-12
Review coordinated by:	European Association for Quality Assurance of Higher Education (ENQA)		
Review panel members:	Gohar Hovhannisyanyan, Jordi Villà i Freixa, Klemen Šubic, Topias Tolonen		
Decision of:	2024-11-27		
Registration until:	n/a		
Absented themselves from decision-making:	Giorgi Munjishvili (EQAR Secretariat)		
Attachments:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. External Review Report (external file), 2024-03-26 2. Applicant's statement on the report, 2024-04-12 3. Minuted clarification call with the Review Panel, 2024-05-28 4. Letter to the President of EQAR, 2024-06-24 5. Additional representation by NCEQE, 2024-08-09 6. Third-party complaint, 2024-10-10 7. Clarification request to NCEQE, 2024-10-25 8. Response to clarification request by NCEQE with Annexes¹, 2024-11-11 		

1. The application of 2023-04-04 adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. The Register Committee considered the external review report of 2024-03-26 on the compliance of NCEQE with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015 version).

¹ Annexes 2 to 9 of the response to the clarification request are unofficial translations prepared internally by the agency.

3. The Register Committee further considered NCEQE's statement on the external review report of 2024-04-12 and the letter to the President of EQAR of 2024-06-24.

4. The Register Committee sought and received clarification from the Chair and the Secretary of the review panel on 2024-05-28.

5. The Register Committee invited NCEQE to make additional representation on the grounds for possible rejection on 2024-07-02.

6. The Register Committee received a third-party complaint regarding the work of the agency on 2024-10-10. In order to explore the allegations outlined in the complaint, the Register Committee sought further clarification from the agency on 2024-10-25. NCEQE disclosed its response on 2024-11-11.

Analysis:

7. In considering NCEQE's compliance with the ESG, the Register Committee took into account the following activities:

- Institutional Authorization
- Programme Accreditation (including the procedure for Accreditation of cluster programmes and International accreditation of education programmes of HEIs operating abroad)
- Accreditation of Joint Programmes

8. The activities *Increasing the student quota at higher education institutions* and *Increasing the student quota on the Medical Doctor educational program*, are not within the scope of the ESG and, thus, not pertinent to the application inclusion on the Register.

9. The Register Committee found that the report provides sufficient evidence and analysis on NCEQE's level of compliance with the ESG.

10. With regard to the specific European Standards, the Register Committee considered the following:

ESG 2.1 – Consideration of internal quality assurance

11. The panel found that standards of ESG Part 1 are addressed in NCEQE's methodologies with the exception of some elements of ESG 1.1, ESG 1.5 and ESG 1.10. While the Register Committee concurred with the panel and found the agency to be compliant with the standard, it underlined the panel's recommendation that NCEQE should cover all aspects of ESG Part 1 in its ESG aligned activities.

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ESG 2.2 – Designing methodologies fit for purpose

12. Since its registration on EQAR, NCEQE introduced two new activities – Accreditation of cluster programmes and International accreditation of education programmes of HEIs operating abroad².

13. At the time of the review, NCEQE was in the initial stage of organising its first review of the international accreditation of education programmes of HEIs operating abroad. As a consequence, the panel only reviewed limited aspects of the procedure. From the report, the Committee could not understand whether the new procedures are fit for purpose as requested by the standard and inquired further information from the panel.

14. The panel clarified that the written procedure is prima facie fit for purpose, but could not attest to the practical implementation (see minuted document of 28-05-2024). Following the explanation provided, **the Register Committee could follow the panel’s conclusion and found the agency to be compliant with the standard. The Committee, however, requested that the next review looks into the fitness for purpose of the procedure (ESG 2.2), the review process (ESG 2.3) and the consistency of outcomes (ESG 2.5) of the international accreditation of education programmes of HEIs operating abroad.**

ESG 2.5 – Criteria for outcomes

15. The Committee learned that NCEQE employs various tools to ensure consistency in its decision making, such as clear and published standards, guidebooks and templates, trainings and involvement of agency staff members in the review process.

16. The panel, however, found that these tools have not been implemented consistently. For example, some of the meetings, including the dissemination of the preparatory materials of the Authorization and Accreditation Councils, were not planned well in advance and some of the decision making practices relied on private information gathering by the councils’ members. In panel’s view (see minuted document of 2024-05-28), however, the inconsistencies in the utilisation of the tools did not have implications over the formal outcomes of NCEQE, including the compliance levels of the standards and the final decisions.

17. On 2024-10-10, EQAR received a third-party complaint alleging significant challenges faced by the Authorization and Accreditation Councils in maintaining consistency in the interpretation and application of authorization and accreditation standards. The complaint stated that the Councils “*frequently change the expert recommendations,*” resulting in more or less favourable outcomes for certain institutions undergoing the accreditation process, with such practices reportedly occurring mostly in 2024.

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² See more in Decision on Substantive Change Report (of 2023-03-03)
<https://www.eqar.eu/register/agencies/agency/?id=59>

18. From the response to the complaint by NCEQE (of 2024-11-11), the Register Committee learned that, out of 24 applications concluded between 2022 and 2024, the final conclusions on the standards differed from those proposed by the panels in four cases – three of which occurred in 2024. This trend resulted in either more or less favourable outcomes for the concerned higher education institutions.

19. Through media reports³, the Register Committee learned additional details about the authorization process for one HEI whose final accreditation yielded a disadvantageous result. These reports indicated that, despite the panel’s positive assessment of the institution, the Authorization Council—following a public hearing—revised some conclusions to a lower level without providing a clear explanation for its decision.

20. The Committee could not understand, without a panel insight, whether the increased discrepancy between the panels’ and the Authorisation Council’s conclusions occurring after the site visit (2023-11-05) steams from the (im)proper use of the tools for consistent application of agency’s criteria or other external factors (see ESG 3.3). **The Register Committee concurred with the panel’s conclusion and found the agency to be partially compliant with the standard due to the discrepant use of the tools for consistent interpretation of the standards. The Register Committee also found that further panel insight is needed to evaluate whether the agency’s criteria are interpreted consistently and whether the outcomes are evidence-based at the given time.**

ESG 2.7 – Complaints and appeals

21. In its decision for inclusion on EQAR (of 2019-06-26), the Register Committee expressed concerns regarding the procedure for setting the composition of the Appeals’ Council as its members were appointed by the Minster for Education and Science. From the report, the Committee learned that the members are now appointed by the Prime Minister of Georgia. The Committee did not find that the current arrangements improve the independence of the Appeals’ Council as it’s organisational structure still depends on the government, and further addressed the issue under the standard 3.3.

22. At the time of the registration procedure in 2018, the Committee was also unable to establish whether the complaints’ procedure was known and accessible. From the external review report, the Register Committee learned that the complaints’ procedure is now available and clear to all stakeholders.

³ Radio Tavisupleba (2024), “All about the Ilia University authorization process” (in Georgian), available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33146708.html> & Publika.ge, (2024), “Iliauni received authorization with a request to conduct monitoring within one year”, available at: <https://publika.ge/iliaunim-avtorizacia-ert-welshi-monitoringis/>

23. **Following the improvements made regarding the accessibility of the complaints' procedure, the Register Committee was able to concur with the panel that NCEQE is now compliant with the standard.**

ESG 3.1 – Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

24. At the time of the first registration on EQAR in 2019, NCEQE was in the process of establishing a Coordinating Council – a stakeholders' body for management and development of the agency. From the report, the Register Committee understood that the Coordinating Council is now fully functioning. The panel found that, however, this body has a supporting role in the work of the Director, rather than being a decision-maker that holds accountability within the agency.

25. While the Register Committee concurred with the panel's conclusion and found the agency to be compliant with the standard, it underlined the panel's recommendation that in order for the agency to engage stakeholders in a more meaningful way, the power-balance in the decision-making between the Coordinating Council and the Director should be reconsidered (see also ESG 3.3).

ESG 3.3 – Independence

26. The Register Committee expressed concerns over the organisational independence of NCEQE in its decision for inclusion on the register (of 2019-06-26) due to the strong involvement of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia in the appointment of members of several bodies, including the Authorisation and Accreditation Councils, the Director of NCEQE and the members of the Appeals' Council (see also ESG 2.7).

27. The Committee learned from the panel and the documents submitted by the agency, that NCEQE introduced several novelties aiming to ensure its independence from the government, such as excluding public officials from appointment as members of the Coordinating Council and involving the Coordinating Council in the selection of the Director and members of the Accreditation, Authorization and Appeal Councils.

28. The Register Committee found that these are positive developments towards ensuring better power balance within the agency., but that the status quo remains challenging due to the role of the Coordination Council in the decision making in NCEQE, which, in practice, is still moderate (see also ESG 3.1).

29. From the review report and the response to the third-party complaint (of 2024-11-11), the Register Committee learned that NCEQE underwent three leadership changes in 2024. During this period, both the Deputy Minister for School Education⁴ and the current Minister of Education, Science, and Youth served as directors of the agency.

⁴ Holding both positions simultaneously since January 2022

30. In the additional representation, NCEQE explained that in order to safeguard the agency's independence from political interferences, legislative amendments have been adopted in July 2024, prohibiting the Director of the agency to hold any additional position, including being a government official. The Committee acknowledged that the legislative changes would prevent such occurrences in the future. It, however, could not determine whether high-level political figures continue to exert influence on the agency's work despite the formal prohibitions, especially with Government's high level of involvement in the selection of candidates for several leadership and managerial positions in the agency.

31. From the third-party complaint, the Register Committee learned that NCEQE faces high staff turnover, allegedly due to the political interference over the agency. In the response to the third-party complaint, NCEQE confirmed that almost half of all permanent staff of the quality department of the agency departed between 2022 and 2024. The peak of staff overturn occurred in 2024, when almost one third of all the permanent staff left the quality department of the agency.

32. The Register Committee found that the agency remains having weak organisational independence as the government persists having strong involvement in the appointment of several NCEQE's bodies. The Register Committee also found that the findings presented in the review report, the third-party complaint and the response to the complaint could imply that since the last review (of 2023-05-11) the agency's independence has been infringed. The Committee found that further panel insight should assess whether the Government's significant involvement in the agency's operations affects the notable staff overturn (i.e. the operational independence) and the final conclusions of the accreditation decisions (i.e. the independence of formal outcomes) (see also ESG 2.5) .

33. In the light of the severity of evidences outlined in the documented materials, the Register Committee, could not verify whether NCEQE complies with the standard at the given time. The Register Committee could not concur with the panel's conclusion, and found that the agency is be non-compliant with the standard. The Committee found that further panel insight is needed to asses whether the agency acts autonomously as a whole.

ESG 3.4 – Thematic analysis

34. NCEQE was found to be partially compliant with the standard (see decision of 2019-06-26) as it did not publish thematic analyses in a systematic manner.

35. Since their registration on EQAR, a new department dedicated to performing thematic analysis has been established. Four thematic analysis and studies have been conducted and another three were planned for 2023.

36. The Register Committee welcomed the steps taken by NCEQE. Following the improvements made by NCEQE, the Register Committee found that the agency now complies with the standard.

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ESG 3.6 – Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

37. The Register Committee concurred with the panel’s conclusion, and underlined panel’s recommendation that NCEQE should develop clear internal procedures on handling complaints.

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38. For the remaining standards, the Register Committee was able to concur with the review panel’s analysis and conclusion without further comments.

Conclusion:

39. Based on the external review report and the considerations above, the Register Committee concluded that NCEQE demonstrated compliance with the ESG (Parts 2 and 3) as follows:

Standard	Previous decision (2019-06-19)	Review panel conclusion	Register Committee conclusion
2.1	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.2	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.3	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.4	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.5	Compliance	Partial compliance	Partial compliance
2.6	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.7	Partial compliance	Compliance	Compliance
3.1	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
3.2	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
3.3	Partial compliance	Partial compliance	Non-compliance
3.4	Partial compliance	Compliance	Compliance
3.5	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
3.6	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
3.7	Compliance	(not expected)	Compliance (by virtue of applying)

40. Since NCEQE does not comply with one standard, the Register Committee was unable to conclude that NCEQE complies substantially with the ESG as a whole.

41. The Register Committee therefore rejected the application.

42. NCEQE has the right, according to §3.21 of the Procedures for Applications, to undergo a focused review addressing those issues that led to rejection, and to reapply within 18 months based on that focused review.

43. NCEQE has the right to appeal this decision of the Register Committee in accordance with the [EQAR Appeals Procedure](#). Any appeal must reach EQAR within 40 days from receipt of this decision.

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უმაღლესი განათლების ხარისხის უზრუნველყოფის
ევროპული რეესტრის (EQAR) პრეზიდენტს,
ბატონ სტეფან ლაუვიკს,

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ბატონო ლაუვიკ,

სსიპ - განათლების ხარისხის განვითარების ეროვნული ცენტრის (NCEQE) სახელით გვსურს გამოვხატოთ გულწრფელი მადლიერება პირადად თქვენი და უმაღლესი განათლების ხარისხის უზრუნველყოფის ევროპული რეესტრის (EQAR) ყველა წევრის მიმართ. ჩვენ ვაფასებთ თქვენს მუდმივ მხარდაჭერას და თანამშრომლობით პარტნიორობას, პატივს ვცემთ ჩვენს საერთო ვალდებულებებს უმაღლესი განათლების ხარისხის უზრუნველყოფის ევროპული რეესტრის (EQAR), უმაღლესი განათლების ხარისხის უზრუნველყოფის ევროპული ქსელის (ENQA), უმაღლესი განათლების ევროპული სივრცის (EHEA) პრინციპებისა და ღირებულებებისა და ევროპის უმაღლესი განათლების სისტემისადმი.

ჩვენთვის, როგორც სააგენტოსთვის პრიორიტეტია ევროპული სტანდარტებისა და გაიდლაინების (ESG) ფარგლებში საქმიანობის ხარისხი და გამჭვირვალობა. ამის უზრუნველსაყოფად, ცენტრი რეგულარულად აქვეყნებს აკრედიტაციისა და ავტორიზაციის გადაწყვეტილებებს გარე ხარისხის უზრუნველყოფის შედეგების მონაცემთა ბაზაში (DEQAR). აღსანიშნავია, რომ 2019 წლის 1 აპრილიდან ცენტრის მიერ ატვირთულია ავტორიზაციის (ინსტიტუციური აკრედიტაციის) 35 გადაწყვეტილება, საგანმანათლებლო პროგრამების აკრედიტაციის 1,194 გადაწყვეტილება, ერთობლივი საგანმანათლებლო პროგრამების აკრედიტაციის 7 გადაწყვეტილება. მჯერა, რომ ჩვენი მუდმივი ძალისხმევა ჩვენი პროცედურებისა და მექანიზმების განვითარებისთვის სასარგებლო იქნება ყველა დაინტერესებული მხარისთვის, რომელიც ჩართულია საქართველოს უმაღლესი განათლების სისტემაში.

ვაფასებთ ENQA-ს ექსპერტთა პანელისგან მიღებულ დადებით შეფასებას, რაც ამაღლებს ჩვენს მოტივაციას განვახორციელოთ ჩვენი პრაქტიკები და მიდგომები. ENQA-ს ექსპერტთა პანელის ანგარიში ადასტურებს, რომ ცენტრის აქტივობები, ხარისხის სტანდარტები და

პროცედურები სრულად შეესაბამება ESG-ის სტანდარტებს. კერძოდ, ცენტრი სრული შესაბამისობით შეფასდა ESG-ის შემდეგ სტანდარტებთან მიმართებით - 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6 3.7, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 და 2.6. მხოლოდ ორ ქვესტანდარტში შეფასდა, როგორც ნაწილობრივ შესაბამისი - 2.5 და 3.3. ანგარიშში ნათლად არის წარმოდგენილი, რომ ENQA-ს ექსპერტთა პანელი კმაყოფილია ცენტრის საქმიანობით და თვლის, რომ იგი შეესაბამება ESG-ის სტანდარტებს.

გამომდინარე აქედან, ამ წერილით გვსურს გამოვხატოთ EQAR-ში რეგისტრაციის სურვილი, დადგენილი პროცედურების შესაბამისად. გაცნობებთ, რომ 2024 წლის 26 მარტს ENQA-ს სააგენტოს განხილვის კომიტეტმა (ARC) დაადასტურა გარე შეფასების ანგარიში (ERR). ჩვენი აზრით, კომიტეტის მიერ ESG-ის სტანდარტის 3.3 შეფასება, ENQA-ს პანელის ანგარიშისგან განსხვავებით, სტანდარტის შინაარსისა და სტრუქტურის გათვალისწინებით, ზედმეტად ხისტია მის მიდგომაში და გვსურს გამოვხატოთ ჩვენი პოზიცია, რომ ჩვენ არ ვეთანხმებით კომიტეტის პოზიციას ამ საკითხთან დაკავშირებით. ცენტრი მიიჩნევს, რომ მისი საქმიანობის შესაბამისობა ESG-ის სტანდარტებთან მიმართებით მკვეთრად იკვეთება მთელი მისი საქმიანობის, დადგენილი პროცედურებისა და ხარისხის უზრუნველყოფის ფარგლებში დანერგული მექანიზმებით. ეს ღირებულებები და პრაქტიკები გაზიარებულია და ხორციელდება ცენტრის თანამშრომლების, გარე და შიდა პარტნიორების და დაინტერესებული მხარეების მიერ.

ამასთან, ENQA-ს ექსპერტების ადგილზე ვიზიტის დროს ყველა შესაბამისმა მხარემ ექსპერტებს განუმარტა, რომ ვიზიტის დროს დირექტორის, როგორც საქართველოს განათლების, მეცნიერებისა და ახალგაზრდობის მინისტრის მოადგილის მოვალეობები დროებითი ღონისძიება იყო და ორიენტირებული იყო მხოლოდ ზოგადი განათლების რეფორმაზე. ცენტრში ხარისხის უზრუნველყოფის საქმიანობების მიმართულებით, როგორცაა ექსპერტთა ჯგუფის შექმნის შესახებ ბრძანების გამოცემა, ექსპერტთა პანელის შექმნის ბრძანება ავტორიზაციისა, ან აკრედიტაციისთვის, ექსპერტთა ანგარიშების ვალიდაცია ხორციელდებოდა მხოლოდ შესაბამისი დეპარტამენტისა და დირექტორის მოადგილის მიერ.

ამასთან, მნიშვნელოვანია აღინიშნოს, რომ საქართველოს განათლების, მეცნიერებისა და ახალგაზრდობის მინისტრმა და ყველა სხვა დაინტერესებულმა მხარემ ღიად განაცხადა, რომ საქართველოს განათლების, მეცნიერებისა და ახალგაზრდობის მინისტრის მოადგილის თანამდებობის დაკავება ცენტრის დირექტორის მიერ იყო დროებითი ღონისძიება. ის, რომ ეს შეთანხმება იყო დროებითი ღონისძიება დადასტურდა 2024 წლის 12 იანვრის გადაწყვეტილებით, როდესაც ცენტრის დირექტორი გადადგა დაკავებული თანამდებობიდან. ამ დღიდან ცენტრის დირექტორის მოვალეობის შემსრულებელია ბატონი ლაშა მარგიშვილი. ინფორმაცია ცენტრის ხელმძღვანელობის ცვლილების თაობაზე დაუყოვნებლივ ოფიციალურად ეცნობა ENQA-სა და EQAR-ს. შესაბამისად, მას შემდეგ, რაც ENQA-ს სააგენტოს განხილვის კომიტეტის (ARC) პოზიცია ოფიციალურად დარეგისტრირდება და გამოქვეყნდება, მან შეიძლება ცენტრის ინსტიტუციური განვითარებისკენ, ობიექტურებისკენ, გამჭირვალობისა და მიუკერძოებლობისკენ სწრაფვა შეაფერხოს.

შესაბამისად, EQAR-ში რეგისტრაციის განახლების მიზნით, გიგზავნიტ დოკუმენტებს, თანდართული ფაილებით. გთხოვთ, იხილოთ ცენტრის თვითშეფასების ანგარიში (SAR), ENQA-ს შეფასება, დეკლარაცია და ცენტრის გარე შეფასების ანგარიშის დადასტურების შესახებ განაცხადი.

ჩვენ მოუთმენლად ველით თქვენთან ნაყოფიერი და პროდუქტიული პარტნიორობის შენარჩუნებას და გაღრმავებას მომავალ წლებში. ვრჩებით უმაღლესი განათლების ხარისხის

უზრუნველყოფის სტანდარტების დაცვის ერთგული და გვჯერა, რომ ჩვენს მიერ გაზიარებული ღირებულებები და მიზნები ერთობლივი ძალისხმევით იქნება მიმართული.

თანდართული დოკუმენტები:

-თვითშეფასების ანგარიში (SAR) გარე შეფასების ხარისხის უზრუნველყოფის სტანდარტებისა და სახელმძღვანელო პრინციპების შესაბამისად ევროპის უმაღლესი განათლების სივრცეში (ESG);

- ENQA სააგენტოს მიმოხილვა;

-დეკლარაცია;

-განცხადება ცენტრის გარე მიმოხილვის ანგარიშის დადასტურების შესახებ.

პატივისცემით,

ლაშა მარგიშვილი

სსიპ - განათლების ხარისხის განვითარების ეროვნული ცენტრის
დირექტორის მოვალეობის შემსრულებელი

Mr. Stéphane Lauwick
President of the
European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)
Nijverheidsstraat 10 Rue de l'Industrie
1000 Brussels
Belgium
E-mail: info@eqar.eu

Dear Mr. Lauwick,

On behalf of the LEPL - National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) of Georgia, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to you personally and to all the members of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). We appreciate your constant support and collaborative partnership with the NCEQE. We hold in high regard our shared commitment to the principles and values of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and unified European Higher Education System.

As an agency, we prioritize the quality and transparency of our work within the scope of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). To ensure transparency, the NCEQE regularly records accreditation and authorization decisions in the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR). Notably, in 2023, 234 decisions were recorded within the DEQAR database. Since April the 1st, 2019, decisions concerning authorization (institutional accreditation) - 35, decisions concerning accreditation of educational programs - 1,194, decisions concerning accreditation of joint educational programs - 7. I firmly believe that our ongoing efforts to develop our procedures and mechanisms will be beneficial to all the stakeholders involved in the context of the Higher Education System of Georgia.

We do appreciate that we received a positive appraisal from ENQA expert panel which raises our motivation to further develop our practices and approaches. The ENQA expert panel report evidence that the NCEQE activities, QA standards and procedures are fully in line with ESG. Namely, our agency was evaluated as fully compliant: ESG 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6 3.7, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.6 and only two sub-standards were evaluated as partially compliant: ESG 3.3 and 2.5. The report vividly states that ENQA review panel is satisfied with the performance of the functions of NCEQE and considers the agency to be in compliance with the ESG.

Thus, with this letter, we would like to express our wish to renew the registration in EQAR following the established application procedures. We inform you that the ENQA Agency Review Committee (ARC) validated the external review report (ERR) on the 26th of March, 2024. In our view, the ARC's evaluation of the ESG Standard 3.3, in contrast with the ENQA panel report, given the content and structure of the standard itself is overly rigid in its approach and we would like to state our disagreement with ARC attitude. The NCEQE strongly holds that its compliance with the ESG standards is demonstrably evident throughout all its activities, established procedures, and the implemented quality assurance mechanisms. These values and practices are shared and fully realized by the NCEQE employees, external and internal partners and stakeholders.

Furthermore, during the site-visit of ENQA experts, all relevant parties clarified for the experts that at the time of the visit, the Director's responsibilities as a Deputy Minister of Education, Science and

Youth of Georgia were temporary measures and focused only on supervision of the general education reform. In terms of quality assurance activities within the NCEQE, such as issuing the Order on the formation of the Experts' pool, the order on setting up expert panels for authorization or accreditation and the validation of the experts' reports were managed only by the relevant department and deputy director.

Moreover, it is important to consider that, the Minister of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia and all other stakeholders overtly stated that holding the position of the Deputy Minister of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia by the Director of the NCEQE, was a temporary arrangement. The fact that this arrangement was a temporary measure was later confirmed by the decision of January the 12th, 2024, when the Director resigned. Since that date, Mr. Lasha Margishvili has been the Acting Director of the NCEQE. The information about the change in leadership at the NCEQE was officially sent to the ENQA and the EQAR immediately. Accordingly, once the ARC attitude is formally registered and published, it might mar the NCEQE's endeavors for institutional development and its dedication to its values for objectivity, transparency and impartiality.

Accordingly, in order to renew the registration with EQAR, we send the attached files to substantiate our arguments. Please find the NCEQE Self-Assessment Report (SAR); ENQA Agency Review; Declaration of Honour and the statement on validation of the external review report of the NCEQE.

We look forward to maintaining and deepening a fruitful and productive partnership in the years to come. We do remain committed to upholding the highest standards of quality assurance in higher education and believe that our shared values and goals will continue to guide our collective efforts.

Attached Documents:

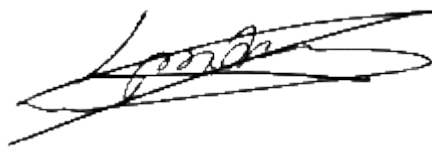
- Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for the External Review against the standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European higher Education Area (ESG);*
- *NCEQE External Review Report;*
- EQAR_Declaration Of Honour_NCEQE;*
- Statement on validation of the external review report of NCEQE.*

Sincerely,

Lasha Margishvili

Acting Director of the LEPL - National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement

სსიპ - განათლების ხარისხის განვითარების
ეროვნული ცენტრის დირექტორის მოვალეობის
შემსრულებელი მარგიშვილი ლაშა



Application by NCEQE for Renewal of Registration

Register Committee

Clarification provided by the Panel

Ref. A146
Date 2024-05-28
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Date of the conversation:	28/05/2024
Panel members:	Klemen Šubic, Gohar Hovhannisyan
Representative of EQAR:	Aleksandra Zhivkovikj

1. NCEQE has submitted on 2023-04-04 an application for renewal of registration on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). On 2024-04-12, NCEQE submitted the external review panel's report of 2024-03-26.
2. In order to prepare the deliberations of the Register Committee on NCEQE' compliance with the ESG, EQAR contacted the Panel to clarify the matter(s) below.

ESG 2.2 – Designing methodologies fit for purpose

3. Regarding effectiveness of the programme accreditation methodology in the International Accreditation of Education Programmes of HEIs Operating Abroad, the panel explained that, so far, the agency has undertaken only one procedure which was at the initial stage at the time of the site-visit, hence making it challenging to assess the effectiveness of the procedure.
4. In panel's view, the criteria and methodology of the programme accreditation methodology in the International Accreditation of Education Programmes of HEIs Operating Abroad, prima facie, are fit for purpose.

ESG 2.4 – Peer-review experts

5. In the categorisation of the panel members of NCEQE (p43 of external review report), the category "field experts" includes academics, while the category "higher education experts" includes higher education institutions' management staff.

ESG 2.5 – Criteria for outcomes

6. The panel did not find that the faults in the methods and tools for enabling consistency in the decision making lead to inconsistency in the application of the agency's criteria, content of the decisions and final judgements.

ESG 2.7 – Complaints and appeals

7. The panel suggestion for further improvement regarding the “objectiveness of the complaint procedure” (p51 of external review report) relates to the way of how complaints are handled - only the agency staff members, under the supervision of the director and without an independent body (e.g. the Coordination Council) look into the complaints. Another concern is also the nomination of the members of the Appeals’ Council and the Authorisation/Accreditation Councils by the same authority (i.e. the Prime Minister), for which a separate suggestion is also made by the panel.

Register Committee

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ESG 3.1 - Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

8. The panel clarified in relation to the practice of “student stakeholders wear(ing) double hats” (p18 of external review report), that when a student member of the panel has also other institutional positions, their understanding and activities could shift from a student to an institutional perspective. In panel’s view, their participation as a student member becomes less representative of the actual student voice.
9. The panel further clarified that the councils’ members (including the student members), sign a formal agreement that they assume responsibility to declare any case of conflict of interest, and accordingly, do not participate in public hearings/voting/evaluation/ decision-making concerning those cases which refer to those higher educational or other institutions affiliated with the HEIs/programs under evaluation. This is also underpinned by the Authorisation and Accreditation charters and the General Administrative Code of Georgia.

ESG 3.3 – Independence

10. Since the initial registration on EQAR, several legislative and procedural changes were made. In 2019, following changes were made: the Coordinating Council became operational and the function of the Council was shifted from an advisory to a managerial body; students’ involvement in the Coordinating Council became obligatory; the representatives of top management of educational institutions and public officials (Minister and Deputy Minister) cannot anymore be appointed as members of the Coordinating Council.
11. From July of 2020 the Minister is not in the composition of the Coordinating Council. In 2020, the rule of selection of the members of the Authorization/Accreditation/Appeals Councils was amended too. According to these changes the Director of the NCEQE assembles committee for selecting council members independently who are then nominated to the Ministry responsible for higher education matters. The Prime Minister does the final approval of the council members list.
12. In panel’s view, the above mentioned changes improved some of the independence aspects of NCEQE’s work. The panel found that, however,

the agency is yet to develop further understanding on independence as described in ESG 3.3.

Register Committee

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Date 2024-05-28
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24/06/2024



MES 1 24 0000738813

უმაღლესი განათლების ხარისხის უზრუნველყოფის
ევროპული რეესტრის (EQAR) პრეზიდენტს,
ბატონ სტეფან ლაუვიკს,

მისამართი: Nijverheidsstraat 10 Rue de l'Industrie
1000 ბრიუსელი,
ბელგია
იმეილი: info@eqar.eu

ბატონო ლაუვიკ,

სსიპ - განათლების ხარისხის განვითარების ეროვნული ცენტრის (NCEQE) სახელით გვინდა
კიდევ ერთხელ გამოვხატოთ გულწრფელი მადლობა უმაღლესი განათლების ხარისხის
უზრუნველყოფის ევროპული რეესტრისადმი (EQAR) მუდმივი მხარდაჭერისა და
თანამშრომლობითი პარტნიორობისთვის. ჩვენთვის მნიშვნელოვანი პრიორიტეტია და
მუდმივად ვიცავთ უმაღლეს განათლებაში ხარისხის უზრუნველყოფის ევროპული ქსელის
(ENQA), უმაღლესი განათლების ხარისხის უზრუნველყოფის ევროპული რეესტრის (EQAR) და
ევროპის უმაღლესი განათლების სივრცის (EHEA) საერთო ღირებულებებსა და პრინციპებს.

როგორც მოგეხსენებათ, ამჟამად, განაცხადი გვაქვს გაკეთებული EQAR-ში რეგისტრაციის
გაგრძელების მიზნით. თქვენი გადაწყვეტილების მიღების შემდგომ, არსებული
პროცედურების შესაბამისად, ცენტრი წარადგენს ოფიციალურ განაცხადს ENQA-ში წევრობის
სტატუსის განახლებისთვის.

ჩვენ ვაფასებთ ENQA-ს ექსპერტთა ჯგუფისგან მიღებულ დადებით შეფასებას, რაც ამაღლებს
ჩვენს მოტივაციას კიდევ უფრო მეტად განვახორციელოთ არსებული პრაქტიკები და მიდგომები.
ENQA-ს ექსპერტთა პანელის ანგარიში ადასტურებს, რომ ცენტრის აქტივობები, ხარისხის
სტანდარტები და პროცედურები სრულად შეესაბამება ESG-ის სტანდარტებს. კერძოდ, ცენტრი
სრული შესაბამისობით შეფასდა ESG-ის შემდეგ სტანდარტებთან მიმართებით - 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5,
3.6 3.7, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6 და 2.7. მხოლოდ ორ სტანდარტში შეფასდა, როგორც ნაწილობრივ
შესაბამისი - 2.5 და 3.3. ანგარიშში ნათლად არის წარმოდგენილი, რომ ENQA-ს ექსპერტთა
პანელი მთლიანობაში კმაყოფილია ცენტრის საქმიანობით და თვლის, რომ იგი შეესაბამება
ESG-ის სტანდარტებს.

გამომდინარე იქიდან, რომ მთლიანად საქართველოს უმაღლესი განათლების სისტემისა და
ცენტრისთვის უაღრესად მნიშვნელოვანია EQAR-ში რეგისტრაციისა და ENQA-ს წევრობის
განახლება, ცენტრმა აქტიური კონსულტაციები გამართა აღმასრულებელ და საკანონმდებლო
ხელისუფლებებთან, რომლის საფუძველზეც, საქართველოს პარლამენტში დაჩქარებული
წესით დაინიცირდა და განიხილება „განათლების ხარისხის განვითარების შესახებ“

საქართველოს კანონში ცვლილებების პროექტი, რომელიც ითვალისწინებს ცენტრის დამოუკიდებლობის ხარისხის მნიშვნელოვან ზრდას, ცენტრის დირექტორის დანიშვნისა და გათავისუფლების პროცედურების მკაფიოდ დადგენას და ცენტრის საკოორდინაციო საბჭოს კიდევ უფრო მეტი მმართველობითი ფუნქციებით აღჭურვას. დაჩქარებული წესით კანონპროექტის ინიცირება და განხილვა საქართველოს კანონმდებლობით ნიშნავს, რომ 2024 წლის ივლისის თვემდე პარლამენტი განიხილავს და მიიღებს წარდგენილ ცვლილებებს.

საქართველოს პარლამენტში წარდგენილი საკანონმდებლო ცვლილება ითვალისწინებს შემდეგ საკითხებს:

- ცენტრის დირექტორის დანიშვნა განხორციელდება საქართველოს პრემიერ-მინისტრის მიერ, საქართველოს განათლების, მეცნიერებისა და ახალგაზრდობის მინისტრის წარდგინების საფუძველზე, რომელიც თავის მხრივ დირექტორის კანდიდატურას შეარჩევს ღია, გამჭვირვალე, საჯარო კონკურსის საფუძველზე;
- ცენტრის დირექტორის თანამდებობიდან გათავისუფლება შესაძლებელი იქნება საქართველოს პრემიერ - მინისტრის მიერ, საქართველოს განათლების, მეცნიერებისა და ახალგაზრდობის მინისტრის წარდგინებით;
- ცენტრის საკოორდინაციო საბჭოს წევრები უშუალო და აქტიურ მონაწილეობას მიიღებენ ცენტრის დირექტორის კანდიდატურის შერჩევისა და გათავისუფლების პროცესებში. საკოორდინაციო საბჭოს წევრები შევლენ ცენტრის დირექტორის კანდიდატურის შესარჩევ კომისიაში. ასევე, საკოორდინაციო საბჭოს წევრები განიხილავენ ცენტრის დირექტორის გათავისუფლების საკითხის მიზანშეწონილობას;
- ცენტრის დირექტორი იმავდროულად ვერცერთ თანამდებობას, მათ შორის ვერც პოლიტიკურს, ვერ დაიკავებს ხელისუფლების რომელიმე შტოში, მათ შორის ვერც აღმასრულებელში;
- დეტალურად გაიწერა ცენტრის დირექტორის უფლებამოსილების ვადამდე შეწყვეტის საფუძვლები, რომელიც შეიძლება იყოს: პირადი განცხადება, მის მიმართ სასამართლოს მიერ გამოტანილი გამამტყუნებელი განაჩენის კანონიერი ძალაში შესვლა, სასამართლოს გადაწყვეტილება, რომელიც შეუძლებელს ხდის მისი უფლებამოსილების განხორციელებას, დირექტორის უფლებამოსილების უხეში დარღვევა, ან/და ცენტრის საქმიანობისთვის არსებითი ზიანის მიყენება, გარდაცვალება;
- ცენტრის დირექტორის თანამდებობაზე არჩევა მოხდება 5 წლის ვადით. აღნიშნული ცვლილება მეტ მდგრადობას შესძენს ცენტრის სტრატეგიული გეგმით გათვალისწინებული ამოცანების შესრულებას;
- ცენტრის საკოორდინაციო საბჭოს უფლებამოსილების ვადა გაიზარდა და ნაცვლად 2 წლისა, იქნება 4 წელი.

საგულისხმოა, რომ აღნიშნული ცვლილებების ინიცირება, აღმასრულებელ და საკანონმდებლო ხელისუფლების წარმომადგენლებთან ინტენსიურ რეჟიმში გამართული კონსულტაციები ნათელი და მკაფიო გამოვლინებაა იმისა, რომ მთლიანად ქვეყანა, საქართველოს ხელისუფლება, უმაღლესი განათლების სისტემა, განათლების ხარისხის განვითარების ეროვნული ცენტრი რამდენად დიდ მნიშვნელობას ანიჭებს EQAR-ში რეგისტრაციისა და ENQA-ს წევრობის განახლებას. აღნიშნული ორგანიზაციების წევრობა ჩვენთვის სასიცოცხლოდ მნიშვნელოვანია არა მხოლოდ საქართველოში არსებული უმაღლესი განათლების ხარისხის უზრუნველყოფის მექანიზმების განვითარების, არამედ მთლიანად უმაღლესი განათლების სისტემის განვითარების ჭრილში.

აღნიშნულიდან გამომდინარე, მოგმართავთ თხოვნით, რომ ზემოაღნიშნული გარემოებები

მიიღოთ მხედველობაში ცენტრთან დაკავშირებით გადაწყვეტილების მიღების პროცესში და მოგვცეთ შანსი, თქვენთან აქტიური თანამშრომლობით გავაგრძელოთ საქართველოს უმაღლესი განათლების ხარისხის უზრუნველყოფის სისტემის დახვეწა და განვითარება.

ამასთან, საჭიროების შემთხვევაში, მზად ვართ, EQAR-ის მიერ ცენტრთან დაკავშირებით შესაბამისი გადაწყვეტილების მიღებამდე, ჩამოვიდეთ თქვენთან ოფისში და დამატებით დეტალურად განვიმარტოთ და მოგახსენოთ წარდგენილი საკანონმდებლო ცვლილებების შინაარსი, მათი მნიშვნელობა ცენტრის დამოუკიდებლობის ხარისხის კიდევ უფრო მეტად გაზრდის მიმართულებით.

პატივისცემით,

ლაშა მარგიშვილი

ცენტრის დირექტორის მოვალეობის შემსრულებელი

Mr. Stéphane Lauwick
President of the
European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)
Nijverheidsstraat 10 Rue de l'Industrie
1000 Brussels
Belgium
E-mail: info@eqar.eu

Dear Mr. Laurick,

On behalf of the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE), I would like to express our sincere gratitude once again for your constant support and collaborative partnership. Our commitment to upholding the shared values and principles of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the EQAR, and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) remains a top priority for the NCEQE.

As you are aware we have applied to renew registration in the EQAR. Upon your decision regarding the EQAR registration renewal, the NCEQE will promptly submit a formal application to ENQA for membership renewal.

We were particularly encouraged by the positive review received from the ENQA expert panel during our recent evaluation. Their feedback serves as a strong motivator for us to further develop our practices and approaches to quality assurance. The expert panel report confirms that the NCEQE's activities, quality standards, and procedures are fully aligned with the ENQA Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). We have achieved full compliance with the following ESG standards - 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6 3.7, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7. Notably, the report acknowledges that only two standards (2.5 and 3.3) were identified as partially compliance. The report delivers a positive assessment, highlighting that ENQA's expert panel is overall satisfied with the Center's performance and its alignment with ESG standards.

Recognizing the critical importance of renewing EQAR registration and ENQA membership for Georgia's higher education system, the NCEQE actively engaged with both executive and legislative authorities. This resulted in the expedited passage of the Law of Georgia "On the Development of the Quality of Education" initiative through the Parliament of Georgia, which envisages a significant increase of independence of the NCEQE, clearly establishing the procedures for appointing and dismissing the director of the NCEQE and equipping the Coordination Council of the NCEQE with even more management functions. The draft law, initiated and reviewed under an expedited process according to Georgian legislation, is expected for adoption by the Parliament of Georgia by July 2024.

According to the draft legislative amendments:

- The appointment of the Agency's Director will be made by the Prime Minister of Georgia based on a recommendation submitted by the Minister of Education, Science, and Youth of Georgia who will nominate a candidate based on the open competition, ensuring a transparent and merit-based selection process.
- Dismissal of the agency's Director will be made by the Prime Minister of Georgia, on the recommendation of the Minister of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia;

- The Coordination Council members will directly participate by serving on the selection and dismissal committee for new candidate of Director. Furthermore, the Council will have the authority to initiate discussions regarding the Director's dismissal.
- The Agency's Director will be prohibited from holding any additional position, including political or government official;
- Clear basis for termination of the Director's position determines, including: Personal resignation; Conviction with a final court judgment; Court's decision preventing the Director from fulfilling their duties; Rough exceeding of authority by the Director that significantly harms the Agency's operations; Death;
- A fixed term of five years will be defined for the Agency Director's position. This proposed change gives the Center an opportunity sustainably develops the strategic planning;
- The NCEQE Coordination Council will participate in the selection and dismissal processes for the Director;
- The term of the NCEQE Coordination Council will be extended from 2 to 4 years.

The recent initiation of these changes, coupled with intensive consultations with both executive and legislative representatives, highlights the unwavering commitment of Georgia, its government, higher education system, and the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) to maintaining EQAR registration and renewing ENQA membership. The membership of these organizations is vital for us not only in terms of the development of quality assurance mechanisms of higher education in Georgia, but also in terms of the development of the higher education system as a whole.

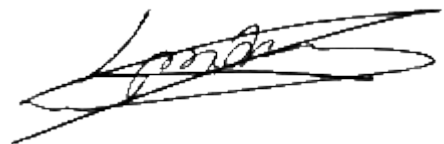
We respectfully request your consideration of the above-mentioned circumstances during the decision-making process regarding the NCEQE and give us a chance to actively cooperate with you to continue improving and developing the quality assurance system of higher education in Georgia.

In addition, if necessary, we are ready, to meet you in person in the EQAR office before the final decision and clarify in detail and inform you about the proposed legislative amendments, which further enhance the NCEQE's independence.

Sincerely,

Lasha Margishvili
Acting Director of the NCEQE

სსიპ - განათლების ხარისხის განვითარების
ეროვნული ცენტრის დირექტორის მოვალეობის
შემსრულებელი მარგიშვილი ლაშა




Additional Representation to the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)

Executive Summary

The National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) reiterates the unwavering commitment to advance European Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education in Georgia and to continue undertaking the measures to ensure transparency, trust and recognition of the work of the NCEQE. Therefore, in accordance with ENQA's recommendations, the NCEQE has implemented the following fundamental changes in respective laws and legal documents regulating the work of the Agency, which greatly contributes to further enhancing of the Agency's organizational independence:

1. Enhancement of Organizational Independence Regarding the Director of the NCEQE

- ✓ In order to prevent the conflicts of interest, the Agency's Director is prohibited from holding any parallel position, including political or executive branch of the government;
- ✓ The Prime Minister of Georgia appoints and dismisses the Agency's Director based on the propositions by the Minister of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia; The Coordination Council actively participates in the process of selecting and dismissal of the Agency's Director;
- ✓ For increasing the sustainability, the Director is selected for 5 years;
- ✓ Terms and conditions for premature termination of the Director's contract have been defined in details.

2. Enhancement of Organizational Independence Regarding the Coordination Council

- ✓ The role of the Coordination Council of the NCEQE has enhanced, in particular, it has been transformed from an advisory body to a managerial body;
- ✓ The Coordination Council actively participates in the process of selecting the Agency's Director, as well as members of the Accreditation, Authorization and Appeal Councils;
- ✓ The Coordination Council is eligible to discuss the dismissal of the NCEQE Director and only after that the Minister of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia is authorized to address the Prime Minister with the relevant appeals.
- ✓ To ensure sustainability, the term of the Coordination Council has been increased from 2 to 4 years.

Based on the above, prior to EQAR's final decision on renewing NCEQE's registration, the most recent legislative changes were initiated and implemented and have effectively addressed the concerns raised in EQAR's draft report. Thus, it does not any longer present a precondition to substantiate the arguments provided in the draft.

Additional Representation for EQAR

This letter outlines the position of the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) on the draft report presented by the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) - „Decision on the application for renewal for registration_RC43/A146 NCEQE “– 2024-07-08.

The draft indicates that the NCEQE is in full compliance with ESG Standards, except for 2.5, which has partial compliance with Standard 2.5, and non-compliance with Standard 3.3. The NCEQE has reviewed and analyzed the draft report in detail and provides clarifications and relevant evidence.

It should be emphasized that as an external quality assurance agency, the NCEQE prioritizes aligning its processes and mechanisms with the European higher education system. The development-oriented approach and strategic goals reflect a commitment to integrate within the European higher education system. This alignment is derived from the ESG Standards, which highlight continuous development of quality assurance agencies, a shared framework for quality assurance of teaching and learning at European, national and institutional levels and accountability for the outcomes.

Since 2019, the NCEQE has been actively enhancing its independence. This includes strengthening the Coordination Council's role as a managerial body (operational independence)¹, progressively reducing reliance on the state budget (financial independence), and implementing changes based on ENQA experts' recommendations.

As you are informed, the NCEQE is a legal entity under public law, which operates as an independent and autonomous institution according to the Law of Georgia "on Educational Quality Enhancement", and the Statute of the NCEQE protects the principles of transparency and publicity, the Constitution of Georgia, international agreements and other legislative acts.

The NCEQE has institutional independence, which is ensured by the tangible results of operational, financial and organizational independence.

In terms of **organizational independence**, the NCEQE is the Agency separated from the legislative and state administration bodies, and it carries out its activities independently²³. In the managerial body, the NCEQE has the Coordination Council and the Director. In accordance with the most recent legislative changes, the Director is selected through an open competition and is appointed by the Prime Minister of Georgia⁴.

The Director selection process is regulated by the Law of Georgia "On Legal Entities under Public Law ". It should be noted that all procedures and regulations in the Agency are approved by the Director. The members of the Authorization/Accreditation/Appeal Councils are selected by a special Committee (described in the Rule of selection of candidates for members of the Authorization Councils of General/Vocational/Higher Educational Institutions, the Accreditation Council of Educational programs and the Appeal Council) and are appointed by the Prime Minister of Georgia, and the candidate is proposed by the Minister of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia. It should be noted that the Coordination

¹ Article 5 and 5¹; Order №89 / N of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia

² Article 1, Paragraph 3; Order №89 / N of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia

³ Article 3; Paragraph 2; Law of Georgia on Education Quality Enhancement

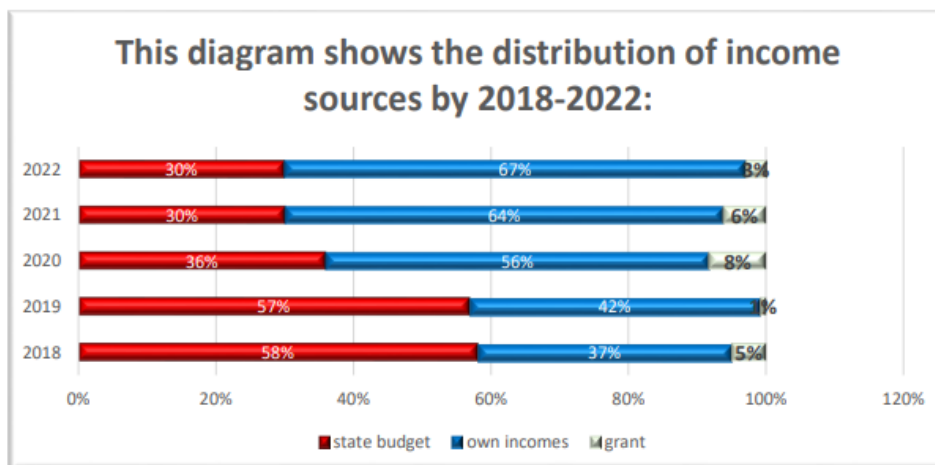
⁴ Article 4, Order №89 / N of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia (amended articles are highlighted in yellow in annexes)

Council participates in the selection of the members for the Authorization, Accreditation and Appeal Councils, as well as the Director of the Agency.

To ensure **financial independence**, the NCEQE performs its own activities independently, with its own income. Operationally, self-sufficient services provide the Agency with its own financial resources. It should be noted that the Agency's financial independence from the state budget has been increasing over the years, and it decides to dispose of these funds independently (*please, see Table 1*).

Table 1:

This diagram shows the distribution of income sources by 2018-2022:



Source: Self-Assessment Report (SAR), 2023

Furthermore, the NCEQE has full **operational independence** in all areas of external quality assurance activities, both on processes and results/outcomes. The NCEQE independently plans and implements all stages of institutional evaluation (authorization) and program accreditation. Accordingly, the Agency is autonomous in organizing external evaluation procedures. However, any kind of decision on authorization and accreditation is made independently by the respective Councils, voting in a closed voting format and there is no possibility of any external interference. As an independent body, the Agency works according to its own Statute, and it is the sole initiator of introduce amendments to it. In addition, in the direction of ensuring the quality of higher education, any changes in the Statute of Authorization/Accreditation can be made only with the permission of the NCEQE.

The NCEQE maintains operational independence in its activities, in the decisions made by the Authorization, Accreditation, and Appeals Councils. The independence is verified by the decision of the ENQA experts' external review, which clearly explained that all the Councils confirm a high degree of independence in the decision-making process.

Furthermore, regarding Standard 2.5 where partial compliance was granted, the NCEQE clarifies that Authorization and Accreditation decisions by the Councils are based on the following criteria and documentation:

1. Self-assessment Report and attached documentation submitted by the institution to the NCEQE;
2. Institution's verified position on the expert group's draft conclusion;

3. Final conclusion of the expert group;

4. Circumstances revealed at the oral hearing of the Council;

Consequently, decisions solely are based on solid and objective evidence and comply with applicable regulations, preventing reliance on any Council member's personal information or opinions.

With reference to paragraphs 22-25 of EQAR's draft report, the NCEQE additionally explains that the Agency's Director concurrently held the position of the Deputy Minister of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, during the ENQA experts' visit. This arrangement was of a temporary measure, necessitated by the country's ongoing reforms in Early and Preschool Education, as well as General Education. As part of the reforms, the Agency was tasked to form the quality assurance mechanisms for Early and Preschool Educational Institutions and authorized kindergartens. Additionally, the ongoing General Education Reform has required significant legislative amendments to the Georgian laws "On General Education" and "on Educational Quality Enhancement". These changes aim to improve General Education Quality Assurance and establish more flexible and effective mechanisms. To achieve this, new Authorization Standards were developed, leading to the first authorization of public General Education Institutions in 2023. Accordingly, during the transition period, a decision was made that the Director of the Agency would be temporarily assigned to the functions of the Deputy Minister, supervising Early and Preschool Education, as well as General Education. It is important to emphasize that during this period the Director of the Agency did not supervise the direction of higher education in the Ministry and the NCEQE. The NCEQE fully delegated the management of higher education functions to one of its Deputy Directors, namely, Mr. Lasha Margishvili. This decision was explained in detail during the ENQA expert panel meeting. Subsequent changes within the Agency confirm the temporary decision of this arrangement. On January 12, 2024, the Director of the Agency left the position and a Deputy Director was appointed as an Acting Director until the selection of a new Director.

It is essential for the NCEQE to foster strong and ongoing collaboration with international partners, actively implementing and considering their recommendations. A key evidence is the NCEQE's response to the recommendations from ENQA's 2019 and 2023 external evaluations. Notably, since 2019, the NCEQE has enhanced the Coordination Council's role as a managerial body through legal amendments (Order No. 89/N). In particular, according to the amendment, top managers of educational institutions and political officials (Minister and Deputy Minister) cannot be appointed as members of the Coordination Council, mitigating potential external influences. Additionally, the Council now mandates student representation. In 2021, the legislative changes expanded the Council to a maximum of 13 members, with a two-term limit for members. The Coordination Council composition includes representatives from educational institutions (excluding top management), the Ministry (excluding Minister and Deputy Ministers), students, employers, civil society, international education organizations, and external experts. In accordance with the recommendations received after the 2023 ENQA Review, the NCEQE actively cooperated with both the legislative and executive authorities in order to prepare changes in accordance with the recommendations and to reflect the changes in the Law of Georgia "on Education Quality Enhancement" (Annex 2 - Law of Georgia "on Education Quality Enhancement") and the NCEQE Statute. In accordance with the changes, the role of the Coordination Council in the management process of the NCEQE has increased, as well as the terms of appointment/dismissal of the Director of the NCEQE have been defined. In response to the 2023 ENQA Review recommendations, the NCEQE mobilized its efforts and collaborated closely with legislative and executive bodies to implement necessary changes to the Law

of Georgia “on Education Quality Enhancement”⁵ and the NCEQE Statute⁶. These changes, reflected in updated legislation, have strengthened the Coordination Council's role in the Agency's governance and further formalized the Director's appointment and dismissal procedures. More specifically, according to the changes approved in 2024:

- The appointment of the Agency's Director is made by the Prime Minister of Georgia based on a submission of the Minister of Education, Science, and Youth of Georgia who nominates a candidate based on the open call, ensuring a transparent and merit-based selection process. At least 1/3 of the Selection Committee for the Director of the Agency is represented by the members of the Coordination Council;
- Dismissal of the Agency's Director can be made by the Prime Minister of Georgia, on the recommendation of the Minister of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia; Furthermore, the Coordination Council have the authority to initiate discussions regarding the Director's dismissal; And only after that, the Minister is authorized to address the Prime Minister with appropriate submission;
- The Agency's Director is prohibited from holding any parallel position, including political or executive branch of the government;
- Terms and conditions for premature termination of the Director's contract have been defined in details, including: resignation letter, conviction with a final court judgment, the decision by the law-court preventing the Director from fulfilling their duties; abuse of authority by the Director that significantly harms the Agency's operations, and decease.
- A fixed term of five years defined for the Agency Director's position. This proposed change gives the Agency an opportunity to sustainably develop the strategic planning;
- The term of the NCEQE Coordination Council extended from 2 to 4 years.

All of the above-mentioned changes entered into force on June 27, 2024 (*Annex 1 - Order №89 / N of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia*). In response to these changes, the Agency gathered the Coordination Council on July 3, 2024. The Council deliberated on necessary amendments to the Agency's Statute, specifically those relating to expanding the Coordination Council's involvement in the Director selection process.

Following the Coordination Council's approval and endorsement of proposed Statute amendments, the NCEQE has revised its Statute accordingly. Thus, after the adoption of the changes made in the Statute of the NCEQE, an open call was announced for the selection of the Director. In particular, the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth announced an open and transparent call regarding the selection of the Director. The mentioned information and qualification requirements were published on the website of the Civil Service Bureau (hr.gov.ge - <https://hr.gov.ge/JobProvider/UserOrgVaks/Details/86646>) for 10 days, where any person who met the qualification requirements for the position of the Director of the NCEQE had the opportunity to fill out and send the application. On July 22, 2024, according to the relevant Order of the Minister, the Selection Committee was approved, in which 2 members of the Coordination Council (1/3 of the Selection Committee) were involved. On July 29, 2024, the Selection Committee nominated a candidate for the position of Director as a result of an open call. The selected

⁵ Article 2¹; Article 4; Law of Georgia on Education Quality Enhancement;

⁶ Article 4; Order №89 / N of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia

candidate was proposed by the Minister of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia to the Prime Minister of Georgia, who issued an Order on the Appointment of the Director for 5 years, on July 31, 2024 (Annex – 3, Order of Appointment of Director of NCEQE). and the Order entered into force on August 1, 2024. Accordingly, the concern raised in paragraph 24 of EQAR's draft report regarding the non-implementation of recent legislative changes, has fully resolved and no longer exists, because the selection process of the Agency Director further elaborated, and process was announced, conducted, and finalized using these new procedures.

Therefore, based on the above, the Agency's position is that the suspension of the NCEQE's registration in EQAR will cause great harm not only to the Agency's image, but also to the entire education quality assurance system at the national and international levels. Therefore, renewing the Agency's registration in EQAR and membership in ENQA is vital for the NCEQE not only in terms of the continuous development of quality assurance mechanisms of higher education in Georgia, but also in the advancement of the country's education system as a whole. As a candidate member of the European Union, it is particularly important for the higher education system at this stage of development, to renew the NCEQE's registration in EQAR and renew ENQA's membership. Considering the mentioned changes, we strongly believe that all the arguments and evidence as well as the Agency aspiration to maintain and further develop the quality assurance of higher education to continue approximation with European standards and harmonizing with European values and principles.

It is crucial that the EQAR Committee, when making its decision, considers the primary objective of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG 2015) for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area: to foster a system of accountability and development that ultimately institutionalizes a quality culture within quality assurance agencies.

In addition, the document clarifies that the ESG 2015 purposes provide a framework within which the ESG may be used and implemented in different ways by different institutions, Agencies and countries. The EHEA is characterized by its diversity of political systems, higher education systems, socio-cultural and educational traditions, languages, aspirations and expectations. This makes a single monolithic approach to quality and quality assurance in higher education inappropriate. Broad acceptance of all standards is a precondition for creating common understanding of quality assurance in Europe. For these reasons, the ESG need to be at a reasonably generic level in order to ensure that they are applicable to all forms of provision.

It is essential to highlight that the ESG 2015 standards are structured into three interconnected parts. Given that the Agency's activities are aligned and comply with all other relevant standards, identifying non-compliance in a single, but critical standard such as 3.3 poses a significant risk of halting developmental measures already planned within the quality assurance process, and thereby discouraging individuals involved therein. It should be emphasized once again that the circumstances related to standard 3.3 do not exist today, at the time of decision-making. These changes have been introduced and implemented in practice. We hope that the decision related to the NCEQE will be focused on development and improvement and not on punishment of the Agency.

We look forward to the final decision of the EQAR Register Committee and hope that you will consider each step taken by the NCEQE towards development. However, we have full confidence and trust that the EQAR Register Committee will carefully consider each section of the evidence we provide thereto and

make a final decision in our favor that will be objective, fair and based on ESG-2015 purposes, principles and requirements.

Sincerely,

NCEQE Team



The Order of the Prime Minister of Georgia

N219

July 31, 2024

Tbilisi

**On appointing Aleksadre Tsuladze as the Director of the Legal Entity of Public Law -
National Center for Educational
Quality Enhancement**

On the basis of Article 4 (2) of the Law of Georgian on Education Quality Enhancement, Mr. Aleksandre Tsuladze appointed as the Director of the Legal Entity Under Public Law - the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, for a term of 5 years.

Irakli Kobakhidze

Prime Minister of Georgia

Signed

EQAR Complaint Form

Reference #	28264736
Status	Complete
Your name	URGENT!!!
My identity may be disclosed to the agency concerned	No
Agency concerned (list)	NCEQE - National Center For Educational Quality Enhancement
Please specify any present or past relationship you have/had with the agency:	The political situation in Georgia does not guarantee any kind of security, which is why I decided not to disclose my identity. However, I can assure you that the concern that I am reporting is well known in the Georgian higher education space and troubles the entire academic community.
Please describe the reason for your complaint and explain specifically where, in your view, the agency does not substantially comply with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG):	<p>After receiving the validation statement on the external review of the NCEQE, which highlighted the agency's non-compliance with the ESG due to the director's dual role as Deputy Minister of Education, the director at the time, Tamar Makharashvili, resigned from her position as director of the NCEQE but retained her role as Deputy Minister of Education. However, a new director was not appointed at the NCEQE for approximately three months. While this change formally removed the Ministry from direct involvement in the governance and operations of the NCEQE, it actually strengthened informal control over the agency's operations.</p> <p>One of the most notable examples of this influence was a statement posted on the official Facebook page of the NCEQE on May 15, 2024, during the massive protests against the</p>

"Transparency of Foreign Influence Bill." At that time, a large number of students had joined the protests and went on strike. This article provides context on the political situation and the protests: <https://www.e-flux.com/notes/607913/in-the-name-of-sovereignty-georgia-s-second-attempt-to-pass-the-foreign-agents-bill>.

The statement warned universities to ensure the continuation of the study process without delays, or they would risk violating accreditation and authorization standards. You can find the original statement, along with comments from experts, students, academics, and others, at this link: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=849759177192585&set=a.293378822830626>. What was even more striking was that it was later revealed that the statement was published without the knowledge and approval of any of the NCEQE staff working in the higher education quality assurance department and...

... publishing the statement was an from the Ministry. In response, the NCEQE staff issued their own statement, underscoring their disapproval of the Facebook post. This counter-statement was signed by 111 employees—representing at least 75% of the staff—and can be found here: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1StpoOxPYKHwvHRFZhb2jxmLYlwxaAMlr/edit>. Following this event, Deputy Minister of Education at the time, Alexander Tsuladze, met with NCEQE employees, demanding that they retract their protest statement, which they refused to do. About a month ago, Tsuladze left his role as Deputy Minister and was appointed Director of the NCEQE. He announced a reorganization of the NCEQE, which, in the

Georgian context, typically implies the removal of 'undesirable' staff members. While the reorganization is not yet complete, at least two staff members from the Higher Education Quality Assurance Department have already left the NCEQE.

Last week, Aleksandre Tsuladze was appointed Minister of Education, leaving the NCEQE once again without a director and operating directly under the Ministry of Education's influence. As a result, the NCEQE is exerting strong political control, not only over educational institutions but also over its own staff. The following section will provide further evidence of the political interference in the decision-making process and the functioning of decision-making councils.

ESG 2.5 Criteria for Outcome

As highlighted in the ENQA 2024 review, the authorization and accreditation councils face significant challenges in maintaining consistency in the interpretation and application of accreditation and authorization standards. Upon examining recent decisions by the authorization...

... council and attending several oral hearings, it has become clear that the council is systematically altering the assessments made by expert panels without providing any rationale for these changes, thereby casting doubt on the reliability and transparency of the entire process. The minutes from these oral hearings reveal that the authorization council frequently moves the expert recommendations—mandatory compliance actions (necessary to meet authorization standards) into suggestions

(optional measures that higher education institutions may choose to implement or disregard). This practice, notably observed in decisions made during August and September 2024, results in more favorable outcomes for the institutions going through the authorization process.

Such actions are in clear violation of the decision-making procedures mandated by the Law on Educational Quality Enhancement (Article 11, Paragraph 3) and the Statute of Authorization of Educational Institutions (Article 77, Paragraph 6), both of which require that the authorization council provide a well-reasoned explanation for any alterations to expert assessments during oral hearings.

Concerns regarding the legitimacy, transparency, and objectivity of the process attracted significant public attention on September 26, 2024, just one week before the NCEQE director was promoted to Minister of Education. In this case, the authorization council diverged from its usual practice of downgrading expert recommendations to mere suggestions and instead adopted the opposite approach with Ilia State University. According to the experts' evaluation report, the university had achieved full compliance across all standards, which should have led to unconditional...

... authorization. However, the council imposed authorization with the condition of monitoring after one year.

The authorization council provided no explanation or justification for this decision. Additionally, it failed to specify the standards under which the university would be monitored, hence overlooked a procedural requirement. The

types of decisions made by the authorization council and the corresponding terms of compliance with standards are outlined in the NCEQE SAR (p. 43). A comparison and analysis of the expert assessments of seven public HEIs reveal a concerning inconsistency. HEIs assessed as substantially compliant in various standards were granted authorization with the requirement to submit a progress report after one year. However, Ilia State University, which fully complied with all standards, was subjected to stricter conditions, with a decision of monitoring after one year. This decision is not only irrelevant to the university's assessment and regulations but was also made without presenting any arguments to justify the stricter terms.

Experts in the field have interpreted this decision as a form of punishment for Ilia State University and its rector, who notably refused to sign the statement issued by the Rectors' Council on May 14, 2024, during the protests and student strike. The statement condemned the participation of students and professors in protests against the "Transparency of Foreign Influence Bill" and insisted that universities should remain uninvolved in political matters (<https://gtu.ge/News/24909/>). The rector of Ilia State University was the only public university rector who did not sign this statement. Moreover, although the statement was officially...

... attributed to the Rectors' Council, media outlets had reported a day earlier that the statement was being drafted by the Ministry of Education, and even published a leaked version of the letter (<https://formulanews.ge/News/111154>).

This decision has been widely regarded as unfair and politically motivated. By imposing monitoring,

the council effectively pressures Ilia State University, along with its students and faculty, to remain silent and refrain from exercising their right to freedom of expression and protest. While this condition poses potential negative consequences for Ilia State University, it also sends a broader message to other institutions: compliance and loyalty to the governing party will be rewarded with privileges.

Moreover, the threat of government interference in the university's authorization process causes significant reputational damage. This could result in a decline in student enrollment, as prospective students may seek to avoid potential complications associated with the institution's uncertain status.

This issue has been widely discussed in the media, with several articles and statements from professors and experts outlining the decision-making process and expressing concern over the outcome as a potential threat to the university. Below are the links (to list a few of them) where these discussions can be found:

This article offers multiple perspectives and political context regarding the authorization council's decision: [https://](https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33146708.html)

www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33146708.html.

In this article, a professor who attended the council meeting describes the details of the decision-making process and the violation of regulations:...

... <https://publika.ge/iliaunim-avtorizacia-ert-welshi-monitoringis/>

Renowned professors and education experts discuss the issue in this video: [https://](https://www.facebook.com/Koveldge/videos/2021547124951779)
www.facebook.com/Koveldge/videos/2021547124951779.

In response to this issue, the academic

community has issued a statement addressing the NCEQE and the authorization council. The statement asserts that the decision regarding Ilia State University's authorization is a clear infringement on the university's autonomy and an attempt to exert political control over Georgia's educational system and academic freedom. The full statement can be found here:https://docs.google.com/document/d/1u6nf9CrQqunZ_W5NPHDz2deny6LQVqCDaqviWTQel_M/mobilebasic.

The inconsistency in decisions made by the authorization councils is not merely a matter of differing interpretations of the standards; it also reveals a mechanism for intentional political influence. Over the past two years, several authorization experts have left the NCEQE's expert pool, citing that their work and assessments were neither respected nor considered by the decision-making councils, with no justification or evidence provided for such disregard.

Furthermore, the arguments presented highlight NCEQE's violation and noncompliance with ESG 2.5 and ESG 3.3, which calls into question the integrity of the entire quality evaluation process. If the decision-making councils are routinely altering expert assessments, this raises concerns about compliance with ESG 2.3 (Implementation of the processes) and questions the qualifications of peer review experts, as well as the quality of the evaluation reports (ESG 2.4). While it would be highly undesirable for Georgia to lose its EQAR and ENQA membership, the potential harm caused by a politically driven quality...

... assurance agency is far more alarming. Such

influence could severely damage the reputation of individual universities and undermine the principles of autonomy and academic freedom across the entire academic space in Georgia. Note: The articles referenced in the text are in Georgian, but Google Translate provides sufficiently accurate translations for understanding the context. Thank you for your consideration.

Did you take up the issue with the agency concerned?

Yes

Please explain the result and why it does not satisfy you:

I think the arguments provided in the complaint answered this question

May we share this document with the agency concerned?

Yes

May we share this document with the agency concerned?

Yes

May we share this document with the agency concerned?

Yes

I hereby represent and warrant that all information provided with the complaint is true and accurate, and has been obtained lawfully. I have read and agree with the EQAR Complaints Policy, and the following terms and conditions: EQAR reserves the right to ignore bogus submissions and complaints that are obviously unsubstantiated.

The IP address of the computer I am using will be logged. EQAR will not release it, except: (a) to a notary for the purpose of verifying the submission of the complaint, under the condition of confidentiality, or (b) to a court or prosecution authorities if required to do so by law.

I read and agree with the above

Last Update

2024-10-10 16:09:56

Start Time

2024-10-10 13:14:45

Finish Time

2024-10-10 16:09:56

Referrer

https://fs22.formsite.com/EQAR_forms/complaint/index.html

Application by NCEQE Renewal of Registration

Register Committee

Clarification request

Ref. A146
Date 2024-10-25
Page 1 / 2

1. NCEQE has submitted on 2023-04-04 an application for renewal of registration on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). On 2024-04-12, NCEQE submitted the external review panel's report of 2024-03-26.
2. The Register Committee invited NCEQE to make an additional representation upon deferring the application for registration on 2024-07-08. The agency submitted their response on 2024-08-09.
3. The Register Committee received an anonymous complaint on 2024-10-10, regarding the work of NCEQE, with particular focus on the consistency in the application of agency's criteria (ESG 2.5) and the independence (ESG 3.3).
4. In order to prepare the deliberations of the Register Committee on NCEQE's compliance with the ESG, EQAR contacted the agency to clarify the matters below.

ESG 2.5 – Criteria for outcomes

5. Has the agency, so far, made analysis of reviews, including the period 2022-2024, in which the Authorisation council's decisions (including the compliance level of the standards, recommendations and the final decision) differ from the one recommended by the experts' panels?
 - a) If yes, we are kindly asking you to disclose the analysis.
 - b) If not, please disclose list of completed reviews in the period 2022-2024, in which the Authorisation council's decision (including the compliance level of the standards, recommendations and the final decision) differed from the ones recommended by the experts' panels.

We are kindly asking you to outline the particular points of divergence from the experts' panels conclusions per standard and recommendations per case.
6. Does the agency present further explanation to the higher education institutions and the panels in cases when the Authorisation council's decisions (including the compliance level of the standards, recommendations and the final decision) diverged from the ones recommended by the experts' panels?

If yes, we are kindly asking you to share evidence that confirms this for all completed reviews in the period 2022-2024.

7. Please disclose the experts' report, Authorisation council's decision and the minuted document of the discussions at the Authorisation council for the following reviews:

- a) Black Sea University (2018)
- b) Ilas State University (2024)

ESG 3.3 – Independence

8. Please present a list of the names of the directors of the agency, in the period 2022 – 2024, including the starting and ending year of their mandate.

ESG 3.5 – Resources

- 9. We are kindly asking you to enlist the staff turnover rates per year for the period 2022 – 2024, per annum.
- 10. We are kindly asking you to provide us with annual numerical data regarding how many experts left and how many new ones joined in the NCEQE's pool of reviewers in the period 2022-2024.

Register Committee

Ref. A146
Date 2024-10-25
Page 2 / 2

Clarification of National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE)

ESG 2.5 – Criteria for outcomes.

5. Has the agency, so far, made analysis of reviews, including the period 2022-2024, in which the Authorization council's decisions (including the compliance level of the standards, recommendations and the final decision) differ from the one recommended by the experts' panels?

a) If yes, we are kindly asking you to disclose the analysis.

b) If not, please disclose list of completed reviews in the period 2022- 2024, in which the Authorization council's decision (including the compliance level of the standards, recommendations and the final decision) differed from the ones recommended by the experts' panels.

We are kindly asking you to outline the particular points of divergence from the experts' panels conclusions per standard and recommendations per case.

The requested information is provided in the **Annex 1** (*Review Review of Performance of Authorization Council of Higher Educational Institutions 2022-2024*).

6. Does the agency present further explanation to the higher education institutions and the panels in cases when the Authorization Council's decisions (including the compliance level of the standards, recommendations and the final decision) diverged from the ones recommended by the experts' panels?

If yes, we are kindly asking you to share evidence that confirms this for all completed reviews in the period 2022-2024.

The Authorization Council of Higher Educational Institutions is an independent body that makes a decision on authorization based on the authorization documentation, the authorization report of the authorization expert' panel, the study of the substantiated position submitted by the University and holding a public hearing. In terms of Authorization Council, the Agency is in charge of performing only the secretariat functions. The NCEQE does not participate neither in discussion of public hearing, nor in the decision-making process of the Authorization Council.

The meetings of the Authorization Council of Higher Educational institutions are public, and all stakeholders can attend. Moreover, the minutes and decisions of the Authorization Council of Higher Education Institutions are publicly available and published on the website of NCEQE which is linked with DEQAR portal.

During the public hearing, the experts' panel has the opportunity to share all important aspects, as well as the institutions can clarify their positions. At the meeting of the Council, the members of the Council, experts, as well as the representatives of the institution are able to ask questions and raise specific issues to be substantiated.

Due to the fact that the meetings of the Council are public and open to all stakeholders, the percentage rate of appeals from the institutions is quite low, because as already mentioned, the institutions are enabled to clarify all issues during the public hearing.

In that regard the Center has some experience, for instance, within the authorization of one of the private Universities, the chairperson of the authorization expert's panel requested additional clarifications from the Center, based on which an online meeting/consultation was held. Also, there is a practice in the Center that, as needed (on the request of an expert or Council member), representatives of the Center's higher education quality assurance department, legal service and other departments attend the public hearing of the Council and make relevant explanations about the Authorization procedures.

It should be noted that the NCEQE shares the summary and analysis of the Authorization and Accreditation Councils' Decisions with all stakeholders on the annual international conferences.

7. Please disclose the experts' report, Authorization Council's decision and the minute document of the discussions at the Authorization Council for the following reviews:

a) Black Sea University (2018)

LTD - International Black Sea University was granted the status of a higher educational institution (University) for a period of 6 years by the decision № 51 on August 20, 2018. Under the terms of the Council's decision, University has been restricted intake of new cohort of students for a one-year period.

According to the 2018 report of the authorization experts, the university has had a court case for several years (component 2.1 - Organizational structure and management), which were still ongoing at that time. This actual situation was not reflected in the University's Business Process Continuity Plan. The authorization standard component 7.4 (Financial resources) of the report, also shows that the institution had a court case to recover the funds. The institution had previous outstanding debts to the state. In addition, it was necessary to take into account the fact that an independent financial audit was conducted in the institution, although the debt to the state was not explained in the audit analysis. Importantly, during the public hearing of the Council, additional financial problems of the university were revealed such as the fact of total asset seizure. The Council considered that the mentioned circumstance threatened the financial stability of the institution. The Council was unable to obtain a proper explanation why the risks associated with tax debt were not reflected in the relevant documents, including the University's Business Process Continuity Plan and the audit analysis on financial reports, as required for authorization. Besides, the 7.4 component requested to the HEIs to prepare an audit report about the university budget, while the International Black Sea University had only audit analysis without any official audit report. Thus, the Council discussed and changed the evaluations of components 2.1 "Organizational structure and management" and 7.1 - "Material resources" in the experts' report and as a result, the institution was granted the status of a higher educational institution for a period of 6 years. By the decision of the Council, the institution has been restricted intake of new cohort of students for a one-year period.

University complained the decision to the Appeals Council.

The Appeals Council based on the fact that the institution had already paid off the debt made a decision (10/15/2018, 16) returning the authorization issue to the Authorization Council for re-consideration. The issue of authorization of the institution was discussed again at the meeting of the Authorization Council on December 8, 2018. The Council changed the decision to restrict intake of new cohort of students to the institution. As a result, the University was granted the status of a higher educational institution (University) for a period of 6 years, and 1 year was set to present a report on the fulfilment of the remaining

recommendations. Details of the public hearing are described in the minutes of the December 8, 2018, Council meeting (see **Annex 2, Annex 3, Annex 4, Annex 5, Annex 6**).

b) Ilia State University (2024)

LEPL – Ilia State University was granted the status of a higher educational institution (University) for a period of 6 years by the decision № 75 on September 29, 2018.

The process of re-authorization evaluation of LEPL - Ilia State University was conducted from June to September 2024. There were various recommendations and suggestions in the report of the authorization experts, however, the report was positive and only 1 recommendation and 11 suggestions were issued.

As a result of the discussion at the public hearing, the Authorization Council reclassified some of the suggestions in the report as recommendations and add 1 recommendation based on the content mentioned in the report. As a result, the institution was granted the status of a higher educational institution for a period of 6 years, and a period of 1 year was determined for the fulfilment of the recommendations to submit a report. The Council proposed the Center to evaluate the fulfilment of the recommendations issued by the Council through monitoring process.

At the current stage, the institution has submitted a complaint (24.10.2024) to the Appeal Council. The process is underway and will be implemented in accordance with the procedures described in the Authorization Charter (see **Annex 7, Annex 8, Annex 9**).

ESG 3.3 – Independence.

8. Please present a list of the names of the directors of the agency, in the period 2022 – 2024, including the starting and ending year of their mandate.

The Directors/Acting Directors of the NCEQE for the period of 2022-2024 (as of November 1, 2024) are as follows (see the table №1 below).

Table №1.

Name and Surname	Status: Director/Acting Director	Starting period: day/month/year	Completion period: day/month/year
Tamar Makharashvili	Director	01.01.2022	12.01.2024
Lasha Margishvili	Acting Director	13.01.2024	31.07.2024
Aleksandre Tsuladze	Director	01.08.2024	02.10.2024
Lasha Margishvili	Acting Director	09.10.2024	Present

Source: NCEQE, 2024

ESG 3.5 – Resources.

9. We are kindly asking you to enlist the staff turnover rates per year for the period 2022 – 2024, per annum.

One of the main priorities of the NCEQE is staff development. The NCEQE has the functions and responsibilities defined for each structural unit and the respective qualifications for staffing. The NCEQE conducts open competitions for recruiting the staff. Furthermore, the NCEQE has approved the rules and procedures for staff performance evaluation. In addition, the NCEQE has an established procedure for staff motivation, using material and non-material incentives to stimulate staff performance and professional development.

The NCEQE's staffing levels and turnover rates for permanent employees, including those in the Higher Education Quality Assurance Department, are presented below for the years 2022-2024. The NCEQE effectively manages turnover through a combination of outflows and inflows of the staff. Human resources policy ensures uninterrupted development of the NCEQE's ongoing business processes and internal quality assurance (see the table №2 below).

Table №2.

Permanent Staff	December, 31 2022	December, 31 2023	November, 1 2024
Total number of Permanent staff NCEQE	188	167	176
Outflow of Permanent staff NCEQE	8	20	19
Inflow of Permanent staff NCEQE	34	26	10
Total number of permanent staff of Higher Education Quality Assurance Department, NCEQE	22	20	18
Outflow of permanent staff of Higher Education Quality Assurance Department, NCEQE	3	1	5
Inflow of permanent staff of Higher Education Quality Assurance Department, NCEQE	3	1	5

Source: NCEQE, 2024

10. We are kindly asking you to provide us with annual numerical data regarding how many experts left and how many new ones joined in the NCEQE's pool of reviewers in the period 2022-2024.

For the effective management, as well as renewal and professional development of the expert pool, the NCEQE has established approaches and implements processes consistently.

The members of the expert pool are selected on the basis of the internal legal act of the Center ([Order №964009 of the Director of National Center for educational quality enhancement August 30, 2022](#)). The [Act](#) also reflects qualification requirements for selecting expert pool members, considers the certification procedures, as well as the procedures of termination and suspension of expert status and rules, etc.

The selection of the expert pool is planned in advance to facilitate the processes for the upcoming year.

According to the aforementioned internal rules, expert status is terminated for various reasons. Key reasons for the termination of membership of the expert pool can be a personal statement, certification results, violation of the norms of the Code of Ethics and ethics commission results, etc. At the current stage, the expert pool in Higher education is comprised of 353 authorization and 1,233 accreditation experts.

The National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) maintained a stable pool of experts in authorization and accreditation of higher education between 2022 and 2024. The NCEQE effectively manages turnover through a combination of outflows and inflows of the expert pools in Higher Education (see the table №3 below).

Table №3.

Authorization/Accreditations Experts in HE	December, 31 2022	December, 31 2023	November, 1 2024
Total Number of Authorization Experts in Higher Education	223	238	353 ¹
Outflow of Authorization Experts in Higher Education	4	2	2
Inflow of Authorization Experts in Higher Education	11	17	117
Total Number of Accreditation Experts in Higher Education	1,022	1,129	1,233 ²
Outflow of Accreditation Experts in Higher Education	27	6	8
Inflow of Accreditation Experts in Higher Education	147	113	96

Source: NCEQE, 2024

¹ a) International Experts – 96; b) Local Field Experts – 117; c) Employer – 63; d) Student – 77.

² a) International Experts – 358; b) Local Field Experts – 551; c) Employer – 171; d) Student – 153.

**Review of Performance of Authorization Council
of Higher Educational Institutions
2022-2024**

The National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement



Introduction

The National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) carries out annual reviews of the activities of the authorization council of higher educational institutions and presents the result at the center's annual conference with the involvement of all stakeholders.

The purpose of the study is to:

- Observe the specifics of the Council's performance.
- Development of the Council's performance.
- Acquaintance of outcomes and existing practices to local and international experts for their professional development.

This document reviews the process of authorization of higher educational institutions during the years 2022-2024, in particular: how homogenous was the evaluation of the Authorization Council of Higher Educational institutions and the experts of Authorization of Higher Educational Institutions.

The "document analysis" method was used while working on the paper. This paper is a comparative review. The review has been made based on the reports of the experts of Authorization of Higher Educational Institutions and the decisions and minutes of the Authorization Council of Higher Educational institutions.

I - Review of Authorization process -2022-2024

According to the Authorization Charter the external quality assurance evaluation processes carried out by the NCEQE are multi-stage and consistent. Throughout the process, feedback is received and considered by relevant parties, ensuring maximum transparency of the processes and making final decisions under objective and fair conditions. The sequential processes ensure that the decision-making process is a result of comprehensive deliberation, consensus, and focuses on quality development.

Finally, the experts' report is discussed at the Authorization Council of Higher Educational Institutions. At the public hearing, the Council considers the documents of the evaluation process and the experts' report. An additional discussion of the issue is held for the purpose of summarization. Finally, the Council makes a decision based on - the authorization documentation, the report of the Authorization experts' panel, the study of the substantiated position submitted by the University and public hearing.

In accordance with the Authorization Charter, the Council has the authority to change the recommendations and suggestions in the experts' report, for instance, add or remove them, and reclassify suggestions as recommendations or vice versa. However, this does not change the essence of final report of the experts. In case of change, the recommendations and suggestions received by the Council are recorded in the minutes of the public hearings.

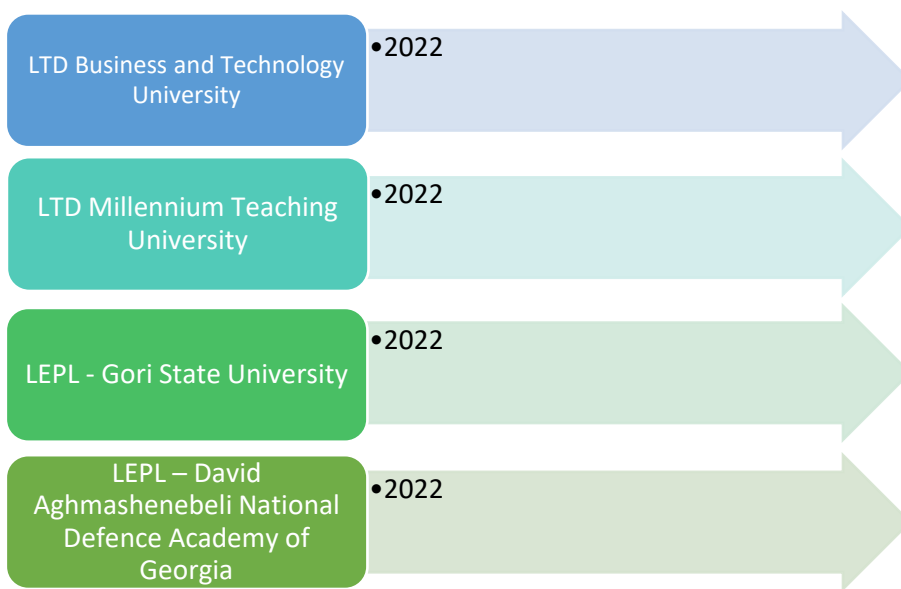
From 2022 to 2024 the NCEQE carried out the authorization (institutional evaluation) process for a total of 24 institutions. The distribution of evaluations by year is as follows:

- **2022:** 4 institutions
- **2023:** 2 institutions
- **2024:** 18 institutions (As of November 1, 2024)

Based on the authorization application submitted by the institution to the NCEQE, the expert panel's report on authorization, the substantiated position submitted by the University to the NCEQE, and the analysis of the positions of all stakeholders presented during the public hearing, three types of changes have been considered:

- a) **Changes in recommendations that did not affect the compliance level of the standards** – In two cases out of 24 applications, the recommendations were modified, but the compliance level of the standards remained unchanged.
- b) **The compliance level of the standards changed, but the recommendations remained the same** – In one case out of 24 applications, the compliance level of the standards was changed, but the recommendations were not modified.
- c) **The recommendations were modified, resulting in changes to the compliance level of the standards** – In four cases out of 24 applications, the recommendations were modified, which led to changes in the compliance level of the standards.

In 2022, 4 higher educational institutions went through the authorization process.



During the comparative review of the 2022 authorization experts' report and the minutes and decisions of the authorization council, the following was highlighted: There were two cases where the evaluations of the Council and the experts were not homogeneous, in particular:

- **LEPL - Gori State University** - Changes in recommendations that did not affect the compliance level of the standards. The council partly agreed with the evaluation of the expert’s panel and added one recommendation. “The University should develop a transparent and fair general rule for issuing research grant projects”
- **LEPL – David Aghmashenebeli National Defence Academy of Georgia (NDA)** - The recommendations were modified, resulting in changes to the compliance level of the standards. The Council removed two recommendations from the expert’s report which resulted the changes in evaluation. There are following recommendations which were removed:
 - NDA should adjust its mission statement, make it more precise and compatible with strategic plan.
 - NDA should define its role and place in the mission statement by better reflecting the context, trends, and challenges of the higher education landscape at national, regional, and international levels.

In 2023, the Authorization Council fully shared the evaluations contained in the experts' reports in all cases.

In 2024, 18 higher educational institutions went through the authorization process (As for November 1, 2024).

LTD Free University of Tbilisi	• 2024
LEPL - Georgian Technical University	• 2024
LEPL - Apollon Kutateladze Tbilisi State Academy Of Art	• 2024
LTD David Tvildiani Medical University	• 2024
LTD Kutaisi University	• 2024
LEPL - Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University	• 2024
LEPL - Ilia State University	• 2024
LTD Petre Shotadze Medical Academy	• 2024
LTD Davit Aghmashenebeli University of Georgia	• 2024
LTD Grigol Robakidze University	• 2024
LTD International University of Tbilisi IUT	• 2024
LEPL - Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University	• 2024
LEPL - Akaki Tsereteli State University	• 2024
LEPL - Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University	• 2024
LEPL - The Vano Sarajishvili Tbilisi State Conservatoire	• 2024
LEPL - Batumi State Maritime Academy	• 2024
LEPL - Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University	• 2024
LPEL - Tbilisi State Medical University	• 2024

During the comparative review of the 2024 authorization experts' report and the minutes and decisions of the Authorization Council, the following was highlighted: There were 5 cases where the evaluations of the Council and the experts were not homogeneous, in particular:

LEPL - Georgian Technical University - Changes in recommendations that did not affect the compliance level of the standards. The council partly agreed with the evaluation of the expert's panel and removed the following recommendations:

- It is recommended to adopt Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Strategic Objectives.
- It is recommended that the Institution must make the personnel management policy and related documents easily accessible through the Institution's official website.
- The University must employ a strategy to reduce the number of students suspended.
- It is recommended that all the works performed by the doctoral students (not only the completed dissertation) must be checked for plagiarism (journal manuscripts, colloquiums, thematic seminars), which will help to develop their skills.
- The Institution must subscribe to IEEE Xplore.

LTD - David Aghmashenebeli University of Georgia - The compliance level of the standards changed, but the recommendations remained the same. Council changed the evaluation of the components 2.1; 3.1; 4.1 instead of "does not comply with the standard requirements" defined as "partially compliance to the standard with the requirements that led to a change in the compliance of standards 2 and 3 as a whole and instead of defining "does not comply to the requirements of the standard" as "Partially complies with the requirements of the standard.

LTD Free University of Tbilisi - The recommendations were modified, resulting in changes to the compliance level of the standards. The council changed with the evaluation of the expert's panel and removed the following recommendations:

- It is recommended to indicate the link between the Action Plan activities and financial resources.
- It is recommended to reconsider internationalization strategy and to open effectively a possibility of international mobility to students at all levels of study.
- It is recommended to enhance students' involvement in decision-making processes related to academic aspects of the FUT's operation.

LEPL – Ilia State University - The recommendations were modified, resulting in changes to the compliance level of the standards. The council changed with the evaluation of the expert's panel, reclassified some of the suggestions in the report as recommendations and added 1 recommendation based on the content mentioned in the report. The council considered that component 3.1 Instead of - "complies to the requirements of the standard", it should be evaluated as - "It is substantially in compliance with the requirements of the standard." The decision of the council was based on the findings in the component 3.1 of the report, the given content of the "suggestion" was more of a recommendation than a suggestion.

However, since the 3.2 component was evaluated by the authorization experts as "substantially complies to the requirements of the standard", the evaluation of authorization standard 3 was determined as "substantially in compliance with the requirements of the standard".

The council also considered that component 4.2 should be evaluated as "substantially compliance with the requirements of the standard". The opinion was mainly based on the following circumstances: to improve the ratio between affiliated academic and Invited staff. Also, in component 4.2 because of the content of the "suggestion" reflected in the report, transferred into recommendations. The change in component 4.2 did not change the compliance level of whole standard.

7.1 Evaluation of the component, instead of - "complies to the requirements of the standard", it should have been - "substantially compliance with the requirements of the standard ". Also, 7.3 evaluation of the component, instead of - "complies to the requirements of the standard", should be - "substantially in compliance with the requirements of the standard". The content of the suggestions mentioned in the report was the cause of the change.

Added Recommendations:

- It is recommended that the University increase the number of affiliated academic staff, which will improve the ratio of affiliated academic staff to invited staff in favour of affiliated academic personnel.

Recommendations which were transferred from suggestions:

- It is recommended that the University pay more attention to correct and timely update internal documentation.
- It is recommended that the institution's law school, in addition to full, associate, and assistant professors, also employ academic staff (assistants) with relatively lower positions, in order to ensure the continuity and sustainability of educational programs and the development of professionals in the field, as well as their professional and career growth.
- It is recommended that all memorandums specify the maximum/minimum number of students that the partner institution " can accommodate (internships, clinical practice).
- It is recommended that the institution improve its English-language website, which will address potential informational and communication issues for international students.
- It is recommended that the University's strategic and action plans reflect tasks and activities related to the development of the new web portal.

LEPL - Akaki Tsereteli State University - The recommendations were modified, resulting in changes to the compliance level of the standards. The council changed the evaluation of experts panel, and several recommendations moved into suggestions.

Suggestions which were transferred from recommendations:

- Increase the number of international projects and exchange opportunities for both academic and administrative staff, as well as students.
- Translate and upload English versions of 'Code of Ethics' and 'Code of Academic Integrity' on the university webpage to extend their reach to non-Georgian speakers.
- Ensure that all international students have access to e-services.
- University should repair some buildings and change desks in some auditoriums.
- Some sanitary unit needs adaptation, University have started the works for solve those issues.
- The university should develop all necessary informational services in English for non-Georgian speaking students and staff.
- University should carry out an external audit in the whole three directions: Financial, Efficiency and Compliance. The auditor should have the valid IPSAS certificate.
- The University should increase transparency there are sufficient risks - in direction of the legal, economical, sustainable, efficient, and productive use of resources.

Short Summary, 2022-2024 (As of November 1)

a) Changes in recommendations that did not affect the compliance level of the standards – In two cases out of 24 applications, the recommendations were modified, but the compliance level of the standards remained unchanged.

b) The compliance level of the standards changed, but the recommendations remained the same – In one case out of 24 applications, the compliance level of the standards was changed, but the recommendations were not modified.

c) The recommendations were modified, resulting in changes to the compliance level of the standards – In four cases out of 24 applications, the recommendations were modified, which led to changes in the compliance level of the standards.

Minutes №09 of the Authorization Council of the Higher Education Institutions

City of Tbilisi

20.08.2018

The meeting was attended by:

Members of the Authorization Council for Higher Education Institutions (hereinafter - the Council):

David Aprasidze - Professor at LEPL - Ilia State University, Chair of the Council.

Maka Gvelesiani - PhD student at LEPL - Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Secretary of the Council.

Davit Bedoshvili - Director of the Institute of Agriculture at the N(N)LE Agricultural University of Georgia.

Irakli Gharibashvili - Director of the National Scientific Library at LEPL - Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University.

Rima Beriashvili - Vice - Rector of LEPL - Tbilisi State Medical University, Professor.

Levan Imnaishvili - Head of the Computer Engineering Department, Faculty of Informatics and Control Systems at LEPL - Georgian Technical University, Professor.

Nana Sharikadze - Head of International Relations Department at LEPL - Tbilisi Vano Sarajishvili State Conservatoire, Associate Professor, Doctor of Arts.

Konstantine Sirbiladze - Professor at LEPL - Akaki Tsereteli State University.

Tamar Ioseliani - Deputy Director of LEPL - Maritime Transport Agency of Georgia.

Magda Maghradze - Executive Director of LEPL - Millennium Challenge Account - Georgia (MCA - Georgia).

Representatives of LEPL - National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (hereinafter - the Center):

Lasha Margishvili - Head of the Department of Higher Education Quality Assurance.

Keti Tsotniashvili - Head of the Department of Higher Education Institutions Authorization.

Tamar Shengelia - Coordinator of the Department of Higher Education Institutions Authorization.

Tinatin Dvalishvili - Specialist of the Department of Higher Education Institutions Authorization.

Representatives of Higher Education Institutions:

LTD European University:

Lasha Chakhvadze - Head of International Relations Department.

Medea Makatsaria - Lawyer of the Institution.

Vakhtang Kavtaradze – Vice-Rector of the Institution.

Maia Advadze – Vice-Rector.

Gocha Tutberidze – Vice-Rector.

Maia Khurtsilava - Head of the Quality Assurance Service.

Levan Madatovi - Strategic Development Service Manager.

LTD International Black Sea University

Ilias Chiloglu - Rector.
Goderdzi Buchashvili – Vice-Rector.
Diana Mchedlishvili - Head of the Quality Assurance Service.
Nikoloz Parjanadze - Affiliated Professor;
Ekaterine Bakaradze - Dean of Law Faculty.
Vakhtang Zaalishvili - Associate Professor.
Resul Dikmen - Chancellor.

LTD Tbilisi Free University

Vakhtang Lezhava - Rector.
Marina Karchava – Vice-Rector.
Natia Samushia – Vice-Rector.
Revaz Khoperia - Head of the Quality Assurance Service.
Nino Batiashvili - Dean of Master's - Doctoral School.

Authorization Experts of Higher Education Institutions (hereinafter - experts):

Nikoloz Parjanadze - Member of the Authorization Expert Panel of LTD European University.
Ekaterine Azarashvili - Member of the Authorization Expert Panel of LTD European University and LTD International Black Sea University.
Nino Taliashvili - Member of the Monitoring Expert Panel of LTD European University.
Irma Grdzeldze - Member of the Authorization Expert Panel of LTD Tbilisi Free University.
Giorgi Kurdiani - Member of the Authorization Expert Panel of LTD Tbilisi Free University.
Rusudan Sanadze - Member of the Authorization Expert Panel of LTD Tbilisi Free University.
Revaz Shanidze - Member of the Authorization Expert Panel of LTD Tbilisi Free University.
Irina Lobzhanidze - Member of the Authorization Expert Panel of LTD International Black Sea University.
Nana Dikhaminjia - Member of the Authorization Expert Panel of LTD International Black Sea University.
Murtaz Kvirkvaia - Member of the Authorization Expert Panel of LTD International Black Sea University.
Nino Popkhadze - Member of the Authorization Expert Panel of LTD International Black Sea University.

Other Attendees:

Nana Rostomashvili – Representative of "Association of Private Higher Education Institutions".

The Council meeting started at 12:07.

According to Paragraph 4 of Article 22, of the "Statute of Authorization for Educational Institutions", approved by the Order №99/n of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, dated October 1, 2010, the meeting was chaired by the Chair of the Council, David Aprasidze.

The Chair of the Council verified the number of Council members present at the meeting and determined that, in accordance with Paragraph 5 of Article 22, of the "Statute of Authorization for

Educational Institutions", approved by the Order №99/n of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, dated October 1, 2010, the meeting was eligible as more than half of the Council members were present. The Chair pointed out to the Council members the requirement of Paragraph 4 of Article 24 of the Statute, which states that a Council member is not authorized to refrain from voting.

The Chair of the Council presented the agenda of the meeting to the Council members:

1. Discussion of the issue of determining the maximum number of student quota for LTD European University.
2. Discussion of monitoring results conducted at LTD European University.
3. Discussion of authorization issue of LTD Tbilisi Free University.
4. Discussion of authorization issue of LTD International Black Sea University.

The Chair of the Council asked the Council members, the Center representatives and interested parties if they had any motions regarding the agenda. The Head of the Higher Education Quality Assurance Department of the Center, Lasha Margishvili, proposed to the Council to modify the order of issues scheduled to be discussed on the agenda. In particular, as Professor Andrew Gibbs, the Head of the Authorization Expert Panel, was joining via Skype, the authorization case of LTD International Black Sea University to be considered as the third issue on the agenda. The Council members unanimously approved the presented motion. Accordingly, the Council unanimously approved the new agenda of the meeting.

1. Discussion of the issue of determining the maximum number of student quota for LTD European University.
2. Discussion of monitoring results conducted at LTD European University.
3. Discussion of authorization issue of LTD International Black Sea University.
4. Discussion of authorization issue of LTD Tbilisi Free University.

Discussion of the authorization issue of LTD International Black Sea University

The Chair of the Council asked the representative of the Institution if they had any recusal against Council members. The representative confirmed that they had no recusal against any Council members.

The Chair of the Council addressed the Council members to confirm that they were familiar with the self - evaluation report submitted by the Institution, the Institution's argumentative position on the draft report of the expert panel and the final report of the authorization expert panel. The Council members confirmed that they were familiar with the case materials. The Chair of the Council asked the representative of the interested party whether they were familiar with the report of the authorization expert panel. The representative confirmed familiarity with the report.

The head of the expert panel, Andrew Gibbs presented general overview of the authorization experts panel report to the Council via Skype. The head of the panel noted that his impression of the International Black Sea University was positive in overall. However, he mentioned that the University needed to continue developing its educational programmes and quality assurance mechanisms, that it was necessary to support internationalization policy and develop more exchange programmes. The Chair of the Council noted that the report of the expert panel also indicated the necessity of increasing investments to improve the research activities of the University. The head of the expert panel also mentioned that it was necessary to improve the workload of academic staff.

The Chair of the Council inquired about how it was possible to increase the motivation of the academic staff in terms of research activities under the current workload conditions. The experts explained that research in the Institution indeed needed improvement, some professors had high workloads and the two research centers at the University had not yet produced any significant results.

The Chair of the authorization Council asked the expert panel to discuss the compliance of the University with the requirements of each standard, specifically to formulate key recommendations and asked the representatives of the Institution to present their position regarding these recommendations.

The expert panel member Murtaz Kvirkvaia noted that the Institution had a strategic development and action plan corresponding to its mission. The working process on the strategic plan at the Institution was a participatory process. However, the expert panel had certain recommendations regarding measurable indicators and the implementation of structural monitoring. The expert also mentioned that the University had well - distributed functions within management structural units, which was evident both from the documentation and was revealed during the interviews with the University representatives. However, the report of the expert panel also included recommendations regarding this standard.

The expert noted that regarding student involvement in the decision - making process of the University, the interviews revealed that some students were not informed about this opportunity. Accordingly, it was recommended to provide appropriate information to students.

The HEI representative highlighted that students were involved in all processes. However, since it was revealed that some students lacked information, the institution would continue working in this direction.

Council member Konstantine Sirbiladze noted that after studying the materials, he was left with the impression that students were involved in discussing specific issues, but this involvement was not systematic in nature. According to the clarification of the authorization expert, the experts remark did not concern the general involvement of students in university processes, but rather the recommendation was about ensuring their involvement in management decisions. According to the explanation provided by the experts, students were not informed about the possibility in this direction.

Regarding the strategic development plan, the institution's representative stated that the University had once again revised the strategic development plan and would continue working to make the document more measurable. As for the structural monitoring of the strategic plan, the strategic plan detailed how the plan was being implemented and who was the responsible person/structural unit. This document also provided how monitoring and reporting would be carried out. The representative of the Institution explained that the strategic development office was directly responsible for developing the strategic plan, however, all structural units were involved in this process, who were reporting to the strategic development office. The office would send reports to the Rector and strategy monitoring would take place. The member of the expert panel, Murtaz Kvirkvaia, made clarifications regarding the financial situation of the University and mentioned that the experts could provide the Council with the information that was revealed through document study and interviews. The member of the expert panel noted that, as they found out, in 2012 - 2013 the University had a financial dispute with the tax service regarding approximately 1 200 000 GEL, University appealed this amount, and it was reduced. At this point, the University had to pay more than 700 000 GEL.

The expert mentioned that the Institution had presented a financial analysis document conducted by a consulting organization in 2013-2017. The Chair of the Council inquired whether the document reflected the ongoing court disputes as a circumstance involving financial risk. The expert, Murtaz Kvirkvaia mentioned that the issue was not featured in the document developed by the consulting organization. The expert noted that according to this document, in 2017 the Institution had undistributed property worth one million one hundred thousand GEL.

The member of the expert panel noted that the panel members were not experts in finances, however, based on what emerged from the documents and interviews, the University could function even after making the payment. The expert also noted that the University had developed a business continuity plan, however, the financial section was only mentioned in general terms.

The Chair of the Council stated at the oral hearing that the Council had reviewed the letter sent by the head of the expert panel regarding financial sustainability, which clarified the issues reflected in the report. Consequently, the Council was familiar with all documents, including the documentation submitted by the University regarding the court dispute. The Chair of the Council addressed the representatives of the HEI to present their position.

The Rector of the Institution noted that the Revenue Service visited the University at the beginning of 2013. During this period, the University was constructing a new building and had hired a construction company that was paying all taxes, including VAT. However, in 2011 the University missed registration as a VAT payer, which resulted in financial sanctions being imposed on the University. The Rector noted that since the construction company had already paid VAT amounting to 400000 GEL, this amount should have been credited to the University, however, it was not credited because the University was not registered as a VAT payer. According to the explanation of the Rector, this was a technical error made by their part, which could have resulted in a smaller penalty being imposed.

The Rector of the Institution further explained that the University appealed this decision first to the Revenue Service and then to the Ministry of Finance. The Rector noted that the University was late in submitting the complaint to the Disputes Review Board of the Ministry of Finance, as the relevant documentation was submitted by unauthorized person and these documents were kept in the University's security service for approximately 10 days. After this, despite missing the deadline, the court ordered the Ministry of Finance to reconsider the matter again, which resulted in a reduction of the amount of fine. The Rector mentioned that the case of the University was currently being reviewed in court and the court hearing was scheduled for October of this year.

The Chair of the Council asked the University Rector to explain why the issue of financial debt was not discussed in the business continuity plan.

According to the explanation of the Rector of the University, the Institution developed a business continuity plan to meet the authorization standards. Moreover, such documents were publicly published on the University's web - page. And the University did not want to make public information about its financial problems. Since, during this period the University was in the process of being sold, according to the Rector's explanation, potential investors did not want this issue to be publicly disclosed. The investors had expressed their readiness to pay the amount imposed on the University.

According to the Chair of the Council, addressing such issues is an essential requirement for educational quality enhancement. Unfortunately, these circumstances are insufficiently discussed in the report of the expert panel. According to the Chair of the Council, it appeared that the Institution did not fully

present the necessary information during the submission of authorization documents and during the site visit. According to the Chair of the Council, this was also confirmed by a written letter from the chair of the expert panel addressed to him, according to which the chair of the expert panel expressed a desire to provide additional clarifications to the Council regarding the assessments reflected in the report. Specifically, the chair of the expert panel explained that the Business Continuity Plan provided by the University did not reflect issues related to the fine and court dispute, while determining compliance with the specific standard in the expert report was based on the financial analysis of previous years and also on a letter submitted by the Institution from a potential future owner, who expresses readiness to purchase the University and cover its debts. According to this letter, the negotiations had to be completed within 2 - 3 weeks and the selling process had to be completed within one month. It was directly evident from the report of the expert panel that information related to financial risks was not reflected in the relevant documents. Accordingly, the Chair of the Council asked the Rector of the Institution, why the selling of the University was put on the agenda and whether the negotiations with the potential buyer were completed in accordance with the letter submitted by the University to the expert panel.

The Rector of the University stated that the decision to sell the University was made by the founders of the University themselves. According to the Rector, there were individuals from the Great Britain who wanted to purchase this University. The Rector stated that personally for him it made no difference whether the founder would be English, Georgian or a representative of any other nationality. Furthermore, according to his explanation, negotiations regarding the sale of the University were not completed and the process was still ongoing.

Accordingly, it became known to the Council that the negotiation with the potential buyer, which the expert report relied on, could not be completed within the specified period. Along with that, during the Council meeting, it also became apparent that the University administration did not have a clear understanding regarding the future ownership of the University. According to the Rector, the change of ownership (if this would happen) could not affect the educational process, which gave the Council reasonable opinion to believe that the administration of the University was also not aware of and had not calculated what consequences the selling process could have on the sustainability of the University.

The Chair of the Council inquired about who was the founder of the University, to which the Rector stated that the founders were Turkish nationals who lived in Germany. The Chair of the Council addressed the Rector, stating that they were interested in whether the founders were natural persons or legal entities and not in their nationality, to which the Rector explained that he was referring to natural persons.

The Chair of the Council inquired about why the financial dispute issue was not reflected in the audited financial statements prepared by the consulting organization (audit), which is required by the authorization standard and represents a publicly available document. The Rector of the University mentioned that they had not provided this information to the consulting organization (auditor) because they did not consider it significant. From the explanation of the University Rector, it became clear to the Council that the financial analysis submitted by the Institution does not reflect the real financial situation of the Institution and the audit analysis cannot be considered valid.

As a result of the discussion, the Council determined that based on the tax claim dated on February 05, 2018, the University is liable to pay 715 433.01 GEL, including principal tax, penalty and late payment interest, which according to the same act was subject to either appeal or enforcement within 30 days

in accordance with the law. The Institution did not present evidence of either enforcement or appeal, neither during the 6 -month review period nor at the Council meeting. From the lawsuit presented by the Institution within the authorization documents, it revealed that the tax claim of February 5, 2018, regarding the charge of 715 433.01 GEL was not indicated as the subject of dispute in the lawsuit and the operation of the act issued regarding this tax claim was not suspended, which meant that in the current situation, the tax liability represented an acknowledged debt, the performance deadline of which has already arrived and been exceeded. Considering all of this, because of the delay additional penalties/late payment interest was added daily to the tax liability, with the final amount depending on the exact period of the delay.

The Council mentioned that in terms of non - payment of the debt and the existence of full property arrest, the goal and policy of the University was unclear. Specifically, it was presumed that debt payment would have put the University in a more advantageous position for several reasons. First of all, this would not question the University's compliance with authorization standards. Moreover, in case of a favorable legal decision, the LTD would recover the paid amount and in case the dispute would be resolved against the LTD, it would avoid additional fines/penalties prescribed for the overdue period due to non - payment of the debt within the established deadline.

The University representatives agreed with the Council that this path would be optimal, however, they explained that they had chosen a different path. The Rector additionally mentioned that the Institution was financially ready to pay the mentioned amount, which was confirmed by the fact that the University had the necessary funds in its bank account. The University Rector presented a bank statement at the council meeting submitted by the Institution showing the account balance (739 720 GEL) as of August 20, 2018.

The Council explained that this document by itself represented neither a guarantee nor security. The Council could not understand how a legal entity could have freely available funds in its account when all of its assets were frozen. The Council did not receive proper explanation on why the risks associated with tax liabilities were not reflected in the relevant documents, business continuity plan and audit analysis on financial statements, which represents one of the authorization requirements.

The Council also determined that due to tax debt, all property (movable and immovable) of LTD International Black Sea University, as well as the owners' shares, were under arrest. The real estate where the teaching process was conducted was also under arrest. This particular property was owned by one of the shareholders, LTD Control, which was used by LTD International Black Sea University under a lease agreement. In this case, it was also unclear to the Council who actually owned the material property of the University and who would ensure its sustainability.

The Institution representatives once again stated that the LTD did not have financial problems and could repay the debt. Additionally, the University rector presented to the Council uncertified copy of the order from the Revenue Service's Analytical Department dated June 4, 2018, according to which the arrest of property of LTD International Black Sea University was to be lifted.

The Council verified the public registry data during the meeting, which revealed that according to the updated statement dated June 21, 2018 (the last update date), the arrest had not been lifted from any property or shares. The Chair of the Council addressed the rector of the Institution with a question about why, despite this letter, the arrest on the property had not been lifted.

The University Rector mentioned that the property was under arrest based on a court ruling and the removal of the arrest should have occurred through a court order. Additionally, the court hearing was scheduled for October.

Based on the explanation provided by the Rector of the Institution, it became clear to the Council that changing the existing situation, specifically, lifting the arrest on the entire property of the Institution, would require a certain period of time. This process included obtaining court confirmation and the existence of an appropriate court ruling that would serve as the basis for lifting the arrest.

The expert panel member Ekaterine Azarashvili presented to the Council the expert panel's recommendations regarding educational programmes. The first recommendation concerned the admission prerequisite for the programme, specifically for bachelor's programmes, where the level of English language proficiency was not specified as an admission prerequisite. The expert panel's recommendation was highlighting the necessity to precisely define the admission prerequisites. The second important aspect concerned the assessment system, according to which a specific lecturer could determine minimum competency scores themselves, however, it was necessary to regulate this issue at the University level so that students would have a unified understanding of the assessment system in general. Also, it was important to better inform students about the assessment system. According to the expert, the interview process with students revealed that they were less informed about the assessment system.

The Chair of the Council mentioned that there was a technical error in the report regarding the assessment of the 3rd standard, specifically, since two components of this standard were evaluated as substantially compliant, the overall assessment of the standard should have been substantially compliant. This opinion was shared by the authorization experts.

The representative of the Institution confirmed that the University had not established a minimum competency threshold in bachelor's educational programmes. It was noted that they agreed with the experts that 40% was not sufficient, however, the University had no practice of any problems regarding students enrolled in the English Language programme. If we look at the statistics, mainly students with 75 - 80 points were enrolled in the English sector. However, there were also cases when students ended up in the English - language programme by chance and didn't realize that they had selected an English-language programme. In such cases, students would transfer to the Georgian - language programme through internal mobility.

Regarding the second recommendation about the assessment system, according to the explanation provided by the Institution, the assessment system was detailed in the syllabi and all lecturers were required to introduce it to students during the very first lecture at the beginning of the semester. In addition, the University had a so - called Smart System, where all lecturers were required to upload relevant materials and syllabi.

The Chair of the Council asked the Head of the Quality Assurance Service to present the number of students and their distribution across English and Georgian sectors. According to the explanation of the Institution's representative, there were 1,571 students enrolled in bachelor's programme, 141 students in master's programme and 60 students in doctoral programme. Approximately 45% were studying in the English sector. Additionally, up to 160 foreign citizens were studying at the Institution. Additionally, internal University grants were available at the Institution.

The Chair of the Council addressed the expert panel to explain about the inaccuracy related to the assessment of the 4th standard, according to which, in the assessment summary table, 4.1 was evaluated as substantially compliant, while 4.2 was partially compliant, whereas in the standards section itself, the assessments were given in reverse. The Chair was interested which version was correct. The expert panel stated that component 4.2 was evaluated as partially compliant, meaning the assessments were correctly indicated in the assessment summary table.

The member of the expert panel, Nana Dikhaminjia noted that the problem regarding staff workload was observed. The problem was not only the internal workload of the staff at the University, but also the academic workload at other Universities. According to the expert opinion, under these workload conditions, it was impossible to conduct quality academic process. Furthermore, it was a good practice that the University's quality assurance service conducted staff satisfaction surveys, but not all staff members participated in completing these questionnaires. Accordingly, the expert panel recommended that all employees should complete these questionnaires.

The expert reported to the Council members that according to the report, the University was taking care of academic staff development, specifically by conducting workshops and trainings. However, during the interview, some professors were not aware of this and more attention needed to be paid by the University to providing information. Also, during the interview process, there were cases where new employees were not well - versed in various University regulations and this also needed more attention. Also, there were cases where affiliated staff did not understand what the affiliation procedures meant. Also, it was necessary to develop a staff evaluation system. It was essential to establish certain target benchmarks for staff development, which would allow them to know what they needed to do to move to the next level of development.

Regarding the 6th standard, expert panel member Irine Lobzhanidze mentioned that recently two research centers had been opened at the University, which were functioning with University support. Accordingly, the expert panel's recommendation concerned working on obtaining additional financial support. The expert noted that during the interviews, it became apparent that these centers were not helping academic staff in finding research grants or developing projects. Accordingly, it was recommended that the center should become oriented towards these activities. It would also be desirable to establish more connections with international and local scientific foundations. According to the explanation of the expert, one of the recommendations also concerned working with doctoral students and the defense process. One of the prerequisites for defense was publishing an article in internationally licensed journals. When these journals were reviewed, most of them were not included in international databases.

According to the explanation of the expert, the University did not have exchange programmes or programmes oriented on granting double degrees, however, the Institution had negotiations with various Educational Institutions in this direction. Also, in this part of the standard, high staff workload was a problematic issue.

The expert explained that the University already had a plagiarism detection software - TURNITIN. However, the interview process revealed that some students had no idea about this software.

The expert also mentioned that according to the university regulations, thesis defense was possible in Georgian, English, and Turkish languages.

The Chair of the Council gave the word to the Institution's representatives and asked them to explain the issue of academic staff hourly workload and research, specifically, how realistic it was for academic staff to give lectures with, for example, a 32 - hour workload or to supervise 17 educational programmes.

The HEI representative stated that they had verified the hourly workload mentioned in the experts report and also spoke with the academic staff themselves. Some of them, for example, Merab Abdaladze, had a 24 - hour workload per week. The Institution's representative cited an argument from the Labor Code, according to which a person has the right to work with a 40 - hour workload.

The Chair of the Council noted that 40 hours was a certain legal limitation for any type of labor relationship, but he wanted to know, substantially considering educational specifics, the Institution imagined academic staff could deliver lectures even for 18 hours, as defined by the regulations of the Institution. According to the HEI representative, 18 hours was realistic if the person didn't have administrative workload and other responsibilities. However, according to the head of quality assurance service, the University required from the staff to submit references about their workload at other higher education institutions. However, the International Black Sea University started its studies earlier than other Institutions and therefore receiving these references was delayed or didn't reflect the real situation.

The Chair of the Council asked the HEI representative to explain what the workload of the persons was mentioned in the report at the International Black Sea University. According to the institution's representative, the workload of Merab Abdaladze was 24 hours and not 109 hours, Azer Dilanchiev's workload was 12 hours, while the institution had not verified the workload indicators for Shorena Kuchukhidze and Ekaterine Bagishvili. The representative of the Institution noted that these individuals, except for Azer Dilanchiev, were invited staff members.

Regarding Avtandil Gagnidze's workload, the Institution's representative mentioned that the supervision of 17 programmes by this person was due to the fact that the University had separately accredited Business Administration programmes, for example - in Management, Marketing, and etc. Accordingly, in this direction, the Institution had 5 Georgian - language and 5 English - language programmes, as well as 3 English - language programmes at the master's level and 1 doctoral programme. In the current year, the Institution submitted a unified Business Administration programme for accreditation, consequently the workload of this person would be reduced. Additionally, the Institution's representative mentioned that they were considering changing the head of the programme in the marketing direction.

The Chair of the Council inquired whether the Institution confirmed that one person was supervising 17 programmes when the expert panel visited the University. This information was confirmed by the Institution's representative. The Institution's representative also mentioned that each programme had administrators. Accordingly, the main daily activities, such as interaction with students, were carried out by the administrators. He also noted that the strategy of the Institution in this direction was to have one person responsible for the development of programmes in the direction, however, it was also stated that they would discuss this issue once again at the University.

According to the explanation of the Chair of the Council, the authorisation experts could not see the effectiveness of this model, therefore they outlined this circumstance in the report and indicated that one person was supervising 17 educational programmes, who was simultaneously employed at two other Higher Education Institutions. The Chair of the Council also noted that according to the expert

panel's report, weekly workload of some professors was, for example: 109, 87, 38, 30 hours. The Chair of the Council was interested, how these workloads were calculated. The authorisation experts stated that they calculated these figures directly from the tables provided by the University.

The Institution's representative stated that there was probably an inaccuracy, as they had double - checked these numerical data with the individuals mentioned in the report and it did not correspond to reality. In response, the expert noted that one of the respondents who was a staff member of the Institution simultaneously provide lectures at 5 other Higher Education Institutions. The weekly workload of this person consisted of 35 hours and additionally had his own consulting company. Accordingly, the illogically high workload indicators of the University staff were revealed both through the documentation provided by the University and during the interviews. Therefore, according to the explanation of the experts, this issue required special attention.

The Chair of the Council mentioned that against the background where academic staff is also required to carry out scientific - research activities, even the lecture workload that the staff had just at the International Black Sea University - 18 hours per week for academic staff - was already quite high on its own, let alone considering the additional workload indicators simultaneously at all other Higher Education Institutions.

The authorisation expert, Nana Dikhaminjia clarified that she had double - checked the materials submitted by the Institution once again and several professors indeed had registered workloads of 109, 87, 38 hours per week. The Institution's representative once again noted that this was likely a technical inaccuracy, and the person mentioned in the report did not have a 109 - hour workload.

The Chair of the Council stated that the discussion was not only about the specified individuals, in general, the staff workload indicator employed at International Black Sea University was quite high. The Chair of the Council noted that it should have been in the University's interest to offer higher quality teaching to students, which in certain cases would be hindered precisely by the unreasonably high workload of the staff. The Institution's representative mentioned that they would pay more attention to this problem.

Regarding the obligation of doctoral students to publish papers, the Institution's representative stated that the University was considering publications in the journal of the International Black Sea University, however, a change was made to the dissertation council charter, according to which a specific University was no longer specified and general requirements were provided. The Institution's representative noted that this change would take effect from the 2018 - 2019 academic year, so as not to restrict the interests of those doctoral students who already knew that publishing in the University's journal would also be considered as a publication. The Institution's representative mentioned that doctoral students were warned about this change 1 year in advance. Regarding scientific journals, the Institution's representative stated that 5 journals was published at the University, of which two had received indexing.

Regarding academic staff evaluation criteria, the Institution's representative noted that the University had approved forms that staff filled out every year and each activity, for example publishing scientific articles, was assigned corresponding point. Additionally, the Institution's representative noted that for affiliated staff, the Institution had allocated 3 000 GEL per year for participation in conferences, publication of articles and various activities. David Aprasidze inquired about how many affiliated staff had utilized this allocated fund in 2017 - 2018, for example. The Rector of the University mentioned that they had funded book publications for 15 professors and the articles would be counted in

September. The Chair of the Council inquired about how much money was allocated for scientific research. The Rector of the University mentioned that 3 000 GEL was allocated for research. The Institution's representative mentioned that regarding the administrative staff evaluation system, it was not yet developed with criteria at the same level as it was for academic staff. The Institution continued working on this issue.

The Council was interested what caused the reduction in the share of administrative expenses. The Rector of the University mentioned that this reduction in expenses was due to the fact that some professors simultaneously held administrative positions at the Institution and their remuneration in administrative positions was reduced. Also important was the fact that a professor who held an administrative position at the Institution had a weekly lecture workload of 9 hours, while the weekly lecture workload of professors who did not hold administrative positions was 18 hours. If a person held the position of associate professor and at the same time performed administrative functions, the weekly lecture workload of this individual was 12 hours. Regarding the reduction in administrative expenses, the Institution's representative also explained that in this case, they were talking about improving the activities of management bodies, increasing their efficiency, which was leading to the reduction of administrative costs. The Institution's representative noted that relevant activities were outlined in the strategic plan of the University.

Council member, Levan Imnaishvili was interested in how much the workload scheme presented by the Institution regarding academic staff allowed them to simultaneously conduct scientific research activities. The Council member noted that this problem required developing a complex approach. Also, Levan Imnaishvili explained that in order to encourage research activities, the Institution should develop an internal funding system. Regarding research, the Institution's representative explained that their university had submitted applications to the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia to obtain grants. The Institution's representative mentioned that 4 grant projects were submitted from the Faculty of Business administration and 2 from the Faculty of Computer Technologies. The Chair of the Council inquired whether the Institution had any ongoing grants. The head of the Quality Assurance Service of the Institution stated that there was one ongoing scientific project. The Institution's representative explained regarding internal funding that if a project received a high score at the Rustaveli Foundation but failed to receive funding from the foundation, the University would ensure the funding of the project through internal sources. The Rector of the University mentioned that work was currently underway on an internal funding model for research projects, and it was possible that certain amounts would be added to the funds allocated for research activities to finance such projects.

The expert included in the expert panel under the student quota, Nino Popkhadze, discussed the recommendations presented in the report of the expert panel regarding the 5th authorization standard. The expert also focused on the electronic system - SMART - and stated that students received complete information through this system. The expert also emphasized greater involvement of international students in extracurricular activities, as well as employment forums. Since both the Institution's name and mission emphasized the international status of the University and was simultaneously oriented towards attracting international students, the Institution needed to take more steps in this direction. Also, the expert highlighted that when the expert panel asked students and professors who they were approaching in case of problems, their answer was that they could discuss problems with everyone. The expert noted that according to the Institution's administration, the University had an open-door policy and students could discuss problematic issues with any staff member. Nino Popkhadze

mentioned that while itself the open - door policy was good, given the staff workload indicators and the number of students, this issue needed regulation and structuring. The expert mentioned that it was also necessary to evaluate the student self - governance activities, which was not happening at the Institution. Also, during the visit, the group was left with the impression that only certain students had the chance to be involved in student self - governance and University clubs. Therefore, the experts' recommendation was that all students should be given equal opportunity to participate in these activities. The expert also noted that one of the recommendations concerned more student involvement in the university life and decision - making processes.

Regarding issues related to self - governance, the lawyer of the Institution mentioned that the Institution planned to assess how satisfied students were with the self - governance activities.

The Chair of the Council was interested in the amount of money approximately spent on student activities. The Rector of the Institution stated that approximately two hundred thousand GEL was spent on student activities.

Regarding the open - door policy, the Rector of the University mentioned that initially, students try to resolve problems at the faculty and only if they cannot resolve the issue at the faculty level, students can approach the Rector. The Rector noted that considering that the University had up to 2,500 students, this problem -resolving mechanism, in his opinion, was working.

Regarding the recommendations related to Standard 5, the Deputy Rector of the Institution noted that when international students arrive in Georgia, the University first introduce them to the culture of the Country and involve them in various activities. As for their involvement in employment forums, the Institution's representative stated that information about the forums was published at the University in both Georgian and English languages. Additionally, the University planned to involve more international organizations in these forums to increase interest of international students. The Deputy Rector of the Institution mentioned that the majority of international students were more focused on returning to their own countries after completing their studies rather than staying in Georgia.

The Institution's representative also discussed the practical component and mentioned that the University signed memorandums with more than 200 facilities, where both local and international students had the opportunity to complete their practical training.

Regarding the recommendations related to authorization Standard 7, the experts who assessed the Institution's compliance with the requirements established by the mentioned standard presented their opinions. In relation to Standard component 7.1, according to the explanation of the experts, the Institution needed to adapt its buildings and facilities for persons with special educational needs. A parking lot was allocated for such persons at the University; however, access was only possible in one building. The mentioned building was equipped with appropriate sanitary facilities. The expert noted that the Institution was also planning to adapt a second building. Also, the experts' suggestion concerned setting up student design space for the architecture programme. Regarding the library, the expert mentioned that from previous years access to international electronic databases had been purchased by the Institution. These databases did not provide the possibility for the Institution to track usage statistics. It was also important to have more collaboration between academic staff and library employees regarding the main literature indicated in syllabi. The expert mentioned that through selective verification, they checked the availability of main literature listed in several syllabi at the library, and in one case, it was revealed that a textbook could not be found at the University library.

Council member, Irakli Gharibashvili stated that he found the expert's assessment regarding the lack of library database usage statistics unclear, since these databases did provide the possibility to view such data. The expert noted that it was possible to see general statistics about how many people were using these databases, but it was impossible to obtain this data, for example by each faculty. Irakli Gharibashvili mentioned that obtaining this information by faculty was indeed difficult and this was not even required by the standard. He also mentioned that documents confirming access rights to international electronic databases were signed for one year term. Therefore, the fact that the institution had documents from previous years, 2017 - 2018, did not demonstrate a problem. The Institution's representative noted that these documents were renewed in 2017 - 2018 and the international electronic databases had been working at the Institution over the years.

Regarding the adapted environment, the Institution's representative noted that both a ramp and an elevator were installed in the academic building, as for administrative building it did not have an elevator but was equipped with a ramp. Adapted sanitary units were available on every floor of the academic building, while in the administrative building they were located on the first floor.

Regarding component 7.3, the expert noted that a special programme was used within the University in order to exchange information between lecturers and students. The expert mentioned that the experts had no recommendations regarding these components. As for components 7.1 and 7.4, the expert noted that the relevant issues had already been discussed during the description of component 2.1. Regarding the remaining parts of this component, they were in compliance with the requirements.

The Chair of the Council asked the Institution's representatives how many students quota they were requesting to determine the maximum number of students in case authorization was granted. The Institution's representative stated that currently, the maximum number of student places was set at 2500 and in case of authorization, they were requesting to set the number of student quota of 3500. The Chair of the Council was interested, what was the motivation for such an increase in student quota. The Institution's representative noted that the University had developed a student number planning formula, according to which the University could accommodate 3500 students. The Institution's representative mentioned that they had taken into account the employment rate of students and graduates and the fact that master's and doctoral level studies began in the second half of the day and teaching process was also conducted on Saturdays. The Institution's representative stated that the Institution actually needed this increased number of places. The Chair of the Council asked the experts if they had reviewed the student quota planning methodology and if this document was acceptable to them. Authorization expert, Murtaz Kvirkvaia mentioned that they had reviewed the document and recommendations were presented in component 2.1.

The Council meeting took a break at 15:50

The Council meeting resumed at 16:50

Council member, Magda Maghradze left the Council meeting due to urgent official duties.

The Chair of the Council informed the Institution's representatives that Council member Magda Maghradze had left the Council meeting to participate in an important meeting.

The Chair indicated that Council members had engaged in extensive discussions regarding the issues under review. The authorization Council stated that, within its authority, the decision would be based on both the evaluation of the experts and the factual circumstances revealed during the oral hearing.

During the oral hearing, a technical error was identified in the experts report regarding the assessment table - in the experts' report, the final assessment field for the 3rd standard was incorrectly marked. In particular, instead of "Substantially Compliant" the field was mistakenly marked as "Compliant". After correcting the inaccuracy, among the seven standards in the expert evaluation, only two were fully met: Mission and Strategic Development and Students and Their Support Services. According to the assessment of the Council, certain circumstances were not fully investigated during the preparation of the expert report because the University administration failed to fully present the necessary information during both the submission of authorization documents and the expert panel visit. The extensive list of mandatory recommendations presented in the report indicates that the Institution needs to conduct serious work.

The Council summarized discussed problematic issues that could affect the determination of compliance levels with the standards. The Chair mentioned that the determination of compliance with a specific standard in the expert report was based on a letter from a potential buyer submitted by the Institution, who expressed readiness to purchase the University and cover its debts. According to the application, the negotiation was supposed to be completed within 2 - 3 weeks, and the transfer process was to be finalized within one month. It was directly evident from the expert panel's report that information related to financial risks was not reflected in the relevant documents. The negotiation was not completed within the specified period. Consequently, the main argument became invalid.

The Council highlights the fact that, from the only lawsuit presented within the authorization documents by the Institution, it is apparent that the tax claim of February 5, 2018, regarding the charge of 715 433.01 GEL is not indicated as the subject of dispute in the lawsuit and the enforcement of the act issued regarding this tax claim has not been suspended. Consequently, due to non - payment of the amount of 715433.01 GEL charged on February 5, 2018, within 30 days, a penalty/fine corresponding to the overdue period has been applied, which has been accumulating on the debt since March 2018. The final amount to be covered to the state budget will depend on the exact period of delay. Accordingly, the implementation of certain actions by the Institution, including the submission of individual bank statements or letters, requires the issuance of accompanying legally significant documents by the appropriate authorities, which will result in legal consequences provided by law, for example, the factual situation will change, and the property of the Institution will be released from arrest.

According to the Rector's explanation itself, it is clear that changing the existing situation, specifically, removing the arrest from the Institution's entire property requires a certain period, including the existence of an appropriate court ruling that would serve as the basis for removing the arrest. At the same time, according to the Institution's representatives' explanation, the court hearing is scheduled for October of the current year.

The University administration did not provide information about the financial situation, including debts, to external auditors, as they did not consider this matter to be a significant circumstance. Audited financial reports are required by the authorization standard (7.4) and represents public document. According to the explanation provided by the Rector at the authorization Council meeting, it became clear that the analyses do not reflect the real financial situation of the Institution and presented audit analysis cannot be considered valid.

The opinion of the Council is that such approach fundamentally contradicts the quality assurance requirements regarding the publicity of valid information and simultaneously violates the legally

established norms concerning the preparation of audit reports about financial conditions. This itself demonstrates the illegal approach of the University.

The university had not considered mentioned risks in either its business continuity or financial plans, which is one of the authorization requirements. According to the Rector's explanation, it was evident that the Institution had only formally developed a business continuity plan. The renewed authorization standard requirement implies that the University administration should assess its existing challenges and risks and develop appropriate plan to ensure process continuity. Moreover, since such documents were publicly published on the University's web - page, the University deliberately did not reflect complete information because it did not want its financial problems to be publicly known.

Based on these arguments, the Council, within its authority, reviewed compliance with 2 standards: "Organizational Structure and Management" (Standard 2) and "Material, Information and Financial Resources" (Standard 7). The Council specifically discussed the requirement of component 2.1, particularly regarding the existence of a business continuity plan considering possible risks, which did not reflect issues of debt and property arrest and ways to resolve them. However, since this issue was directly related to the requirements of component 7.1 regarding material resources, Council discussed and revised the standard assessment results only for component 7.1. Specifically, one component was assessed as non-compliant with the standard requirements, while the standard as a whole was evaluated as partially compliant. Under existing legislation, based on such assessment of the standard, the Council is authorized to make only one type of decision - grant authorization to the Higher Education Institution while restricting its intake of new cohort of students. Additionally, the Council discussed and maximally considered the educational interests of the University, based on which it considered appropriate to restrict intaking of new cohort of students not for the maximum 3-year term, but for the minimum period of 1-year. This approach provides the Institution with a reasonable timeframe during which it should be able to demonstrate compliance with the authorization standard and submit appropriate valid documentation required by the standard.

Accordingly, the Chair of the Council put to vote the issue of granting authorization to LTD International Black Sea University, determining the maximum number of student places at 2500 and restricting intake of new cohort of students for a period of 1 year.

Voting results:

For - 8

Against - 1

Decision:

According to subparagraph "a" of paragraph 2 of article 11 and paragraph 2¹ of the same article, and article 12 of the Law of Georgia on "Education Quality Improvement", subparagraph "a" of paragraph 3 of article 56² and paragraph 3¹ of the same article, and article 56³ of the Law of Georgia "On Higher Education", subparagraph "a" of paragraph 1 of article 24 and paragraph 1¹ of the same article, and paragraph 1, paragraphs 3 and 4, subparagraph "d" of paragraph 6 of article 25 and paragraph 1 of article 25¹ of the "Statute of authorization for Educational Institutions" approved by Order №99/n of October 1, 2010 of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, LTD International Black Sea University (ID: 229275405) is granted the status of a Higher Education Institution (University) for a period of 6 years with a maximum student quota of 2500 students. The right of LTD International Black Sea University to intake of new cohort of students has been restricted for a period of 1 year.

After discussion of the issues provided by the agenda, the Council meeting ended at 18:00.

Chair

David Aprasidze

Secretary

Maka Gvelesiani

Decision

On Authorization of International Black Sea University LLC

Based on a review, evaluation, and consolidation of the information presented by the institution in the self-evaluation form, the argumentative position presented by the HEI on the draft report of the expert panel on the authorization of higher educational institutions, as well as based the report of the expert panel of the authorization of higher educational institutions, the position expressed by the interested party at the session of the Council of the Authorization of Higher Education Institutions, in accordance with Article 11(2)(a) of the Law of Georgia on Education Quality Improvement, paragraph 2¹ of the same Article, Article 12, Article 32⁷(1), Article 56²(3)(a) and Article 56³, of law of Georgia "On Higher Education" as well as according to Article 24(1)(a), the paragraph 1¹ of the same Article, Article 25(1) and the paragraphs 3, 4, and 6(d) of the same Article and Article 25¹(1) of the Authorization Regulations for Educational Institutions approved by Order N99/N of 1 October 2010 by the Minister of Education and Science,

the Council has decided:

1. To grant the LLC International Black Sea University (ID/Code: 229275405) the status of a Higher Education Institution (University) for the term of 6 years and to determine the quota as 2500.
2. LLC International Black Sea University's intake of new cohort of students shall be limited for the period of 1 year.
3. LLC International Black Sea University shall be granted with the authority to implement the higher education programmes stipulated in the appendix.
4. Part 3 of the minutes of the session No.09 on August 20, 2018, of the Authorization Council of Higher Education Institutions, and the report of the Expert Panel on the Authorization of Higher Education Institutions regarding International Black Sea University LLC, shall be declared integral parts of this decision.
5. It is possible to appeal the decision of the Authorization Council of Higher Education Institutions in accordance with the law, within one month of its issuance, by submitting an appeal to the Appeal Council at the following address: N2 Merab Aleksidze Str. N1, Tbilisi, or by filing a complaint with the Administrative Cases Panel of the Tbilisi City Court at the following address: Davit Agmashenebeli Alley, 12th kilometer, №6, Tbilisi.

Chairperson

David Aprasidze

Secretary

Maka Gvelesiani

Minutes #27 of the Authorization Council of the Higher Education Institutions

City of Tbilisi

08.12.2018

Following members were presented at the meeting:

Members of the Authorization Council for Higher Education Institutions (hereinafter - the Council):

Davit Aprasidze - Professor at LEPL - Ilia State University, Chair of the Council;

Nugzar Skhirtladze - Vice President for Academic Affairs at LTD Caucasus University, Professor, Deputy Chair of the Council;

Maka Gvelesiani - PhD student at LEPL - Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Secretary of the Council;

Tamar Zarandia - Dean of the Faculty of Law at LEPL - Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Associate Professor;

Davit Bedoshvili - Director of the Institute of Agriculture at the N(N)LE Agricultural University of Georgia;

Irakli Gharibashvili - Director of the National Scientific Library at LEPL - Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University;

Rima Beriashvili - Vice - Rector of LEPL - Tbilisi State Medical University, Professor;

Levan Imnaishvili - Head of the Computer Engineering Department, Faculty of Informatics and Control Systems at LEPL - Georgian Technical University, Professor;

Ramaz Sakvarelidze - Professor at LEPL - Tbilisi State Medical University;

Nana Sharikadze - Head of International Relations Department at LEPL - Tbilisi Vano Sarajishvili State Conservatoire, Associate Professor, Doctor of Arts;

Konstantine Sirbiladze - Professor at LEPL - Akaki Tsereteli State University;

Nodar Shurghaia - Director of LTD "Employment Agency HR".

Representatives of LEPL - National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (hereinafter - the Center):

Lasha Margishvili - Head of the Department of Higher Education Quality Assurance;

Lali Giorgidze - Head of the Division of Higher Education Institutions Authorization.

Tinatini Dvalishvili - Specialist of the Department of Higher Education Institutions Authorization.

Giorgi Munjishvili - Specialist of the Department of Higher Education Institutions Authorization.

Nino Popkhadze - Specialist of the Department of Higher Education Institutions Authorization.

Representatives of Higher Education Institutions:

Ltd International Black Sea University:

Ilias Chiloglu - Rector;

Goderdzi Buchashvili - Vice-Rector;

Resul Dikmen - Member of the Supervisory Board;

Diana Mchedlishvili - Head of Quality Assurance Department;

Tamar Shudra - Lawyer;

Ioseb Baratashvili - Attorney;
Mariam Chikovani - Attorney;
Shorena Devadze - Attorney;
Tamar Gegenava - Student;
Ani Khetsuriani - Student;
Mindia Gabadze - Representative of Public Relations Service.

LTD Business and Technology University:

Andro Rurua - Rector;
Maia Noniashvili - Head of Administration;
Nino Enukidze - Dean of the Faculty of Business and Technology;
Tamar Gvianishvili - Head of Quality Assurance Service.

LEPL - Sokhumi State University:

Zurab Khonelidze - Rector;
Nino Topuridze - Head of Administration;
Larisa Takalandze - Speaker of the Representative Council;
Mariam Miresashvili - Head of the Department of Learning Process Management;
Zurab Papaskiri - Head of the Department of Scientific Research and Development;
Sophio Gvaramia - Head of Legal Service;
Indira Dzagania - Head of the Department of Foreign Relations and Intercultural Connections;
Romeo Galdava - Head of Quality Assurance Service;
Lia Akhaladze - Dean of the Faculty of Education;
Marina Zarkua - Dean of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Healthcare;
Vepkhvia Gvaramia - Dean of the Faculty of Law;
David Jalaghonia - Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Business;
Merab Nachkebia - Dean of the Faculty of Humanities.

Authorization Experts of Higher Education Institutions (hereinafter - experts):

Irina Lobzhanidze;
Ekaterine Azarashvili;
Murtaz Kvirkvaia;
Irine Darchia;
Nino Berishvili;
Tinatin Pavliashvili;
Salome Dzagnidze;
Avtandil Tavkhelidze.

Authorization Experts of Vocational Education Institutions:

Mariam Mikadze;
Nino Khachidze;

Marina Gedevanishvili.

Other Attendees:

Nana Rostomashvili - "Association of Private Higher Education Institutions";

Nia Gugunava - Authorization Expert of Vocational Education Institutions.

Shorena Khubunaia - Authorization Expert of Vocational Education Institutions.

The Council meeting started at 14:10. According to Article 22, Paragraph 4 of the "Statute for the Authorization of Educational Institutions" approved by the Order №99/n of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, October 1, 2010, the meeting was chaired by the Chair of the Council, Davit Aprasidze. The Chair of the Council verified the number of Council members present at the meeting and determined that, in accordance with Article 22, Paragraph 5 of the "Statute for the Authorization of Educational Institutions" approved by Order №99/n of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, October 1, 2010, the meeting was eligible as more than half of the Council members were present.

The Chair of the Council noted that since the Council was also discussing the issue of granting authority to Higher Education Institutions to implement vocational education programmes, based on Article 23, Paragraph 3 of the Authorization Regulation, two persons - Nia Gugunava and Shorena Khubunaia, designated by the Chair of the Council were attending the meeting with advisory voting right.

The Chair pointed out to the Council members the requirement of Article 24, Paragraph 4 of the Regulation, which states that a Council member is not authorized to refrain from voting.

The Chair of the Council presented the agenda of the meeting to the Council members:

1. Reconsideration of the Authorization status of LTD International Black Sea University based on to the decision of Appeals Council.
2. Discussion of the matter of expanding the student quota for LTD Business and Technology University;
3. Discussion of the authorization matter of LEPL - Sokhumi State University.
4. Discussion of the matter to grant the authority to implement vocational education programmes to LEPL Sokhumi State University.

The Chair of the Council asked the Council members, Center representatives and interested parties if they had any motions regarding the agenda. No motions were presented. Accordingly, the Council unanimously approved the presented agenda of the meeting.

1. **Reconsideration of the Authorization of LTD International Black Sea University based on the decision of Appeals Council.**

The University representative, Ioseb Baratashvili, presented a motion to the Council regarding making a video recording of the Council meeting. The Chair of the Council put the issue to a vote and with the consent of Council members, the Institution was granted permission to make a video recording of the meeting. Upon the request of the Chair of the Council and with the consent of Council members, the Center was also asked to make an audio recording of the session.

The Chair of the Council asked the representatives of the Institution if they had any recusal requests against the Council members. The representatives of the Institution confirmed that they had no recusal requests against the Council members.

According to the Chair of the Council, based on the decision of Appeals Council, the Council was reconsidering the authorization issue of LTD International Black Sea University. During the discussion, special attention would be focused on two issues, concerning both the restriction of the authority of the institution to intake of new cohort of students as well as determining the maximum number of student for the institution.

The Chair of the Council gave the representatives of the Institution an opportunity to express their opinion.

According to the representative of the institution, Ioseb Baratashvili, the institution appealed the authorization Council decision of August 20, 2018, which concerned the restriction of International Black Sea University to intake of new cohort of students and determining the number of students to 2500. According to his explanation, International Black Sea University was involved in a legal dispute with the Revenue Service, due to which the property of the University was under arrest. The position of authorization Council was that if the court case was decided against the University, this could pose a risk to the students. In the appeal, the institution presented a position that during the visit of authorization experts, they were aware of the dispute, however, they did not consider this fact as a threat. Also, the representative of the institution presented a bank statement to the authorization Council, which confirmed that there were relevant funds on the institution's account. In case the dispute was resolved against the institution, it would cover full amount of the mentioned debt. It is important to note that the bank accounts of International Black Sea University were not frozen, and the University was not required by law or any other act to present a bank guarantee or warranty to the authorization Council.

According to the representative of the institution, after the decision of authorization Council, on October 22, 2018, the Collegium of Administrative Cases of Tbilisi City Court left the Revenue Service's lawsuit without consideration and annulled the ruling of February 8, 2017, of the Administrative Cases Panel of Tbilisi City Court, which had imposed arrest of the property of LTD International Black Sea University and immovable property and shares of the founders. Therefore, the precautionary measure related to the lawsuit - the arrest was cancelled and on November 9, 2018, the above mentioned ruling of Tbilisi City Court entered into legal force. Also, the statement from the Public Registry was updated, which confirmed that the shares and immovable property of LTD International Black Sea University were no longer encumbered by any type of obligation.

According to the representative of the institution, as of December 8, 2018, even the slightest doubt that might have existed towards the institution had been completely removed. In fact, the property of the

University was completely free and the Rector presented both the legally binding court ruling and the statement and if there had been any questions regarding this issue, they no longer existed as of today.

Regarding the justification for setting the student quota at 3500, the institution indicated in the appeal that this issue essentially was not discussed at all and was not reflected in the Minutes of authorization Council. Specifically, no explanation was presented as to why the student number was set at 2500 when the institution requested 3500 students, who supported this decision and who did not and what was the reasoning behind it. The representative of the institution handed over to Diana Mchedlishvili, the Head of the Quality Assurance Department of the University, to justify the request regarding the maximum number of students.

According to Diana Mchedlishvili, the Head of the Quality Assurance Department of the institution, regarding determining the maximum number of students at 3500, the Institution had two important approaches. First of all, over the years, the institution had recorded an increasing dynamic of student enrollments in existing and ongoing programmes. Along with that, other criteria had to be considered, such as the employment rate of graduates, student mobility dynamics and programme completion rates always had very good results and had been improving year after year. Additionally, demand from international students to continue their studies at International Black Sea University was growing yearly. Therefore, a constant need to increase the maximum number of students always existed in the University.

According to Diana Mchedlishvili, the University always had difficulty to announce mobility opportunities for both spring and fall semesters, as well as for master's programmes, in February they would only announce 2 symbolic places in the programme. This was uncomfortable and created many problems for the institution. According to the Head of the Quality Assurance Department of the institution, during the reauthorization process, they decided to increase the maximum number of students to have more flexibility in student admissions.

It was also important to mention that the institution had the necessary human resources, facilities and technical equipment to run the programmes with a larger student body. According to the Head of Quality Assurance of the institution, they had created a special formula that proved they could handle a larger number of students. It was important that during the visit, this fact was confirmed by the experts and was reflected in their report. According to Diana Mchedlishvili, the institution had counted classrooms that were not occupied throughout the entire day, but only during certain parts of the day, which was actually possible. Based on the two circumstances mentioned above, the institution appealed to the Council to approve the request of the University to increase the maximum number of students, as the institution had a constant need for this and was capable to create an appropriate educational environment for 3500 students.

The Chair of the Council noted that according to the decision of 2011 of authorization Council, the institution's maximum student capacity was determined at 2500, which remained unchanged by the decision of Authorization Council of August 20, 2018. The Council members considered that since the right of the Institution to intake of new cohort of students was restricted for one year, it was reasonable for the institution to maintain the maximum number of students that existed during the previous authorization period.

The Chair of the Council inquired about the number of students with active status. According to the representative of the institution, since the institution was unable to admit first - year students in either bachelor's or master's programmes, nor through mobility or international students, at this stage the institution had 1500 students with active status. However, if the restriction on intaking of new cohort of students were to be lifted, the institution would face the same problem again.

According to the Rector of the Institution, Ilias Chiloglu, the growing interest of international students in studying at International Black Sea University was noteworthy. Also, during the discussion of this issue, it was important that the institution was requesting to determine the student threshold at 3500 for the 6 - year authorization period and this would allow them to better plan their future activities in the long term.

According to the explanation of the institution's representative, Ioseb Baratashvili, the institution requested to annul that part of the authorization Council's decision of August 20, 2018, which restricted intaking of new cohort of students for International Black Sea University for 1 year and set the maximum number of students at 2500 instead of 3500. As for the second part of the decision, which granted authorization to the institution, according to explanation of Ioseb Baratashvili, the institution agreed with this part, and this was also mentioned in the appeal. Also, according to the explanation of the institution's representative, there was also a condition at the Appeals Council that it was possible to partially review the decision. Ioseb Baratashvili once again highlighted that neither the real estate nor the bank accounts of the University were under arrest anymore and the institution was free from all obligations.

The Chair of the Council gave the expert group members an opportunity to express their opinion and asked them to emphasize main aspects that were presented in the appeal and by which the institution was requesting to change the previous authorization decision. According to the Chair of the Council, the expert panel members had discussed the issue of arrest at the authorization Council meeting on August 20 and once again asked them to provide information to the Council. According to the explanation of the Chair of the Council, as mentioned by the institution's representative Ioseb Baratashvili, the experts did not consider this issue as important and asked them to explain once again why they did not consider the arrest issue as important given the situation that existed during the site visit. According to the Chair of the Council, as declared by the institution's representatives, certain circumstances from this perspective had already changed.

According to the explanation of authorization expert Murtaz Kvirkvaia, regarding financial resources, their arguments concerning the arrest and financial issues remained unchanged. According to the explanation of the expert, when evaluating this issue during the site visit, they were guided by the documentation presented by the institution, specifically, the conclusion of previous year audit, which was a business assessment conducted by quite authoritative organization, according to which, the disputed amount that the University had was much less, approximately 30 times less, than the University itself as an assessed business. However, in their report, both in the second standard and in component 7.4, they mentioned that since the issue was controversial, more attention should have been paid to business continuity issues, where risks were discussed. Also, Murtaz Kvirkvaia stated that, during the site visit, the head of the expert group requested a separate additional meeting, where the University presented several options for process development if the issue of payment would come up on the agenda.

The Chair of the Council asked the experts to discuss the issue of increasing the maximum number of students and inquired about their opinion on whether the University had sufficient human and material resources to serve 3500 students.

According to the explanation of authorization expert Ekaterine Azarashvili, they considered the request of the University regarding the increase in student numbers and the resources were evaluated from this perspective during the site visit. According to her explanation, the University had the relevant resources to serve 3500 students. As for the financial and the property arrest part, they did not ignore these issues and it was reflected in the relevant standards in the report.

According to Ekaterine Azarashvili, the relevant risks were not reflected in the business continuity plan of the University and it was noted by the experts. Also they recommended that risks must be reflected and the institution should have predetermined what resources would be needed to address these type of problems. However, most of the recommendations provided by the expert panel were primarily oriented on the further development of resources that the University already possessed and the experts were hopeful that the institution would consider their recommendations. In addition to these developmental recommendations, the experts considered that the University had the appropriate human and material resources to serve the increased maximum number of students.

According to the Chair of the Council, it was repeatedly highlighted in the experts' report that the institution should work on increasing student awareness. The Chair of the Council inquired that if the institution had such problem with 2500 students, how did the experts believe that the University had institutional readiness to adequately handle this challenge under the conditions of 3500 students.

Expert Ekaterine Azarashvili explained, that their main recommendations were also related to the systematization of processes. It was significant to note that information mechanisms existed in the institution, however, their effective implementation was important. According to the explanation of Ekaterine Azarashvili, the University had steps to take in this regard. For example, there were student support services that were rather scattered and it was necessary to transfer them to one specific unit, structure or at least to a person and to inform students about this. The expert mentioned once again that appropriate mechanisms existed in the institution, however, in terms of their implementation, the University had steps to take.

According to the institution's representative Diana Mchedlishvili, based on the experts' recommendation, changes were implemented in this direction and currently student services were functioning under one unit. Also, it was important to mention that students were actively involved in University life and it was surprising for the institution why experts had such impression. As Diana Mchedlishvili explained, the reason for this could have been the circumstance that students were confused or nervous during the interview process or were not personally active themselves. According to the explanation of the institution's representative, the University would continue working in this direction to make students more active towards the processes.

According to the Chair of the Council, authorization experts had the appropriate methodology that was used to evaluate the existing situation at the institution. This issue was mentioned multiple times by the experts in different parts of the report, which was significant for the Council. As a result of the oral hearing, it was revealed that the mechanisms existed, but better implementation of them was needed.

According to the Council member, Tamar Zarandia, it is legally permissible for a profit - oriented business legal entity to obtain the status of a Higher Education Institution. Legally, the fact that the property of Limited Company was under arrest may not represent a substantial problem for any other LTD, however, this circumstance could be problematic for a Higher Education Institution operating in the legal form of a LTD, considering its operational purposes. According to the explanation of the Chair of the Council, this comment was not related to the issue under discussion, but this comment could be recorded in the minutes as it might contribute to the further development of higher education.

The Chair of the Council inquired whether there was any update regarding the issue of selling of the institution, because this scenario was discussed during the authorization experts visit. The Chair of the Council inquired whether there was any decision made in this regard or what was the vision of the University, as this issue was directly related to the sustainability. Furthermore, the institution mentioned that in any case, the institution would continue functioning as a University.

According to the Rector of the institution, negotiations were still ongoing in this direction with interested parties, there were foreigners who wanted to purchase the University, however, this process, specifically the decision of authorization Council of August 20, hindered this process, as investors became afraid to continue with the process. In order to provide detailed answer to this question, the Rector passed the word to University representative Ioseb Baratashvili, who was directly involved in this process.

According to the representative of the institution, Ioseb Baratashvili, in his opinion and in the experts opinion as well, this case had no impact on the institution's functioning, whether it would have authorization and the ability to admit students or not. Otherwise, this would have definitely been reflected in the experts' report. According to Ioseb Baratashvili, the experts were aware of this issue, but they did not consider the fact of whether the University would be sold or not as a decisive factor. Currently, there was no threat to the University and this issue was solely a matter of interest.

According to the Chair's remark, if they were discussing a regular company, this matter would not have any importance. Since the Council was discussing the issue of the Higher Education Institution, the Council and the public were interested in the existing guarantees, in case of changes in ownership, that would not cause disruptions for the University functioning. According to the representative of the institution Ioseb Baratashvili, this issue was no longer on the agenda. In case of any changes, the relevant authorities would be immediately notified. He emphasized once again the fact that the institution had appropriate material and intellectual resources to successfully carry out its activities.

Council member, Konstantine Sirbiladze explained that expanding student quota from 2500 to 3500 represented a 40% increase. Consequently, the Council member inquired about which directions the institution planned to develop with the increased quota and how sustainable these programmes would be with the higher student enrollment. According to the representative of the institution, the University planned to develop the Business Administration direction, as well as Law, which recently had been separated into an independent faculty and had 2 programmes, also there were plans to add additional Master's and Doctoral programmes. Additionally, significant resources were directed towards the faculty of Computer Technology, where foreign professors had already been invited and scientific work was actively ongoing with student participation. Also, the institution was considering adding a Georgian - language doctoral programme in the field of Education. Diana Mchedlishvili explained that the institution

had growing demand from international students as well. The institution didn't have enough room to announce regular student mobility and they were consistently suppressed. Therefore, the institution chose to combine their request for increased student capacity with the authorization process, instead of applying for it separately in advance.

According to Diana Mchedlishvili, the decision of the institution to request increased number of students was not based on the needs of recent months, but rather was a necessity of the last several years. According to her statement, the authorization processes were postponed several times, so the institution waited for new standards of the authorization to be established and finally, within the framework of this authorization, express their desire to increase the number of students.

The Chair of the Council was interested in how the increased number of students would be reflected on the sustainability of these programmes. According to the explanation of Diana Mchedlishvili, the experts saw that the institution had no problems in terms of material resources and the new campus would be operational very soon, one building was already ready. Regarding human resources, calculating only academic staff within the range of 3500 students, there were 43 students per one academic staff member, plus there were up to 300 invited lecturers. Also, according to the strategic development plan, the institution planned to increase the number of affiliated academic staff to approximately 100 within 2 years and in this direction, the institution was announcing competitions and would not have any problems in terms of human resources. From a financial perspective, if the University had the opportunity to admit as many students as it desired, the institution would not have financial problems and financial sustainability would be ensured. According to the University representative, the institution would also attract foreign students, who would pay considerably more than local students.

According to the explanation of Council member Nugzar Skhirtladze, one of the recommendations of experts' panel was formulated as follows: to deepen cooperation between academic staff and the library to ensure accessibility to all mandatory literature listed in the syllabus. The Council member was interested, what led to issuing such recommendation.

According to the explanation of Diana Mchedlishvili, the academic staff themselves were active and key participants in syllabus compilation and programme development. Accordingly, they themselves took care that the literature they used would be available in the library, whether in printed or electronic form. Besides that, the University used the SMART system, where literature was uploaded and controlled by the Quality Assurance Department. Accordingly, she could not understand why this problem was identified. Additionally, in the recent period, the institution underwent accreditation for Business Administration and Journalism programmes and there was not a single instance of a book being absent from the library. This was ensured by the academic staff who are the authors of the syllabi. Accordingly, as explained by the institution's representative, this could be considered more as a suggestion for the University to continue working in this direction.

Council member Irakli Gharibashvili inquired about what the institution meant by academic staff taking care of library development and also asked them to explain what was uploaded in the SMART system. According to the representative of the institution, taking care meant that academic staff selected literature in the library and if they needed different educational literature, they would request to the faculty to purchase it. Accordingly, this close connection existed between the academic staff and the library. The SMART system was one of the student information systems, where all lecturers were required to upload

all materials for students on a weekly basis, so that materials would be electronically accessible. If the electronic version did not exist, they had to scan and upload it electronically. This was mentioned in both the regulations and the contract and this system was actively used and beneficial for both students and lecturers.

Council member Nana Sharikadze inquired about how many students the institution was expecting if there were no existing restrictions and, given the requested 3500 places, how the University had planned the percentage increase of students in the coming years.

According to the institution's representative, the number of students would be approximately 2300 or slightly more, the institution planned to admit 800 students and there was demand for this. However, this would also be added to by foreign students, master's degree candidates, doctoral students and students seeking mobility transfer. According to the University representative, they had an increasing dynamics of demand. In particular, according to the latest Webometrics data, they were ranked first among private Universities. Accordingly, the University was planning to increase the student body by approximately 300 students per year. According to the Rector of the University, in previous years, the institution had 350 first - year students, then accepted approximately 500 students, then 650 students and this year they announced admission for 800 students. Accordingly, the admission was increasing by 150-200 students every year.

The Chair of the Council was interested from which countries citizens mainly studied at the institution. According to the Rector of the Institution, at this stage representatives from Turkmenistan, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, the USA and other countries were studying at the institution.

Council member, Nana Sharikadze, was interested in the foreign language entrance examination issue for international students. According to the Rector of the institution, the Oxford examination system had been implemented at the institution, through which the English language level of students was determined. The minimum required language proficiency level was B2. Also, students were undergoing an online interview to determine their language competency. Also, it should be noted that the institution had one year English language preparatory programme, which foreign students would take if necessary.

The Council meeting took a break at 14:55.

The Council meeting resumed at 15:12.

According to the Chair of the Council, the Council discussed the mentioned issue and made a decision by consensus. The Chair of the Council stated that all Council members agree that, sadly, this issue became unnecessarily politicized. He stated that today's Council meeting demonstrated the sustainability of the quality development framework in the State, the existence of an appeals body that reviewed and remanded the issue back to the authorization Council, which willingly undertook a thorough reconsideration of the issue in full compliance with procedures. According to the explanation of the Chair of the Council, this case would serve as an example for other universities in the future, demonstrating that there is a trust in this system and a sense that disputed issues can be resolved within the system itself.

The Chair of the Council explained that concerning the decision of August 20, it was crucial to highlight that Council members had certain questions regarding how the management of the Institution approached risks within the University, rather than concerns about its financial stability. The Council believes that legal entities engaged in higher education have a specific social responsibility and are not just entities focused on economic profit. This is exactly why there is an authorization process and corresponding

standards, setting higher requirements for these entities compared to regular companies. The Council also noted that they observed the steps taken by the institution after August 20, 2018, which were demonstrated through debt payment and the removal of property arrest. According to the opinion of the Council members, they observed a changed situation in terms of the attitude of the University management, but also noted that it would have been better if the payment had been made before August 20, 2018.

Regarding the number of students, the Council accepted the circumstance that this issue was not properly discussed at the previous authorization Council meeting, however, the Council believes that it would be illogical to increase the number of students for an institution whose intaking of new cohort of students was restricted for 1 year due to certain deficiencies. Therefore, on August 20, the institution was determined a maximum threshold based on the previous authorization period.

The Chair of the Council, on behalf of the Council, thanked the Appeals Council, whose decision once again confirmed that this mechanism works institutionally. The Chair of the Council also thanked the members of the authorization Council and mentioned that they had considered this issue based on the principles of professional ethics.

The Chair of the Council mentioned that according to the authorization Statute, in case the Appeals Council makes a decision to return the case to the authorization Council for reconsideration, the authorization Council reviews the case in accordance with the procedure established by the authorization Statute and makes one of the decisions provided by the authorization Statute. The Chair of the Council also mentioned that the term of the decision on granting authorization to the institution would start counting from December 8, 2018. Consequently, from the same date, Decision №51 of the authorization Council of Higher Education Institutions dated August 20, 2018, would no longer be valid.

Also, according to the Council's explanation, in this case, the Council considered that component 7.1 of the authorization standard should be evaluated as substantially compliant with the requirements as of December 8, 2018. Therefore, the assessment of the entire 7th standard would be substantially compliant. Therefore, according to the authorization Statute, the institution will need to submit a report regarding the recommendations within one year.

Accordingly, the Chair of the Council put to vote the issue of granting authorization to LTD International Black Sea University and determining the maximum number of students at 3500.

Voting results:

For: 11

Against: 0

Decision:

According to the subparagraph "a" of paragraph 2 of Article 11, and Article 12 of the Law of Georgia on " Education Quality Improvement", subparagraph "a" of paragraph 3 of Article 56², and Article 56³ of the Law of Georgia on "Higher Education", part 1 of Article 61 of the General Administrative Code of Georgia, subparagraph "a" of paragraph 1 of Article 24, paragraph 1, paragraph 3, paragraph 4, subparagraph "b" of paragraph 6 of Article 25, paragraphs 2 and 3 of Article 26⁸ of the "Statute of the Authorization of the Educational Institutions" approved by Order №99/n of October 1, 2010 of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia,

1. LTD International Black Sea University (ID: 229275405) is granted the status of a Higher Education Institution (University) for a period of 6 years, with a maximum student quota of 3500. The institution is given 1 year to submit a report on the implementation of the received recommendations.

2. The Decision №51 of August 20, 2018, of the authorization Council of Higher Education Institutions shall be declared as annulled.

The Council meeting break was announced at 15:20.

The Council meeting resumed at 15:33.

Decision

On Authorisation of International Black Sea University LLC

According to the information presented by the institution in the self-evaluation form, the argumentative position presented by the HEI on the draft report of the expert panel of the authorization of higher educational institutions, as well as based the report of the expert panel of the authorization of higher educational institutions, as well as according to the decision N16 of the Appeals Council of 15 October 2018, according to Article 11(2)(a) of the Law of Georgia on Education Quality Improvement, Article 12 of the same law, Article 56²(3)(a) and Article 56³ of law of Georgia "On Higher Education" as well as according to Article 61- part 1 of the General Administrative Code of Georgia, also Article 24(1)(a), article 25(1) and the paragraphs 3, 4, and 6(b) of the same Article, and paragraphs 2 and 3 of Article 26¹ of the Authorization Regulations for Educational Institutions approved by Order N99/N of October 1, 2010, by the Minister of Education and Science,

the Council has decided:

1. To grant the LLC International Black Sea University (ID/Code: 229275405) the status of a Higher Education Institution (University) for the term of 6 years and to determine the student quota as 3500.
2. To declare Decision No. 51 of the Authorization Council of the Higher Education Institutions of August 20, 2018, void.
3. To grant LLC International Black Sea University the authority to implement the higher education programmes stipulated in the appendix.
4. To declare Part 1 of the minutes of session No.27 of December 8, 2018, of the Authorization Council of the Higher Education Institutions and the report of the Expert Panel of the Authorization of Higher Education Institutions on LLC International Black Sea University shall be declared as integral parts of this decision.
5. It is possible to appeal the decision of the Authorization Council of Higher Education Institutions in accordance with the law within one month of its issuance, by submitting an appeal to the Appeal Council at the following address: N2 Merab Aleksidze Str. N1, Tbilisi, or by filing a complaint to the Administrative Cases Panel of the Tbilisi City Court at the following address: Davit Aghmashenebeli Alley, 12th kilometer, №6, Tbilisi.

Chairperson

David Aprasidze

Secretary

Maka Gvelesiani



განათლების ხარისხის განვითარების ეროვნული ცენტრი
NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

Report of Authorisation Evaluation of International Black Sea University

Expert Panel Members

Chair: Andy Gibbs, Independent QA Expert, United Kingdom

Members:

Irina Iobzhanidze, Ilia State University, Georgia

Ekaterine Azarashvili, Caucasus University, Georgia

Nana Dikhaminjia, Ilia State University, Georgia

Murtaz Kvirkvaia, Grigol Robakidze University, Georgia

Nini Popkhadze (student expert), Ilia State University, Georgia

Tbilisi
2018__

Authorisation Report Resume

General information on the educational institution

The International Black Sea University (IBSU) mission focuses on professionally-oriented high-quality education and applied research emphasizing innovation, internationalization and lifelong learning. IBSU strives to promote intercultural dialogue, sustain a high employment rate of graduates in domestic and international labour market and contribute to the development of a democratic civil society.

IBSU has the vision to take strides in becoming an internationally recognized university for its educational excellence, management efficiency, research output, and societal engagement, having the necessary environment for its students and staff to be advocates of global human values, and lifelong learning. International Black Sea University serves the following areas of education for BA, MA, PhD degrees.^[4]

- Faculty of Business Management
- Faculty of Social Sciences
- Faculty of Education and Humanities
- Faculty of Computer Technology and Engineering
- Faculty of Law

Brief overview of the evaluation procedure for authorisation: SER and site visit

The evaluation procedure for authorisation of IBSU was conducted in line with the process described by the National Centre for Educational Enhancement (NCEE). The panel was appointed in March 2018.

The SER and related documents was sent to panel members on 3rd April 2018. Panel members had regular email exchanges regarding the organisation of the review. Following a proposal by the chair, specific standards were allocated to the panel members as specific focus points for their attention. Panel members identified a proposed time schedule for the site visit, preliminary impressions and any requests for additional documents were discussed. At that time special points for further investigation were brought together in a mapping grid for panel members. On 23rd April 2018, the panel met before the start of the site visit, to discuss the topics and consider the authorisation standards in detail. It was decided that, while an individual panel member would have a first responsibility for bringing up topics related to 'his or her standard' in specific sessions, other panel members could join in in the discussions whenever suitable. Thus, there would be no specific lead-person per session, apart from the chair. The site visit was conducted between 24th and 27th April 2018.

The SER was well prepared, and the meetings and interviews were conducted in a collegiate way. At the conclusion of the site visit, brief feedback was given firstly to the University management and then to staff of the University. Following the site visit the panel provided detailed comments on each of the standards and a draft report was compiled and edited by the Chair. The report was prepared submitted to NCEE on 8th May 2018 and finalised on 8th July 2018.

Overview of the HEI's compliance with standards

Summary of Recommendations

- Include measurable performance indicators in the action plan
- Commence structured monitoring of the action plan
- To enhance students involvement in University decision-making, provide students with greater awareness regarding students' involvement opportunities in structural units
- Involve all alternatives related to risks in the business continuity plan, with relevant justification and reference to resources available at university to solve the problems
- Encourage more focus on the involvement of academic staff in quality assurance surveys
- Refine the methodology of students body planning in the University and improve the awareness of the staff (related with the students body planning process) about existing methodology of students body planning
- Foreign language proficiency level shall be clearly defined in admission preconditions of the programme and thoroughly executed
- Mandatory internship results shall be carefully evaluated by supervisors in view of the internship learning outcomes and the relevant programme goals
- The university should ensure that students have clear understanding of learning outcomes evaluation scheme in order to avoid misinterpretation and confusion among students;
- Academic staff and lecturers are suggested to better communicate the learning outcomes and the evaluation system with students.
- Ensure that affiliated academic staff fully understand rules of affiliation
- Establish clear strategies for the professional development of the staff, to measure their participation in the offered trainings and workshops and to measure effect of the professional development on their performance
- Staff evaluation system need to be developed in more systematic way
- Set specific benchmarks for the academic and administrative staff and to measure how the performance is improved
- Develop more formal procedures to make sure that all the academic staff is fully involved in decision-making processes
- Staff satisfaction surveys should be filled in by each academic and administrative personnel;
- Improve procedures for integrating new employees into work environment and informing them on quality assurance requirements;
- Include in the workload calculation the time necessary for grading, material preparation, research, office hours for each course, supervising education program. Total workload calculation also should include other jobs of professors at administrative or industry positions
- After total workload calculation, HEI needs to reconsider the workload for professors to ensure implementation of educational programmes and proper fulfillment of research and other activities
- Consider how to Involve more international students at job fairs
- Develop clear policy and distinction of who is responsible to manage and resolve student problems
- Regulate "Open Door Policy" in order to regulate and manage staff workload
- Utilise the evaluation for the students clubs and self government office, as they are official bodies of the University
- Promote the perception of student self-government as a change maker among students, that is focussed on students needs and engages in University life and decision making

- Focus on securing external funding opportunities for the implementation of research projects
- Provide Support for academic staff with grant writing and project proposals
- Accelerate implementation of planned joint programs aiming at joint or double degrees
- Publish outcomes of outcomes of academic staff research output evaluation
- Make all buildings fully accessible for people with special needs
- More cooperation between academic staff and library with regard to delivery of main literature listed in the syllabi

Summary of Suggestions

- Introduce centralised co-ordination of strategic planning to ensure coherence of activities
- Refine the methodology of students body planning in the University and improve the awareness of the staff (related with the students body planning process) about existing methodology of students body planning
- Formalise consultation processes with external stakeholders
- Introduce centralised co-ordination to ensure coherence of activities
- Develop an effective marketing platform at the international level and strengthen PR activities internationally
- Encourage more focus on the involvement of academic staff in quality assurance surveys
- Systematically review the mechanisms for anti-plagiarism and permanently support academic honesty
- Improve the quality of market research by using effective methods and problem-based analysis in order to increase reliability of conducted research
- Design of questionnaires shall give a more space to students to comment on practical and scientific-research components of the educational programmes
- Elaborate educational programme periodic review on existing programmes so that it is clearly described with more emphasis on formal engagement of all stakeholders
- Foreign language proficiency level could be more clearly stated in admission preconditions of the programme and thoroughly executed
- Elaborate educational programme periodic review on existing programmes so that it is clearly described with more emphasis on formal engagement of all stakeholders
- Consider programme specification in each field while selecting the fourth subject at the national unified examination, aiming at students' better academic achievements.
- Mandatory internship results shall be carefully evaluated by supervisors in view of the internship learning outcomes and the relevant programme goals
- Law faculty students participation in international moot court competitions would be asset , such as CEEMC (Central and Eastern European Moot Court), JESSUP (Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition), VIS MOOT (Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot).
- Utilise international activities to internationalise the curriculum for the benefit of non mobile students
- Increase awareness of plagiarism and anti plagiarism amongst MA students
- Develop more international project opportunities (social and/ or academic) for students
- Create student model space for Architecture programme
- More cooperation between academic staff and library with regard to delivery of main literature listed in the syllabi
- Greater clarity with regards to statistical analysis of database usage
- Train the relevant administrative staff on cyber-security and IT management related issues
- Continue efforts to diversify income streams to ensure long-term financial stability for the university

Summary of the Best Practices

- The participatory approach to mission statement development has created good awareness and ownership amongst staff
- Reporting on development of educational programs is good practice that faculties share within the University
- Team congratulates the university on having such as vibrant, comfortable and multifunctional campus.
- The SMART system is student oriented
- Intership programs based at IBSU is regarded as a good starting point for further development

Summary Table of Compliance of HEI with Standards and Standard Components

	Standard	Complies with Requirements	Substantially complies with requirements	Partially Complies with Requirements	Does not Comply with Requirements
1.	Mission and strategic development of HEI	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.1	Mission of HEI	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2	Strategic development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Organisational structure and management of HEI	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.1	Organisational structure and management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.2	Internal quality assurance mechanisms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.3	Observing principles of ethics and integrity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Educational Programmes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.1	Design and development of educational programmes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.2	Structure and content of educational programmes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.3	Assessment of learning outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Staff of the HEI	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.1	Staff management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.2	Academic/Scientific and invited Staff workload	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Students and their support services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.1	The Rule for obtaining and changing student status, the recognition of education, and student rights	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.2	Student support services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Research, development and/or other creative work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.1	Research activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.2	Research support and internationalisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.3	Evaluation of research activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7	Material, information and financial resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.1	Material resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.2	Library resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.3	Information resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.4	Financial resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signature of expert panel members

Ekaterine Azarashvili

Nana Dikhaminjia

Andy Gibbs

Irina Lobzhanidze

Prof Murtaz Kvirkvaia

Nino Popkhadze

Compliance of the Applicant HEI with the Authorisation Standard Components

1. Mission and strategic development of HEI

Mission statement of a HEI defines its role and place within higher education area and broader society. Strategic development plan of HEI corresponds with the mission of an institution, is based on the goals of the institution and describe means for achieving these goals.

1.1 Mission of HEI
Mission Statement of the HEI corresponds to Georgia's and European higher education goals, defines its role and place within higher education area and society, both locally and internationally.
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements
The International Black Sea University (IBSU) mission focuses on professionally-oriented high-quality education and applied research emphasizing innovation, internationalisation and lifelong learning. IBSU strives to promote intercultural dialogue, sustain a high employment rate of graduates in domestic and international labour market and contribute to the development of a democratic civil society.
The statement corresponds to both European and Georgian higher education goals, with particular focus on lifelong learning, internationalisation and employability. The methodology for developing the mission statement was inclusive of all staff and created following extensive discussion and dialogue. The mission clearly reflects the goals of the university as exemplified in their teaching and learning, research and other activities as well as strategic planning.
Differing groups of staff were asked about the mission statement during site visit interviews. All staff showed good awareness of the university mission and their role in contributing to its realisation.
Evidences/indicators
IBSU Mission statement
IBSU Vision statement
IBSU strategy documents
Interviews

Recommendations:
Suggestions:
Best Practices (if applicable): The participatory approach to mission statement development has created good awareness and ownership amongst staff
Evaluation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements
1.2 Strategic Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o HEI has a strategic development (7-year) and an action plans (3-year) in place. o HEI contributes to the development of the society, shares with the society the knowledge gathered in the institution, and facilitates lifelong learning o HEI evaluates implementation of strategic and action plans, and duly acts on evaluation results.
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements <p>IBSU has a comprehensive strategic plan which runs to over 60 pages. The plan is subdivided into sections which clearly state actions, performance indicators, timelines and functional units responsible for implementation and monitoring. The plan is supported by internal quality assurance processes and internal regulations which will ensure regular monitoring of the plan, however at this stage structured monitoring had not commenced. The plan would even more closely meet the required standard with the inclusion of measurable performance indicators</p> <p>The plan was developed with a bottom up approach to ensure that it reflected the views of all personnel in the university. Additionally, the views of stakeholders were gathered to input to the development of the plan. These stakeholders included, students, alumni and employers. The process of stakeholder involvement was rather informal, and a more formalized systematic approach may ensure that all those who wish to contribute can do so.</p> <p>The plan generally contributes to the development of society and has a clear focus on lifelong learning. A number of areas, including internationalisation and research activity would benefit from greater centralised co-ordination to ensure coherence and complementarity of activity and to prevent the growth of diverse unmanageable activities.</p>
Evidences/indicators IBSU Mission statement IBSU Vision statement IBSU strategy documents Interviews
Recommendations: Include measurable performance indicators in the action plan Commence structured monitoring of the action plan
Suggestions: Formalise consultation processes with external stakeholders Introduce centralised co-ordination to ensure coherence of activities
Best Practices (if applicable):

The participatory approach to strategic planning and development has created good awareness and ownership amongst staff

Evaluation

- Complies with requirements
- Substantially complies with requirements
- Partially complies with requirements
- Does not comply with requirements

2. Organizational Structure and Management of HEI

Organizational structure and management of the HEI is based on best practices of the educational sector, meaning effective use of management and quality assurance mechanisms in the management process. This approach ensures implementation of strategic plan, integration of quality assurance function into management process, and promotes principles of integrity and ethics

2.1 Organizational structure and management

- Organizational structure of HEI ensures implementation of goals and activities described in its strategic plan
- Procedures for election/appointment of the management bodies of HEI are transparent, equitable, and in line with legislation
- HEI's Leadership/Management body ensures effective management of the activities of the institution
- Considering the mission and goals of HEI, leadership of the HEI supports international cooperation of the institution and the process of internationalization.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

Based on the analysis of the self-assessment report and the submitted documents, the team concluded that the International Black Sea University (IBSU) has and operates the organisational structure relevant to the legislation of Georgia. On all levels of the University management, functions and responsibilities are defined that provide effective implementation of the activities described in the strategic development plan and ensure the achievement of goals set by the University. From interviews with representatives of structural units, it is clear that these representatives know and practice the functions and duties defined in the University's regulatory documents. University staff are well aware of their obligations and responsibilities, and have a clear understanding of their role in the university management system. From interviews with students and staff, it is clear that decisions made by the management bodies are timely.

From the interview with the staff, and from presented documents, it is clear that the University has a rule of selection and appointment in the management bodies which is transparent and compliant with the requirements of the legislation of Georgia. The documents show that students have the opportunity to be members of decision-making bodies (Basic Educational Unit (Faculty) Board; Academic Board). However, from interviews with students, it is clear that the quality of their awareness of the above-mentioned possibilities is low.

During the meetings with structural units, it was observed that employees of the University are listening to each other and working well together. During the visit, it was apparent that communication between structural units is well structured. Due to the small scale of the university, both formal and informal channels of communication are successfully used between staff members, as well as between staff and students. It is also a welcoming fact that governing structures and employees are open for innovations regardless of where or how new ideas come from. From the review teams point of view, this approach is a good example for students of IBSU.

In order to ensure continuity of business processes, IBSU has developed a business continuity plan. The plan reflects all the major risks, as well as possible preventive measures, timing periods and measures to be implemented. However, the plan does not fully reflect all the possibilities and resources that the IBSU actually has in order to ensure of business continuity. During the interview with the university management, it was revealed that, for example, in the case of risks connected with fines and penalties or

<p>taxes the University has many more alternatives of solution than it is presented in the business continuity plan. For example, the university has a court case for several years, which is still in progress. In spite of the fact that the university has alternatives of action in accordance with any decision of the Court (information from interviews), it is not reflected in the business continuity plan. Furthermore, the University informed the team that transfer of ownership may at some time be a possibility and this should also be accounted for in continuity plans.</p> <p>The University has experience in internationalisation and plans to conduct activities in different directions of internationalisation (mobility, joint programmes, international student recruitment). Accordingly, the University uses various PR technologies and marketing approaches. However, in order to further deepen internationalisation, it is necessary to focus on the international markets, and develop a clearly defined marketing strategy.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <p>Regulations of Structural Units Internal Regulation of IBSU Organisational chart Regulation for Qualification Requirements and Rules for Appointing on Administrative Position Correspondence Rules Business Continuity Plan Monitoring mechanisms of effective governing and assessment system Internationalisation Policy (2018-2025) Interview administrative and academic staff Interview with the Rector, Vice Rectors and the chancellor Interview with the representatives of the Academic Board Interview with the administration PR Office and Alumni Office Interview with the representatives of the International Relations Office and Lifelong Learning Office, School of Languages Interview with the Deans</p>
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>To enhance students involvement in University decision-making, provide students with greater awareness regarding students' involvement opportunities in structural units</p> <p>Involve all alternatives related to risks in the business continuity plan, with relevant justification and reference to resources available at university to solve the problems</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>Develop an effective marketing platform at the international level and strengthen PR activities internationally</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>
<p>2.2 Internal quality assurance mechanisms</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institution effectively implements internal quality assurance mechanisms. Leadership of the institution constantly works to strengthen quality assurance function and promotes establishment of quality culture in the institution. • HEI has a mechanism for planning student body, which will give each student an opportunity to get a high-quality education.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

There is an independent structural unit of Quality Assurance Service at IBSU. The University has a provision of Quality Assurance Service and Quality Assurance Internal Mechanisms (Manual). The Head of Quality Assurance Service at the University is appointed by the University Rector. In the management structure of the university, the quality service reports to the rector and is accountable to him. Faculty quality assurance managers provide coordination of quality service within the faculties.

From analysis of the documents presented and interviews during the site visit it was apparent that the quality assurance service of the University is based on the "Plan - Do - Check - Act" (PDCA) cycle principles. The University has conducted: assessment of academic and invited staff; monitoring and evaluation of the ongoing processes at the University; monitoring of the academic performance results of the University students and the implementation of the monitoring results to improve the learning process; Assessment and development of current and new educational programs; Elaboration of individual curriculum and so on. All basic structural units are involved in the implementation of the University quality assurance mechanism. Effective implementation of the quality assurance mechanism is provided with appropriate resources.

Interviews with university graduates, students, employers and personnel reveal that they are involved in the evaluation and improvement of educational programs.

The presented documents and interviews show that the university is conducting surveys and research in many directions. Research is conducted regularly, special forms have been developed and uses appropriate methods for research. It also becomes clear that the University uses the results of survey and research to improve activities in different directions. However, at the meeting with academic staff, some of the participants noted that they did not have the opportunity to complete, for example, forms connected with employee satisfaction survey.

The interviews show that the University Quality Assurance Service plans to improve the mechanisms of evaluation of various structural units. Information on improvement assessment mechanism is also reflected in the strategic and strategic plans of the University (Strategic Plan. Sub-goal 4.2.10.).

The University has a methodology for students body planning, which states: "For planning student contingent for each educational program, existence of relevant material and human resources, requirements of the labour market, dynamics of students enrollment to the program, mobility, status termination/withdrawal/commencement, program completion and employability (including with speciality) should be considered". In addition, the formula for determining the number of students has been developed at the University. However, the methodology is to some extent general. Also, the staff related to the planning of students' body were not fully aware of the existing methodology.

Evidences/indicators

- Internal Regulation
- Internal Mechanisms of Quality Assurance and its appendices
- Reports compiled by Quality Assurance Office
- Evaluation results conducted by Quality Assurance Office
- Regulation of Quality Assurance Office
- Instruction for Designing Educational Programs
- Interview with the representatives of the Quality Assurance Office
- Meeting with the Heads of Programs
- Monitoring mechanisms of effective governing and assessment system
- Interview administrative and academic staff
- Interview with the Deans
- Interview with Alumni and Employers

<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>Encourage more focus on the involvement of academic staff in quality assurance surveys</p> <p>Refine the methodology of students body planning in the University and improve the awareness of the staff (related with the students body planning process) about existing methodology of students body planning</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>
<p>2.3. Observing principles of ethics and integrity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HEI has developed regulations and mechanisms that follow principles of ethics and integrity. Such regulations are publicly accessible. • Institution has implemented mechanisms for detecting plagiarism and its prevention. • HEI follows the principles of academic freedom.
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>The University has developed a code of ethics that determines the principles of the code of conduct and the consequences of violation thereof. The code of conduct applies to academic, administrative personnel, invited lecturers, teachers and students. From interviews with students and staff, it became dear that they are familiar with the code of ethics and are aware of the expected consequences of violation of the rules defined by the Code of Ethics. Interviews also show that the University is taking various measures for students and staff to raise awareness about academic honesty.</p> <p>Analysis of the presented documents and interviews shows that academic honesty is recognised as the most important factor in scientific research in the University. In 2018, the Black Sea International University acquired the right to use Turnitin. According to the University administration, the University intends not only to examine similarities to detect plagiarism in students' work, but also to examine scientific articles prepared by affiliated staff.</p> <p>In the internal regulations of the University the principles of academic freedom are declared. Interviews with academic and administrative staff reveal that they are independent in the teaching process. The university does not interfere with teaching, research, discussions and publications. According to the students, they have freedom in the learning process and the University has managed to protect the students from the needless impact that can damage their academic freedom.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <p>Code of Ethics</p> <p>Doctoral Studies and Dissertation Board Regulation</p> <p>Regulation for Master's Education</p> <p>Disciplinary Regulation for Students</p> <p>Staff management policy</p> <p>Internal Regulation</p>

<p>Interview with students Interview with academic and administrative staff</p>
<p>Recommendations:</p>
<p>Suggestions: Systematically review the mechanisms for anti-plagiarism and permanently support academic honesty</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements

3. Educational Programmes

HEI has procedures for planning, designing, approving, developing and annulling educational programmes. Programme learning outcomes are clearly defined and are in line with the National Qualifications Framework. A programme ensures achievement of its objectives and intended learning outcomes

3.1 Design and Development of Educational Programmes

HEI has a policy for planning, designing, implementing and developing educational programmes.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

IBSU has elaborated Instruction for Designing Educational Programmes, describing the methodology of planning, designing and developing of educational programmes at all three levels of higher education. The document is approved by the Academic Board on January 18, 2018.

Currently, IBSU runs 40 educational programmes, out of them 39 are accredited programmes and teacher training programme (60 ECTS). Additionally, one programme is submitted to the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement for accreditation.

Educational programs developed by IBSU serve the advancement of the university mission through providing respective academic knowledge to the students, equipping them with the relevant theoretical knowledge and the practical skills for the professional development and employability.

Program planning, designing and development is a participatory process and all stakeholders are involved in it in order to the development of high quality and market-oriented educational programs.

University representatives mentioned that international field-related experts were involved in educational programme review process that contributed to the programme development in a way to meet the international market needs. However, the evidences of those benefits mainly were demonstrated as adding some new learning courses to the programmes.

Based on analysis of educational programme assessment results, IBSU has renewed programmes in order to meet market and stakeholder needs. 10 educational programs were closed due to the insufficient outcomes, out of them two were Doctoral programmes.

In order to study demand on educational programmes, IBSU conducted market research in the academic year of 2017-2018. The following data were obtained and analyzed: the number of places announced by the university on educational programs (since 2013), the statistics of admissions in the relevant years, external and internal mobility data, which implies the number of students either moved from or enrolled in the educational programs. In addition, observation of employment statistics for graduates of educational

programs was conducted. Also, employment portals were studied (5 the most actively used portals were selected and studied: www.cv.ge, www.jobs.ge, www.myjobs.ge, www.hr.ge, www.hr.gov.ge). However, the way how the results of the data analysis were converted in decision-making (including student body planning per programme) seems blurred.

Questionnaires for programme evaluation targeted at different stakeholders (students, alumni, employers) are elaborated. Student's questionnaire aims to collect and analyze data on learning outcomes in general, assessment criteria, programme flexibility, programme coordinator and lecturers, programme resources and overall quality of the educational programme, however there is a limited opportunity to comment on practical component, e.g. internship. It has to be mentioned that the regardless the fact the questionnaire is for students at all three levels, opportunities to assess scientific-research component at MA and PhD levels are also missing. The questionnaire designed for employers considers to collect feedback on both newly elaborated as well as existing programmes.

University has developed regulations and procedures for approving, amending and annulment of educational programmes, which are in compliance with current legislative requirements.

Evidences/indicators

- Methodology of planning, designing and developing of educational programmes;
- Market research
- Questionnaires for different stakeholders
- Rules and Regulations for Educational Process
- Interview results

Recommendations:

Suggestions:

Improve the quality of market research by using effective methods and problem-based analysis in order to increase reliability of conducted research

Design of questionnaires shall give a more space to students to comment on practical and scientific-research components of the educational programmes

Elaborate educational programme periodic review on existing programmes so that it is clearly described with more emphasis on formal engagement of all stakeholders

Best Practices (if applicable):

Reporting on development of educational programs is good practice that faculties share within the University

Evaluation

- Complies with requirements
- Substantially complies with requirements
- Partially complies with requirements
- Does not comply with requirements

3.2 Structure and Content of Educational Programmes

- Programme learning outcomes are clearly stated and are in line with higher education level and qualification to be granted
- With the help of individualized education programmes, HEI takes into consideration various requirements, needs and academic readiness of students, and ensures their unhindered involvement into the educational process.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

Programme learning outcomes are clearly stated and are in line with the higher education level and qualification to be granted. Programme structure and content are constructed based on logical connection and consequence between the components. Attainment of learning outcomes is defined within the

reasonable timeframe, considering the specifics of the field. Teaching and learning methods applied within the educational programme are targeted at to ensure achievement of learning outcomes.

Catalogue of IBSU educational programmes provides interested parties with information about educational activities of the university.

Applicants can be enrolled in programmes according to the Georgian legislation and internal regulations of IBSU. Rules for enrollment in Master's programme include Unified Master's Examination results and also University's internal examination results (foreign language and specialty). Applicants willing to be admitted to Master's programme, shall prove the foreign language proficiency that is equivalent to B2 level, at PhD level – the level of which is defined by each program and the relevance is approved by the internal exam. Exemption cases for the applicants are clearly prescribed by the IBSU regulations. Applicants can be enrolled in Bachelors' programmes based on the results of the Unified National Examination results. It also indicates that admission to the educational program without passing Unified National exams may be allowed only in cases considered by the Georgian law.

The selection of the fourth subject by the University does not seem always logical for all study programmes. For example, the fourth subject – "civic education" is defined as one of the admission precondition for study programmes in Marketing, Accounting, Management, Finances, Tourism, Economics, Law, International Relations, Journalism.

Minimum level of English language proficiency is not defined in BA programmes. Admission precondition for enrollment in Bachelor's programmes delivered in English requires only passing the Unified National Exams. The university representatives explained that the applicants are obliged to overcome 40 per cent in English language exam at the national examination and provided document No MES 51800093212 issued on 30/01/2018 by the National Assessment and Examinations Center indicating that the level of national examination in English is equal to B1 and applicants satisfy this level only if they pass 80-90 scores. After students' admission, the University also proposes English language learning courses for these students. However, it is not sufficient, when all courses within the programme are delivered in English from the first year of studies. In addition to this, some MA students during the interview could not speak in English regardless the fact that they take studies on MA programmes delivered in English.

The programmes provide students with opportunities to elect non-compulsory components;

Mandatory internship is offered to students within the educational programmes. Internship is carried out in accordance with the programme requirements. Memorandums with partner organizations are signed. Student has two supervisors – at organization and at the faculty/university level. Both supervisors are obliged to make an assessment of student's performance against the learning outcomes. The assessment results shall be reflected in internship reports signed by both supervisors. The study of the submitted internship reports showed that in some cases the assessment by the faculty supervisor was not done and no evidence for the final evaluation was presented at all.

Students' academic achievement monitoring is carried out per semester by each faculty and the results are discussed at the faculty board, as stated by the faculty board members during the interview session.

The university regulates the preparation of an individual study plans for students with different requirements, special educational needs and academic preparation level. Upon the faculty board decision, when required by student and/or performer of the relevant component, Individual study plan is prepared by the program coordinator in coordination with the Quality Assurance Office.

Evidences/indicators

- Educational programme catalogue
- Syllabi
- Rules and Regulations for Educational Process
- Regulation for Master's Education;
- Regulation for Doctoral Studies and Dissertation Board
- Internship reports
- Memorandums on internship
- Interview results

<p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign language proficiency level shall be clearly defined in admission preconditions of the programme and thoroughly executed • Mandatory internship results shall be carefully evaluated by supervisors in view of the internship learning outcomes and the relevant programme goals
<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>Consider programme specification in each field while selecting the fourth subject at the national unified examination, aiming at students' better academic achievements.</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements
<p>3.3 Assessment of Learning Outcomes</p> <p>HEI has law-compliant, transparent and fair system of learning outcomes assessment, which promotes the improvement of students' academic performance.</p>
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>A student's knowledge and skills are assessed through 100 points grading system. It consists of midterm and final evaluations. In order to pass the relevant learning course, student shall accumulate 51 points out of 100. This grade shall consist of the points of the midterm and final evaluation(s). For the midterm and final evaluations minimal passing grade is set. The final evaluation minimal passing grade must not exceed 60% of final evaluation grade. The assessment form, components, method and criteria given to each evaluation component is outlined in the related syllabus, which is uploaded to SMART (learning process management system).</p> <p>Learning outcomes evaluation system for programmes is described and accessible for all interested parties and in general is in line with the Order #3 of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia on approval of the Rules for Calculation of Higher Educational Program Credits.</p> <p>In the submitted syllabi the points between midterm and final evaluations, as well as minimal passing grades in both evaluations are defined by each lecturer. As a result, distribution of 100 points between midterm and final evaluation forms are 60/40 or 70/30. Minimal passing grade in midterm evaluation differ per learning course and can be: 20,21,25,31 points; Minimal threshold also vary in final evaluation and can be: 10,15,16,20. Application of the different evaluation schemes in the same type of courses is lacking deamess (e.g. in English language courses minimal passing points in midterm evaluation: at A2 is 21 points out of 70; at B1 is 31 out of 70; At B2 is 20 points out of 70).</p> <p>Many different approaches are applied for the evaluation of students' learning outcomes per courses and this creates a complex system which does not seem to have overall logic and coherence. At the interview with students during the site-visit, students faced difficulties to describe the evaluation system within the university. The order of Minister allows to give freedom to lecturers to decide by themselves minimal threshold for each course. If the standard requirements are complied with however suggestions are made for improvement.</p> <p>Analysis of students' academic performance is undertaken each semester and discussed at the faculty board.</p>

University has a mechanism of assessment appeal in place. The relevant faculty board sets a commission composed by field specialists and Quality Enhancement Office manager. Commission makes decision based on a majority vote.

Evidences/indicators

Educational Programmes

Syllabi

Rules and Regulations for Educational Process

Examination Instructions

Recommendations:

- The university should ensure that students have clear understanding of learning outcomes evaluation scheme in order to avoid misinterpretation and confusion among students;
- Academic staff and lecturers are suggested to better communicate the learning outcomes and the evaluation system with students.

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

- Complies with requirements
- Substantially complies with requirements
- Partially complies with requirements
- Does not comply with requirements

4. Staff of the HEI

HEI ensures that the staff employed in the institution (academic, scientific, invited, administrative, support) are highly qualified, so that they are able to effectively manage educational, scientific and administrative processes and achieve the goals defined by the strategic plan of the institution. On its hand, the institution constantly provides its staff with professional development opportunities and improved work conditions.

4.1. Staff Management

- HEI has staff management policy and procedures that ensure the implementation of educational process and other activities defined in its strategic plan.
- HEI ensures the employment of qualified academic/scientific/invited/administrative/ support staff.

IBSU has elaborated general principles and rules of staff management that are transparent and fair. Administrative and support staff is hired by transparent and objective procedures. IBSUs procedures for hiring professors and invited lecturers are fair and is aimed on hiring qualified employees. Affiliation procedures and rules are recently established in HEI and during interviews a few professors were not aware of affiliation rules of HEI;

IBSU conducts academic staff evaluation through student satisfaction surveys, as well as by directly attending lectures and academic staff receive feedback on their performance based on these evaluations. Also, HEI utilizes staff satisfaction surveys, however, during the interview most of the professors confirmed that they didn't take this survey during past academic year. Some new professors do not quite understand the quality assurance methods for teaching. According to the opinion of the university, student satisfaction surveys are sufficient for their evaluation. It shows that integration procedures of new employees into work environment is not fully realized.

There are general requirements for academic staff to have certain number of papers and participation in conferences to become assistant, associate or full professor and most of the academic staff know these requirements. IBSU claims that every year professors are writing yearly report to show their achievements or professional development throughout the year, though during interviews some professors said that they haven't written such report for the last year. Professors are not required to write their planned activities for the coming years.

IBSU does not have a well-established strategy for professional development of its academic and administrative staff; IBSU provides various trainings and workshops for academic, as well as administrative staff, though participation rate in these trainings are low. There are no measurements of who took part in these trainings and workshops and how it improved staff performance. HEI doesn't define specific benchmarks to measure staff development throughout years.

IBSU has policies for encouraging professional development of the affiliated staff, providing financial incentive every year for publishing papers, books, participating in the conferences. IBSU uses preliminary defined principles of remuneration, that are well-known for employees, though there are not any salary increase procedures that depend on employee performance evaluation results. According to Staff management policy, IBSU might use the following incentives for exemplary and good performance of the employee:

- a) Announcement of Thanks;
- b) Rewarding with a valuable gift;
- c) Gratuity;

Academic staff is involved in decision-making processes at HEI through the faculty meetings and academic council meetings, however the involvement procedures need to be formalised to ensure full participation of the academic staff in the HEI development processes. Currently academic staff is more involved with curriculum development and improvement of the educational programs.

Evidences/indicators

Self-study report

Staff management policy

Affiliation Rules

Academic contracts

Personal files of administrative staff

Personal files of academic staff

Staff satisfaction results

Staff evaluation results

Job descriptions

Academic competition documents

<p>Interviews with academic affiliated staff</p> <p>Interviews with invited lecturers</p> <p>Interviews with administrative staff</p>
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>Ensure that affiliated academic staff fully understand rules of affiliation</p> <p>Establish clear strategies for the professional development of the staff, to measure their participation in the offered trainings and workshops and to measure effect of the professional development on their performance</p> <p>Staff evaluation system need to be developed in more systematic way</p> <p>Set specific benchmarks for the academic and administrative staff and to measure how the performance is improved</p> <p>Develop more formal procedures to make sure that all the academic staff is fully involved in decision-making processes</p> <p>Staff satisfaction surveys should be filled in by each academic and administrative personnel;</p> <p>Improve procedures for integrating new employees into work environment and informing them on quality assurance requirements</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>
<p>4.2. Academic/Scientific and Invited Staff Workload</p>
<p>Number and workload of academic/scientific and invited staff is adequate to HEI's educational programmes and scientific-research activities, and also other functions assigned to them</p>
<p>HEI has regulations for the maximum contact hours professor can hold during a week, including consultation hours for students. The total teaching workload of university's lecturer (professor, associate professor, assistant professor, assistant, invited lecturer) is defined as 18 hours per week. Obligatory consultation hours for university's lecturer (professor, associate professor, assistant professor, assistant, invited lecturer) is 2 hours per week for each component. While determining the academic workload of the lecturer, university considers his/her workload in other HEIs, where the lecturer holds academic and/or scientific position. Lecturers' maximal workload in all HEIs should not exceed 40 hours per week. For the purposes of defining the maximal workload, at the beginning of the semester, lecturer submits the certificate proving his/her academic and/or scientific position in other HEI(s) (if any). If the lecturer exceeds the weekly workload (40 hours), university is entitled to diminish lecturer's weekly academic workload for next semester. In spite of this, there are examples of exceeding workload regulations. Affiliated professors and invited lecturers often work in the several universities simultaneously at academic positions or invited lecturer. Also, when HEI calculates total workload, it does not contain office hours or time necessary for grading tests, preparation of office hours, time necessary for research at other universities (if professor is affiliated there), or if professor has full-time jobs at companies or consultant job not related to teaching.</p> <p>Examples of cases where HEI needs to reduce workload, are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merab Abdaladze works as professor and associate professor in two other universities and has total workload of 109.5 hours per week, averaged from the whole year;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Azer Dilanchiev has 87 hours a week total workload in all universities he works; • Shorena Kuchukidze has 38 hours a week contact hours in two universities; • Ekaterine Bagishvili has 30 hours a week including 3 other universities; <p>Excessive workload is also in the cases when the professor is a head of several education programs. Supervising and developing education program requires time that is not covered in the contact hours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avtandil Gagnidze is a head of 17 education programs in IBSU, is an invited lecturer in two other universities and has 22 contact hours in Spring semester; <p>HEI fully understand the issues of excessive workload and aims to increase number of affiliated professors, as well as to combine some educational programs to overcome this problem. However, it also requires thorough calculation of the workload other than contact hours at other jobs that professors work. In case when affiliated professors also have administrative duties at HEI, it needs to be included in the total workload calculation.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <p>Affiliation Rules Academic contracts Affiliation contracts Regulation of academic workload Excel sheets of Individual Academic Workload Personal files of academic staff Educational Programs Interviews with academic affiliated staff Interviews with invited lecturers</p>
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>Include in the workload calculation the time necessary for grading, material preparation, research, office hours for each course, supervising education program. Total workload calculation also should include other jobs of professors at administrative or industry positions</p> <p>After total workload calculation, HEI needs to reconsider the workload for professors to ensure implementation of educational programmes and proper fulfillment of research and other activities.</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements

5. Students and Their Support Services

HEI ensures the development of student-centred environment, offers appropriate services, including career support mechanisms; it also ensures maximum awareness of students, implements diverse activities and promotes student involvement in these activities. HEI utilizes student survey results to improve student support services

<p>5.1. The Rule for Obtaining and Changing Student Status, the Recognition of Education, and Student Rights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For each of the educational levels, HEI has developed regulations for assignment, suspension and termination of student status, mobility, qualification granting, issuing educational documents as well as recognition of education received during the learning period. ○ HEI ensures the protection of student rights and lawful interests.
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>Through the evaluation of the documents and interviewing various representatives from the administrative departments, it was seen that the University has an effective, well applied policy when it comes to suspension, termination, mobility, student status, rights and duties. Documents are accessible both in English and in Georgian. Legal office has stated that once the students are enrolled at IBSU, they participate in orientation programme, where detailed information is provided for the students to make them aware of the regulations. Apart the orientation, they provide the printed documents such as “Quick Start Guide” and disseminate these among the students to keep them informed. During the meetings with both International and Georgian students, they all stated that they are very much informed and read all contracts before signing. Therefore, team is satisfied that university has made efforts to keep all stakeholders updated, thereby ensuring the protection of student rights and lawful interests.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <p>Contract (For BA, Master, Doctoral levels), Rules and Regulations for Educational process, Regulations of structural Units, University website Interviews with staff and students</p>
<p>Recommendations:</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements
<p>5.2 Student Support Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HEI has student consulting services in order to plan educational process and improve academic performance ○ HEI has career support service, which provides students with appropriate counselling and support regarding employment and career development ○ HEI ensures students awareness and involvement in various university-level, local and international projects and events, and supports student initiatives ○ HEI has mechanisms, including financial mechanisms to support low SES students
<p>In analysis of documents and interviews, the team found that each program has coordinators and/or heads of the programs who support students with their academic performance. They also analysesurveys and meet with students on based on student request. Students told the team that in case of problems regarding the academic process, they would directly approach coordinators, but generally it depends on</p>

the issue itself. Besides the coordinators, lectures and professors are involved in assessing students' academic performance via their own evaluation.

The University has a Career Planning Office, which is responsible for student employment. University provided list of memorandums among the various companies with whom they have links. The Career Planning Office also researches the employment market and its demands. A representative from the Career Planning Office explained, they used to organize jobs fair once per year, however, they have assessed that it was not enough and have decided to organize them more often. In meetings with students, they said that they get information through posters, mails, sometimes via SMS, Facebook (social media). They would like to have more opportunities to get internships and jobs. Additionally, when team met alumni, they stated that they are still receiving vacancies from career planning office. However, based on conversations with students, the team formed the view that international students are less engaged in career planning activities and thus, further steps should be taken forward to include international students as well.

When it comes to social and academic extra-curriculum events at university, the team found that there are different bodies which tackle these issues: student self-government, students clubs and faculties itself. Each of them organise various social or academic events for the students on university level, national or international levels. The ideas for clubs and events often come from the students and sometimes from the staff or academic personnel. The University is open for the initiatives and suggestions. President of Self-government mentioned that students on a daily basis, approach them with different problems and they try to play the mediator among the administration and students. While having the meeting with the students, team formed the opinion that during the strategic development preparation, students who are relatively more affiliated with self-government got involved. As for the international students, their involvement in this process was minimal.

The University has got several scholarships and methods of payment to help out students with SES students, students also have knowledge and using the opportunity of discounts. The selection criteria is mainly based on GPA.

Evidences/indicators

- Regulation for Structural Units;
- Internal Regulations;
- Employment rate of students and alumnis including considering their qualifications;
- Statistical data analysis;
- Interview results

Recommendations:

Consider how to Involve more international students at job fairs

Develop clear policy and distinction of who is responsible to manage and resolve student problems

Regulate "Open Door Policy" in order to regulate and manage staff workload

Utilise the evaluation for the students clubs and self government office, as they are official bodies of the University

Promote the perception of student self-government as a change maker among students, that is focussed on students needs and engages in University life and decision making

Suggestions:

Law faculty students participation in international moot court competitions would be asset, such as: CEEMC (Central and Eastern European Moot Court), JESSUP (Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition), VIS MOOT (Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot).

Utilise international activities to internationalise the curriculum for the benefit of non mobile students

Develop more international project opportunities (social and/ or academic) for students

Best Practices (if applicable):

Team congratulates the university on having such as vibrant, comfortable and multifunctional campus. Also, the SMART system is student oriented
 Internship programs based at IBSU is regarded as a good starting point for further development

Evaluation

- Complies with requirements
- Substantially complies with requirements
- Partially complies with requirements
- Does not comply with requirements

6. Research, development and/or other creative work

Higher Education Institution, considering its type and specifics of field(s), works on the strengthening of its research function, ensures proper conditions to support research activities and improve the quality of research activities

6.1 Research Activities

- HEI, based on its type and specifics of its fields, carries out research/creative activities.
- Ensuring the effectiveness of doctoral research supervision
- HEI has public, transparent and fair procedures for the assessment and defense of dissertations which are relevant to the specifics of the field

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

IBSU focuses on applied research, which is considered from two main goals, 1) as an opportunity to accumulate knowledge with regards *“raising in quality of education and generalization of learned experience”* and, 2) as a possibility to resolve problems *“faced by the society, entrepreneurship or business”*.

With regard to the first, IBSU organized two research centres (Centre for International Studies promotes cooperation at the local and international levels in the fields of geopolitics, American Studies, EU studies and China studies and Centre for Interdisciplinary Research promoting integration of research activities in the process of teaching and learning of different fields), but according to the interview results, the functioning of these two centres has only begun recently and generally is proceeding under the financial support of IBSU.

Secondly, IBSU provides publication of articles, books etc. and allocates funds per faculties for the implementation of these activities in accordance with Regulation for Academic Incentives. The materials produced through these activities are generally used in teaching processes.

Finally, IBSU develops the university scientific journals (e.g. Journal of Education in Black Sea Region, Journal of Technical Science and Technologies etc.), provides their availability online and reviewing of content and conducts negotiations regarding their inclusion into the international scientific databases (e.g. The Journal of Education in Black Sea Region is indexed by INDEX COPERNICUS, Academic Resource Index etc. and during the interview, there was revealed information on negotiations with SCOPUS, the Journal of Technical Science and Technology is indexed by SIS, while other journals are not presented in any scientific databases). At the same time according to the Regulation for Doctoral Studies and Dissertation Board, the articles published in the above-mentioned journals are accepted as a publication in international citation indexed journal and the journals are generally used by PhD students, who are obliged to meet the pre-defence criteria of IBSU. Thus, taking into account that some journals are not indexed by appropriate databases, it is difficult to meet the criteria regarding the publication in international citation indexed journal.

With regard to the second, the key indicators are memoranda on cooperation with business sector in the field of law, economics, social sciences etc. At the same time, the interview results revealed that the number of studies aiming at economic, technological, industrial or other innovative development is small, and income to support these activities is too low to support sustainability but the university is working in this direction and is looking for funding opportunities. Additionally, greater co-operation with scientific foundations and business sector with regards to the development of research activities

aiming at economic, industrial and other innovative development, which is limited at the moment, would increase potential.

In accordance with the action plans of the faculties, IBSU carries out small-scale research projects like “Solving Tree Regular Equations”, “Higher Order Term Rewriting with Regular Types” etc. implemented by its invited staff under the financial support of the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation (the main staff is not, generally, involved in such kind of activities and the quantity of the projects with external funding is small, but it is explained by the fact that there is not any organizational structure providing support for academic personnel in grant application) and participated in the international projects TEMPUS, Black Sea Basin and Visegrad aiming at the improvement of capacities of the university. Also, the university systematically provides organization of conferences (e.g. American Studies Annual International Research Conference, International Research Conference on Education, Language and Literature etc.) and other scientific events (e.g. The Silk Road Symposia etc.), which, generally, contribute to educational development on regional level.

The institution has elaborated vision on the activities of research centers aiming “to improve the quality of research activities through the seminars, workshops and round table format discussions, in which the academic personnel of the university and the invited lecturers will be involved together with the Master and Doctorate students of the University”. This vision like activities can be considered as educational one. Also, according to interviews, books and articles published under the financial support of IBSU, especially, in the field of humanities and social sciences are used by lecturers for teaching processes.

The University has clearly defined functions for the supervisors of PhD students/researchers, which are described in the Regulation for doctoral studies. The supervisor should be an Associate Professor or Professor of IBSU or another HEI, which means that generally the supervisor is involved in teaching activities (e.g. the workload of one supervisor is equal to 400 teaching hours etc.) as well. At the same time since 2017, some programmes (e.g. PhD in Computer Sciences, PhD in American Studies etc.) give a possibility for PhD students to have an international co-supervisor of their research, although the use of co-supervisors is not yet activated, it is unclear how IBSU will define the workload of an international co-supervisor or a professor, who belongs to other HEI.

The effectiveness of doctoral research supervision is assessed on the basis of questionnaires filled by PhD students and generally, students reveal satisfaction with the level of supervision. The main claims regarding the contact hours and effectiveness of international supervisors/co-supervisors, but it is explained from one point by the fact that the majority of students don't have international supervisors/co-supervisors yet and from another by the fact that the real quantity of international co-supervisors is not very high (e.g. starting from 2017 there are 3 co-supervisors for the PhD in Computer Sciences, 2 co-supervisors for PhD in American Studies etc.).

All procedures are described in the Regulation for doctoral studies and dissertation board, but as it was revealed during the interviews, students generally need additional information on pre-defense period, which requires at least three publications (two in a reviewed scientific journal and one in international citation indexed journal) and a list on SSI or SOC indexed journals accepted by the Academic Board in addition to IBSU Journals.

Evidences/indicators

Research Policy, Strategic Plan, Action Plan

Regulation for Recruitment and Selection of Academic and Invited Personnel, Regulation for Academic Incentives

Research centers

Research related IBSU websites

Regulation for Doctoral Studies and Dissertation Board and additional forms

Memoranda of cooperation

Implemented, current and planned activities for scientific-research projects and list of dissertations

Doctorate-Supervisor Ratio

Doctorates Online Survey

Relevant publications

Interview results
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>Focus on securing external funding opportunities for the implementation of research projects</p> <p>Develop greater cooperation with scientific foundations and business sector with regards to the development of research activities aiming at economic, industrial and other innovative development</p> <p>Provide clarity on staff workload and contact hours in case of international co-supervisors of PhD thesis</p> <p>Enhance clarity on pre-defense period, especially, from the viewpoint of accessibility of a list of ISI or SOC indexed journals</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>
<p>6.2. Research support and internationalization</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HEI has an effective system in place for supporting research, development and creative activities ○ Attracting new staff and their involvement in research/arts-creative activities. ○ University works on internationalization of research, development and creative activities.
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>IBSU is, generally, oriented on the acquiring of new knowledge with regards to research skills and methods and intensive cooperation with similar educational organizations from the viewpoint of exchange opportunities.</p> <p>The research activities at IBSU are directed by the Office of Vice Rector for Science and Research. In accordance with the regulation for Academic Incentive, the university supports affiliated staff in payment costs for publishing articles, books, participation in conferences. Also, the Vice Rectorate for Science and Research looks for funding opportunities for research and provides templates for internal administrative processes related to projects, but there doesn't exist any structure or university unit, which supports staff members in grant writing or proposal submission. As it was revealed during the interviews, staff members neither get consultations regarding drafting grant proposals, their evaluation or submission, nor help with administration grants or reporting process.</p> <p>The research centers of IBSU have started their functioning some years ago. At the same time, about three years ago the Shota Rustaveli National Science foundation supporting the development of Science, Technology and Innovation allowed limited liability companies (LLC)-s to participate in scientific calls. So, the functioning of research centres and recent activities of IBSU can be considered as a challenge to develop effective research activities.</p> <p>IBSU allows MA and PhD students to be involved in teaching processes and strives to support them for doing research. Also, at the educational level it offers students from various faculties a series of trainings on project writing, research design etc., which can be considered as a base for future involvement of students into scientific activities. Also, IBSU stimulates students to participate in exchange programs, but at the same time students ask for more exchange opportunities;</p> <p>The regulations for doctoral programs of IBSU allow for submissions in Georgian, Turkish and English however are only conducted in English. There were no joint research programs aiming at joint or double degrees. At the same time, IBSU has international contacts confirmed by memoranda with higher educational institutions abroad (e.g. with Instituto Superior do Porto, Polytechnic Institute of Braganca</p>

<p>etc.) and there are negotiations with Krakow University with regarding organization of joint program but as yet no outcomes from this activity.</p> <p>In spite of the fact that IBSU doesn't implement joint MA and PhD programs, since 2017 it supports possibility of joint supervision by international and local professors. And, some articles are published in co-authorship with foreign specialists (e.g. Giorgi Bagaturia, Margaret Johnson; "The Impact of Social Media in Marketing Management", Journal of Business, Volume 3, Issue 1, 2014 etc.)</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <p>Regulation for Academic workload and salary determination</p> <p>Regulation for Recruitment and Selection of Academic and Invited Personnel, Regulation for Academic Incentives</p> <p>Regulation for Doctoral Studies and Dissertation Board and additional forms</p> <p>Implemented, current and planned activities for scientific-research projects and list of dissertations</p> <p>Doctorate supervisor ratio</p> <p>Analysis of supervision efficiency</p> <p>Interview results</p>
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>Provide Support for academic staff with grant writing and project proposals</p> <p>Accelerate implementation of planned joint programs aiming at joint or double degrees</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>
<p>6.3. Evaluation of Research Activities</p>
<p>o HEI has a system for evaluating and analysing the quality of research/creative-arts activities, and the productivity of scientific-research units and academic/scientific staff.</p>
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>In accordance with the Evaluation of Academic Staff Performance Form, IBSU has started to evaluate the academic staff's research output in accordance with annual report on scientific & academic work at the end of each year. Output collected from academic staff includes information on recently published articles and books, scientific events and projects already implemented etc., but the results of the evaluation were not completely accessible to the review team as the information provided differed per faculties and some faculty folders did not include this information at all.</p> <p>The quality of research and research centres are evaluated on the basis of data collected at the end of each year as well. Taking in mind that the that functioning of research centres has begun recently there are represented only two Activity Reports for 2016-2017 years, especially, the Activity Report of staff members and the Activity Report of Research Centres for 2016-2017). Also, the research activities are represented in the following documents:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Publications per faculties, which includes information on the quantity of published articles since 2012; Survey efficiency scientific supervisor includes statistic data about the efficiency of scientific supervisors; A general report on scientific activities covers articles and conference papers published with foreign specialists since 2013; List of International conferences organized by IBSU; Also, the document on Current Planned Scientific activities includes information on the past, future

<p>and ongoing projects per faculties</p> <p>IBSU regularly publishes reports on implemented activities and uses the evaluation results of research output for further development of research activities by updating its regulations and policies.</p> <p>To avoid plagiarism the IBSU launched Turnitin system, which is generally used by staff. During the Site-Visit the MA students said that generally they do not use Turnitin, while PhD students said that they have complete information on plagiarism and Turnitin system.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <p>Evaluation of Academic Staff Performance Form</p> <p>General report on scientific activities</p> <p>Annual report on scientific and academic work</p> <p>Academic Incentives</p> <p>Personnel who provides review for IBSU journals</p> <p>Turnitin</p> <p>Review results</p>
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>Publish outcomes of academic staff research output evaluation</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>Increase awareness of plagiarism and anti plagiarism amongst MA students</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>

7. Material, Information and Financial Resources

Material, information and financial resources of HEI ensure sustainable, stable, effective and efficient functioning of the institution, and the achievement of goals defined through strategic development plan.

<p>7.1 Material resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The institution possesses or owns material resources (fixed and current assets) that are used for achieving goals stated in the mission statement, adequately responds to the requirements of educational programmes and research activities and corresponds to the existing number of students and planned enrolment. o HEI offers environment necessary for implementing educational activities: sanitary units, natural light possibilities, and central heating system. o Health and safety of students and staff is protected within the institution. o HEI has adapted environment for people with special needs
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>IBSU owns material resources that correspond to the mission statement and requirements for implementing educational programmes. The campus building contains foyer, recreation spaces, classrooms, administrative offices, space for group work, library, computer laboratories, student and staff canteens, gym, stadium. Safety regulations are observed in the building, IBSU has fire alarms, fire extinguishers and evacuation plan at every necessary point of the building. IBSU provides first aid, has medical staff appointed to this duty and medical cabinet equipped with first aid tools. The University</p>

<p>has security video recording and storage facilities throughout the premises; Security is also maintained through card access system, so no outsider can enter the premises, and through security staff.</p> <p>Buildings have proper sanitary units, some of them adapted for special needs. People with special needs can freely navigate only one building of HEI that is equipped with ramps, there is special parking space inside the HEI premises for people with special needs. Educational program in Architecture will require student model space that is foreseen by the program development, as the programme is recently accredited and HEI works on it. Development of the new campus is mentioned in Actin Plan and is planned before 2021, but it is not specified when HEI plans to move there and if they will keep the current campus too.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <p>Self-evaluation report Tour of facilities Interview results</p>
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>Make all buildings fully accessible for people with special needs</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>Create student model space for Architecture programme</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>
<p>7.2. Library Resources</p>
<p>Library environment, resources and service support effective implementation of educational and research activities, and HEI constantly works for its improvement.</p>
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>The university library is equipped with reading hall, meeting and group workspace, IT equipment space, book stocks, reading desks, chairs, computers with internet access etc.</p> <p>IBSU has elaborated regulations for development of library resources, its function and usage.</p> <p>Library consists of both printed and electronic materials necessary for implementing educational programs and regularly updated on demands, but at the same time, there is needed more coordination between academic staff and library staff to provide constant availability of main literature listed in the syllabi, as sometimes literature on reading lists is unavailable. Generally, materials are available for students and lecturers for at least 60 hours a week and the library staff assists students and staff in finding them.</p> <p>The books are arranged according to the field of study and registered in electronic catalogue. There are two type of catalogues: one for printed materials and one for electronic materials. IBSU provides access to electronic library databases like Clarivate, JStor, EBSCO etc. As it was revealed Polpred subscription has been launched since 27 February 2018, JStor subscription - since 23 February 2018 and will continue for a year. At the same time, it should be mentioned that time of usage as well as type of subscriptions doesn't allow continuous tracking of database usage.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <p>Catalogues for printed and electronic materials</p>

<p>Educational programs and syllabi</p> <p>Access to international electronic library databases (EBSCO, Clarivate etc.)</p> <p>Library equipment with appropriate documents</p> <p>Library Regulation</p> <p>Budget allocated on the development of library resources;</p> <p>Interview Results</p>
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>More cooperation between academic staff and library with regard to delivery of main literature listed in the syllabi</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>Greater clarity with regards to statistical analysis of database usage</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>
<p>7.3 Information Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o HEI has created infrastructure for information technologies and its administration and accessibility are ensured o Electronic services and electronic management systems are implemented and mechanisms for their constant improvement are in place o HEI ensures business continuity o HEI has a functional web-page in Georgian and English languages.
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>University's information technology infrastructure and its administration is in compliance with business processes implemented in the institution. IBSU has elaborated a Regulation for Management Information Technologies, which regulates the issues related to information technologies management, data protection and electronic services. The regulation also defines the rules of accountability related to the management of information technologies and responsibilities related to data disclosure.</p> <p>Strategic plan stresses the importance of developing IT infrastructure and contributes towards it by detailed action plan.</p> <p>Possible risks within the category of information technologies are identified and evaluated by the Business Continuity Plan of the University.</p> <p>IT infrastructure (computer equipment, software provision, internet) is constantly accessible to students and staff.</p> <p>University uses a set of electronic services (Student Information System (SIS), IBSU's Moodle based LMS (Learning Management System), university web-page) and electronic management systems (electronic documentation platform, e-mail, registry of educational institutions).</p> <p>Whilst awareness of cyber security was demonstrated by staff directly maintaining the system, such awareness was not demonstrated by administrative staff. Whilst this lack of awareness does not pose a risk to the system greater awareness could provide a greater level of security.</p> <p>The information system is used for academic and administrative registration processes, regulation of student status, registering academic evaluation data. Communication and exchange of information relevant to educational programs between students and lecturers is carried out by additional system "Smart". Application of SIS and Smart systems were highly appreciated by students and personnel during the site-visit. In addition, there is an electronic system/platform in university, on which is placed</p>

documents regulating the university activities and samples of documents used in working processes (tqm.ibsu.edu.ge). The access to this system has university personnel and students (depending on the content of document).

IBSU web-page serves communication and information functions, contains contact and other useful information in Georgian and English languages, including the University mission, strategic plan, organizational structure, catalogue of educational programmes, procedures of teaching, learning and assessment, staff, library electronic catalogue, annual reports, financial reports, research activities, employment opportunities and other available services. Information on the web-page is updated on a regular basis. Each faculty is responsible for the relevant information update on the web.

Evidences/indicators

Regulation for Management Information Technologies

Business Continuity Plan

Strategic Plan

Action Plan

Contract on electronic communication service

University web-page

Interview results

Evaluation

- Fully complies with requirements
- Substantially complies with requirements
- Partially complies with requirements
- Does not comply with requirements

Recommendations:

Suggestions:

Train the relevant administrative staff on cyber-security and IT management related issues

Best Practices (if applicable):

7.4 Financial Resources

- o Allocation of financial resources described in the budget of HEI is economically achievable
- o Financial standing of HEI ensures performance of activities described in strategic and mid-term action plans
- o HEI financial resources are focused on effective implementation of core activities of the institution
- o HEI budget provides funding for scientific research and library functioning and development
- o HEI has an effective system of accountability, financial management and control

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

According to the presented documents, the total budgeted revenue of the University 2017-2018 is 7,603,750 GEL, while the total planned expenditures is GEL 7,341,344. The main source of the University's incomes are: tuition fee; state grants; TOEFL examination center; IBSU training center/ Lifelong Learning Programs; Conferences – participation fee collected through international conferences; International and national projects and scientific grants. The budget of the same

academic year includes the following main expenses: staff salary expenses; Affiliated academic personnel scientific and research activity expenses; educational programs research component expenses; promoting scientific publications expenses; students' scientific activity expenses; purchasing books, magazines, newspaper expenses; the cost of printing books; marketing expenses and so on.

The Black Sea International University has the relevant financial resources for implementing activities under the Strategic Development Plan.

The meeting with the administration revealed that the University plans to reduce administrative costs. Current period ratio of administrative expenses to the total budget is 57 %, by 2021, however, it is expected to reduce the ratio up to 55 percent. The University also intends to increase the total amount of funds allocated for research, development and creative activities from 3% to 5% of the total budget by 2021.

The University has internal and external mechanisms of financial control. The financial management and control regulation has been developed, where it is set out regulation and format for the distribution of responsibilities, delegation, and accountability. Every year, audit company hired by IBSU examines the legitimacy of financial activities carried out by the accountancy unit, conforms its compliance with the expenditure portion of the central / structural units' budgets, and prepares relevant report. In the presented documents is a consultation company's conclusion on financial analysis of the University 2013-2017. In addition, the university has hired advisor in tax issues.

The revenue dynamics of the University in 2013-2017 years and the number of students enrolled according to years provides the basis for the activities in strategic and operational plans to be effectively accomplished.

With regard to the outstanding court case mentioned in 2.1 the university demonstrated that it has sufficient funds and contingency to pay the disputed amount. The university explained that the defence of the case rests on principle rather than inability to pay.

Evidences/indicators

- University budget
- Financial reports and the dynamics according to years.
- Regulation for Financial Control
- Meeting about the Material and Financial Resources with the Accountancy and Special Headquarters, chancellor
- Meeting with the Rector, Vice Rectors and the chancellor

Recommendations:

Suggestions:

Continue efforts to diversify income streams to ensure long-term financial stability for the university

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

- Complies with requirements
- Substantially complies with requirements
- Partially complies with requirements
- Does not comply with requirements



10/10/2024

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Minutes of the Authorisation Council
of the Higher Education Institutions

City of Tbilisi, 26/09/2024,

Session started at: 14:00

Session ended at: 16:00

Chair of the session: Zurab Orjonikidze,

Secretary of the Council: Davit Leshkasheli

The session of the Authorisation Council of the Higher Education Institutions was held remotely, using modern electronic means of communication - the Zoom software, on September 26, 2024.

All persons participated in the session of the Authorisation Council of the Higher Education Institutions expressed their consent to participate remotely in the work process of the Council.

The session was attended by:

Members of the Authorisation Council of the Higher Education Institutions (hereinafter - the Council):

1. Zurab Orjonikidze - LEPL – Tbilisi State Medical University, Deputy Chancellor, Professor, Deputy Chair of the Council;
2. Davit Leshkasheli – LEPL – Georgian Technical University, PhD Candidate, Secretary of the Council;
3. Mamuka Khuskivadze – LEPL – Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Deputy Director of School of Tourism, Associate Professor;
4. Mikheil Gurgeniidze – LLC – British Teaching University in Georgia, Assistant Professor;
5. Levan Midodashvili – LEPL – Gori State University, Head of Quality Assurance Department, Professor;
6. Sergo Chelidze – LLC – Georgian National University SEU, Professor;
7. Gaiane Simonia – LEPL – Tbilisi State Medical University, Head of the Department of Medical Education, Research and Strategic Development, Professor of the Department of Geriatrics;
8. Konstantine Sirbiladze – LEPL – Akaki Tsereteli State University, Dean of Faculty of Technology and Engineering, Professor;
9. Nino Chinchaladze – The Foundation ‘Center for International Education’ (Membership Based Corporation under Public Law), Executive Director;
10. Ivan Jagodnishvili – LEPL – Georgian Technical University, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering Economics, Media-technology and Social Sciences, Professor;
11. Emil Avdaliani – LLC – European University, Professor;

12. Salome Kutchukhidze – LLC – International Black Sea University, Dean of Law and State Governance School;
13. Tamar Ioseliani – LLC – Anaklia Sea Port, Chairperson of the Supervisory Board, an employer.

Invited members of the Authorisation Council of the Higher Education, Institutions:

1. Kakhaber Chikhradze – Ltd. “American Hospital Tbilisi”, Head of the training programmes;
2. Jilda Cheishvili – Member of the Council of the Association of Georgian Epidemiologists and the Infection Control Specialists;
3. Maia Bitskinashvili – Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of LEPL Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Associated Professor;
4. Eka Bochorishvili – Head of the State Programs Revision Division of the Medical Activity Regulation Department of the LEPL Regulation Agency for Medical and Pharmaceutical Activities;
5. Nino Gagua – A student of Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy;
6. Eka Ekaladze - Director of USMD programme, Associate professor of biochemistry department of LEPL Tbilisi State Medical University;
7. Kakhaber Vanishvili - Director of the Medical Center of LLC Med Diagnostics;
8. Davit Totadze – General Director of Geo Hospitals LLC - Tbilisi Multidisciplinary Medical Center;
9. Zviad Kirtava – Professor at International Black Sea University LLC;
10. Levan Ratiani – General Director of the First University Clinic of LEPL Tbilisi State Medical University; Head of the Department of Anesthesiology and Reanimatology of the same university, Professor;
11. Davit Kobeshavidze - Director of LTD "Imedi Clinic";
12. Khatuna Zaldastanishvili – Head of the Professional Regulation Division of the Service Department of the LEPL Regulation Agency for Medical and Pharmaceutical Activities.

Representation of the LEPL National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (hereinafter – the Center):

1. Nino Sarjveladze - Chief Specialist of Higher Education Quality Assurance Department.
2. Kristine Abuladze - Chief Specialist of Higher Education Quality Assurance Department.
3. Sophiko Kurasbediani - Chief Specialist of Higher Education Quality Assurance Department;
4. Ketevan Inanashvili - Deputy Head of Higher Education Quality Assurance Department

Representatives of the higher education institution:

LEPL Ilia State University:

Nino Dobarjginidze - Rector;

Ketevan Darakhvelidze - Head of Administration;

Giorgi Gvalia - Deputy Rector;

Nino Zhvania - Head of Quality Assurance Office;

Maia Gamezardashvili - Head of Human Resources Management Office;

Ana Khundadze - Head of Research Coordination Office;

Dali Tskitishvili - Head of Legal Office;

Salome Bilanishvili - Head of Internationals Relations Office;

Salome Shedania - Head of Office of Development;

Teo Kavelashvili - Director of Library;

Ketevan Boiko - Head of International Students and Program Marketing Office;

Elena Zhuravliova - Dean of School of Natural Sciences and Medicine;

Tamar Barbakadze - Head of Quality Assurance Office of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Medicine;

Iagor Kalandadze - Professor;

Tamaz Shaburishvili - Professor;

Ivane Abiatari - Head of School of Medicine;

Giorgi Papuashvili - Dean of the School of Law;

Marina Meskhi - Head of Quality Assurance Office of the School of Law;

Nikoloz Kavelashvili - Dean of the School of Business, Technology and Education;

Maia Bitsadze - Head of Quality Assurance Office of the School of Business, Technology and Education;

Nino Mataradze - Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences;

Maia Lashkhia - Head of the QA office of the School of Arts and Sciences;

Nino Amiranashvili - Deputy head of Quality Assurance office;

LTD Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy:

Irine Shotadze - the Rector;

Nino Sikharulidze - Head of Quality Assurance Office;

Mariam Jashi - Chairman of the Board of Advisors;

Shalva Akhrakhadze - Counselor on Finances;

Ekaterine Kldiashvili – Vice Rector in Research direction;

Ia Avaliani - Vice Rector in International Relations direction;

Sebastien Couderc - Head of Strategic Development Office;

Maka Maghlakelidze -Head of Institutional Culture Department;
Lali Mekokishvili - Dean of the School of Medicine;
Tsisana Lomashvili - Co-head of the one-level educational programmes;
Nino Kekenadze -Co-head of the one-level educational programmes;
Ana Mikhelidze - Head of Human Resources Management Office;
Anzor Dzirkvelashvili - Head of Legal Office;
Maia Zarnadze - Head of the Faculty Development Department.

Experts of the authorisation of higher education institutions (hereinafter- the experts):

Azim Muhammed Mirzazade – I issue;
Sofio Khundadze - I issue;
Khatuna Saganelidze - I issue;
Eka Lekashvili -I issue;
Magda Memanishvili - I issue;
Natia Maghalashvili - I issue;
Elene Zurabishvili - II issue;
Tamar Goderidze - II issue;
Lana Bokuchava - II issue.

The meeting of the Council started in a remote mode at 14:00. According to the paragraph 4 of Article 74 of Authorisation Regulations for Educational Institutions approved by the Order N99/N of October 1, 2010 of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, the session was headed by the deputy chair of the council - Zurab Orjonikidze.

The Chair of the session checked the number of members of the Council present at the meeting and determined that in accordance with paragraph 5 of Article 74 of the Authorisation Regulations for Educational Institutions approved by the Order N99/N of October 1, 2010 of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, the session was authorised because it was attended by more than half of the listed members of the council including the invited members. The Chair of the session pointed out to the members of the Council the requirement of paragraph 5 of Article 77 of the Authorisation Regulations, according to which the member of the Council is not authorised to abstain from voting.

The Chair of the session introduced the draft agenda of the session to the Council members:

1. Discussing the issue of authorisation of LEPL Ilia State University;
2. Discussing the issue of authorisation of LLC Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy.

Motion to change the agenda.

- NO

Approved agenda:

1. Discussing the issue of authorisation of LEPL Ilia State University;
2. Discussing the issue of authorisation of LLC Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy.

The first issue: Discussing the issue of authorisation of LEPL Ilia State University.

Recusal of the council member(s) by the institution

- NO.

Self-recusal of the council member(s)

- YES

The following members recused themselves: The main member of the Council - Emil Avdaliani and the invited member of the Council - Davit Totadze.

The Chair of the session asked the members of the Council to confirm that they were familiar with the self-evaluation report presented by the higher educational institution, the report of the authorisation experts' panel and the argumentative position presented by the institution on the draft report of the experts' panel. The council members confirmed that they were familiar with the case materials.

The Chair of the session asked the representative of the interested party (educational institution) whether they were familiar with the report of the authorisation experts' panel. The representatives of the institution confirmed that they were familiar with the report of the authorisation experts' panel.

Oral hearing of the issue:

The Chair of the session asked the experts to express their opinions regarding the issue under the review.

The International Expert: Milan Pol was not attending the session, however he had sent a video on the position of the experts' panel; the video was shown during the Council session. According to the video, Milan Paul said that the visit to the university was constructive. All seven standards were assessed as in compliance with the requirements. One recommendation was issued to the institution, which was related to the observation and monitoring of the university in connection with the legislative changes. According to

the expert's opinion, the institution should constantly update its internal documentation in accordance with the changes in the legislation. Milan Pol noted that the experts' panel also had several suggestions for improving the university's performance, which were reflected in the report of the experts' panel. According to Milan Pol, the authorisation experts have identified best practices, which are detailed in the report of experts' panel. Therefore, the panel of experts believes that the Ilia State University should be granted the authorisation by the Authorisation Council.

The Co-chair of the experts panel, international expert - Azim Mohammad Mirzazadeh fully agreed with his colleague's opinion. He noted that it was necessary for the university to translate regulatory documents into English in a timely manner. According to the Co-chair of the experts panel, the experts worked on issues related to the university assessment for 5 days and reviewed the university's compliance with authorisation standards from various angles. The report of the experts' panel was positive and it reflected the strengths and areas for improvement of the university.

Authorisation expert - Eka Lekashvili said, that the experts panel requested additional documents from the institution in order to once again verify the measures taken by the university. The institution presented the documents, both physically and electronically. Thus, the expert panel expressed its satisfaction with the university's approach during the site visit. According to Eka Lekashvili, the experts' panel presented some suggestions regarding the seventh standard. In addition, the experts emphasized that the institution is engaged in a lot of work, therefore the components that were given as suggestions within the seventh standard of authorisation were not considered as a recommendation, since the work on the university's website was in progress, in particular, the complete uploading and updating of English-language materials.

In addition, Eka Lekashvili added that the agreements which will specify the purpose of the programme, its duration and the number of students admitted to practice need to be constantly updated. The expert noted that this process was ongoing at the university and all the main conditions would be reflected in contract renewal.

The Chair of the session asked the representatives of the institution to say their position. Rector of LEPL Ilia State University - Nino Daborjginidze greeted the members of the Authorisation Council and expressed her gratitude for the work completed by the authorisation experts' panel. She noted that the site visit of the experts panel was especially useful for the institution. The institution had been preparing for this process for the last two years. According to the Rector of the university, this stage of authorisation was met by the institution mainly with two important innovations. The first was the construction of one of the most modern technological campuses in Georgia, which delivered the programmes accredited by the quality assurance agency operating in the USA; Second - the capacity of the university to implement the medical education programme was determined, including the number of students and the scientific, research and practicing staff.

Rector of the university pointed out about the educational programme of medicine that the experts on the latter stated, that the institution met all the conditions necessary for the implementation of the medical programme, both in terms of material resources and intellectual resources. The only recommendation was that the university should keep an eye on the changes in the legal documents and bring the internal documentation in line with the legislative changes on time.

The head of the quality assurance office of the university - Nino Zhvania noted about the recommendation given by the experts, that the university followed the legislation of Georgia related to the accreditation of programmes. As a regulatory document in the direction of accreditation of educational programmes, the institution used the relevant order on the terms of cluster accreditation of the programme, which indicated when the educational programmes of a specific field of study had to be re-accredited. Accordingly, all educational programmes were accredited according to these deadlines. The head of the quality office of the university also added that the educational programme to which the recommendation was indicated were admitted at the Center.

The head of the quality assurance office of the university explained that the visits of the accreditation experts' panel had already been completed to all programmes in the direction of business administration, and the university was waiting for the draft reports developed by the experts' panels. December 31, 2024 was defined as the deadline for the accreditation of the mentioned educational programmes. As these programmes were sent to the Center for accreditation, the authorisation application included information on current educational programmes, the accreditation period of which had not yet expired.

Rector of the University Nino Dobarjginidze added that when the institution submitted the authorisation application package, those programmes that had the current accreditation period until the end of December 2024 were active and they were guided accordingly.

The Chair of the meeting asked the members of the Council to ask questions, if any.

The member of the Council, Guiane Simonia addressed the institution with a question. Guiane Simonia noted that she had carefully read the programme of medicine and was specifically interested in what stages, components did it include and how was the rather relevant topic - "Workplace Based Assessment" introduced in the field of teaching of the medical programme.

Ivane Abiatari, the head of the medical programme, said that the university had an attempt to introduce "Workplace Based Assessment" at the clinical level. Also, according to his explanation, he planned to integrate "DOPS" and mini-clinical exam evaluation in the university's programme of medicine. Trainings for the proper implementation of this methodology were conducted for the academic staff. Ivane Abiathar noted that they had planned another training for the current semester, and depending on the feedback, the university would try to include other clinical disciplines more broadly. In addition, the institution worked on the issue of introducing a 360° evaluation method in the programme

of medicine. At this stage, this was temporarily unavailable, since they still did not have eleventh and twelfth semester students in the medicine programme.

A Council member - Mamuka Khuskivadze, addressed the experts with a question regarding the suggestion in the draft report, which was about reflecting the number of students in the memorandums. According to his explanation, initially, in the draft report, the experts in the seventh standard had given a recommendation to reflect the number of students in the memos, but this recommendation was then moved to the suggestions. He wondered if the panel of experts was guided by the memoranda presented within all educational programmes or only by the memoranda presented within the programme of medicine.

The expert - Eka Lekashvili noted, that the experts were guided not only by the memoranda of the programme of medicine by the memoranda signed by the entire institution. This recommendation was changed into a suggestion after the experts' panel received feedback from the institution on the draft report. In her opinion, the process related to medicine fit into a certain regulation and the presented agreements were changed under the current conditions. Therefore, according to her explanation, the experts decided to give a suggestion instead of a recommendation in this regard.

The Council member - Levan Midodashvili asked the experts and the institution about the information presented in component 3.1 - the experts point out that in some cases, depending on market requirements, the institution combines two different adjacent educational programmes. The experts cite as an example the decision of the administration of the School of Arts and Sciences and the issue of merging the "Oriental Studies" bachelor's programme with the "International relations" bachelor's programme. According to Levan Midodashvili, as per the accreditation regulation, in particular, based on Article 30, paragraph 2 of the regulation, such a combination of programmes is not allowed. An exception is the case when such a combination is made in order to bring the qualification framework and the field of study into line with the classifier. The implementation of the combined programme should be done only in the manner established by the legislation - under the conditions of getting the accreditation. The report says nothing about this. Consequently, there is an impression that the institution is implementing such an educational programme, which it has no right to implement.

Authorisation expert - Magda Memanishvili noted that a small number of students who remained at the "Oriental studies" bachelor's programme were transferred to the "International relations" bachelor's educational programme by internal mobility. It was not excluded that such a concentration or module would be created on this educational programme, which would combine academic courses in the direction of Oriental Studies. Therefore, during the visit, there was no talk of combining and merging the educational programmes. The authorisation expert also explained that the university had rules of procedure for teaching on the programmes that were in the expiring mode, which regulated the mentioned process. Accordingly, when the educational programme becomes

unprofitable or the number of students is reduced, depending on the expediency of financial calculations, the administration of the higher educational institution may be faced with making such decisions.

The member of Council - Levan Midodashvili explained why he had a specific question. According to him, the report of the authorisation expert panel indicated that the institution had developed procedures for planning, designing, approving, developing and canceling the educational programmes. It should be noted that the third article of the document regulated the procedures for canceling and combining educational programmes at the HEI, although in the document, which was posted on the website of the university, there was no similar record on the issue of combining programmes.

The head of the institution's international relations programme pointed out that in fact neither the merger nor the combination reflected the process that occurred in the case of these two programmes. The dynamics of recent years have shown that the interest of students in the direction of Oriental Studies was regularly decreasing. Accordingly, the decision was made by the faculty to convert the existing programme into an expiring mode, and not to merge it. Simultaneously, a new program called "International Relations - Europe and the Middle East" was developed, within the framework of which the academic resources in the direction of oriental studies were integrated in the format of regional concentration. It was not formally a merger of the two programmes, rather the programme of Oriental Studies was moved to the expiring mode. She also clarified that in this case there was no internal mobility. The university took an obligation and allowed all the students enrolled on the expiring programme to complete their studies on the same programme. Accordingly, this decision was made in order to optimize resources. By making this decision, the university helped to maintain the interest in oriental studies.

Rector of the University - Nino Doborjginidze said that the Institute of Oriental Studies, which was established in 1964 for the purpose of developing international relations with the East, operated in the institution. This institute has proved itself very well and is loaded with components like - Languages, History and Civilization.

The head of the institution's quality assurance office, Nino Zhvania, added that the educational programme was accredited in 2022. Within the framework of the educational programme there were two directions (Europe and the Middle East) and awarded the academic degree of Bachelor of International Relations. Accordingly, they followed the laws and regulations that applied to the accreditation of bachelor's programmes.

The head of international relations programme also pointed out that unfortunately, the interest in Eastern languages (Turkish, Arabic and Persian) has disappeared. Regional concentration in itself led to an interest in languages.

The member of Council - Davit Leshkasheli asked the institution about the inclusion of international and local students in the educational process. He was wondering whether students were involved in the management and decision-making processes of the university.

The head of international students and program marketing office - Ketevan Boiko, noted that an international student goes through a certain stage related to the preparation of their arrival before and after arrival in the country. In order for the student to be able to adapt to the international environment, the institution conducts an admission week. The university has established a special programme to connect local and international students. Active students of the university actively provide orientation meetings to new students in order to be able to easily adapt to the university space. It is the "Culture Festival" held by the university that serves a student to adapt to the university space and allows various country representatives to present their culture in one space.

The representative of the university, Ketevan Boiko, also spoke about other types of supporting events, such as, for example, student clubs, various types of sports. The representative of the institution noted that they will definitely take into account the suggestion of the experts to further strengthen the efforts they are making in the direction of integration of international students. To do this, they had already developed a research-based action plan that was conducted with students once a year and a service questionnaire that was shared with students and received feedback from them. Taking this into account, in order to promote the integration of students, specific activities are also defined for the next year.

Rector of the institution - Nino Doborjginidze noted that when the elections of the faculty or representative councils are held, all students participate. Also, a student has the opportunity to participate in and attend international conferences. It depends on the student's ability and academic performance. In addition, students have the opportunity to apply to the university on a club basis for funding initiatives. Therefore, the students' involvement in the management of the university is ensured.

The member of the Council - Tamar Ioseliani asked the experts to provide more information to the authorisation Council regarding the eighth and ninth suggestions and explain why the suggestion were provided and what problems did they encounter. She also asked the experts to elaborate on the suggestion related to the School of Law and its relevant academic staff, which stated that, in addition to full and associate professors, the institution should preferably have junior academic staff (assistants) to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the programme, as well as the development and growth of relevant professionals in the field.

The authorisation expert - Eka Lekashvili explained regarding the eighth suggestion that the experts studied all the memorandums. Some memos did not specify deadlines and maximum/minimum number of students. This mainly concerned the memoranda signed within the framework of the medicine programme. Initially, to address this issue, the experts formulated a recommendation, but after getting feedback from the institution, it was changed to a suggestion, since the university was aware of the fact that the memorandum should reflect the purpose, number of students and duration, and this process was already taking place at the university during the site visit. Accordingly, the

experts considered that the institution would continue to work in this direction.

The expert - Magda Memanishvili, in response to the question asked by the member of the council - Tamar Ioseliani on the ninth suggestion, explained that when they studied the documents presented in the evidence of the 4th standard of authorisation, it was noted that the university employs qualified human resources and they did not have any notes in this regard. However, the experts noticed that the School of Law did not have any assistants in its staff list, when this could be a useful resource for the school. Therefore, it was desirable that all schools have assistant professors to ensure the sustainability and further development of the school and its human resources.

Rector - Nino Doborjginidze stated, that the memoranda, especially within the medical programme, fully meet the limits of the maximum number of student quota required by the university. The memoranda indicate the number of students, except for the old memoranda that did not include the number of students. For example, the institution had signed a memorandum with "Bacteriophage" in which the number of students was not determined, nor there was such a necessity. Thus, all new memoranda considered the number of students. Rector - Nino Doborjginidze also noted that when they received the draft report, they sent an argumentative position on this topic, and then the experts moved this recommendation to the suggestions. Rector of the university once again confirmed that all the memoranda, which would be signed by the institution, would specify the conditions discussed by the experts, and as for the old memoranda, they would be updated in the nearest future. Nino Doborjginidze explained that the university has all kinds of resources, including clinical teaching and in terms of internship for serving the required number of students at all levels including medicine.

A deliberative break was announced at the session.

Start of the break: 14:52

End of the break: 15:15

The Chair of the session put the following to the vote:

Granting the authorisation to Ilia State University, submission of report and monitoring within 1 year, determining the student quota by 17 770 including the student quota of 800 for the one-level Educational Programme of Medical Doctor (MD) in English Language;

Based on the authorisation application submitted by the institution to the Center, the report of the expert panel on authorisation and the argumentative position presented by the university to the Center on the draft report of the experts panel, as well as based on hearing the positions of the interested party at the session of the Council, the Council substantially shared the evaluations reflected in the report of the experts' panel.

However, the Authorisation Council considered that component 3.1 of the authorisation

standard, instead of being evaluated as “complies with the requirements”- should be evaluated as -"substantially complies with the standard requirements". The Council's assessment was based on the content of the "suggestion" provided in the component 3.1 of the report of the experts' panel on authorisation, which was more of a “recommendation” than a “suggestion” with its content. Furthermore, since the 3.2 component was assessed by the authorisation experts as "substantially complies with the standard requirements", the assessment of the 3rd standard of authorisation, taking into account the assessment of its two components (3.1 and 3.2), was determined as - "substantially complies with the standard requirements".

The Council also considered that component 4.2 of the authorisation standard should be evaluated as "substantially complies with the standard requirements". The Council's opinion was mainly based on the following circumstances: the improvement of the ratio of affiliated academic staff to the invited staff in favor of affiliated academic staff and also the content of the "suggestion" contained in the report in component 4.2, which, in the opinion of the Council, was a “recommendation” and not a “suggestion”. The change in the assessment of the mentioned component did not cause a change in the assessment of the 4th standard.

According to the Authorisation Council, the evaluation of the component 7.1 of the authorisation standard, instead of - "complies with the standard requirements", should have been - "substantially complies with the standard requirements". Also, the evaluation of component 7.3 of the authorisation standard, instead of - "complies with the standard requirements", should have been - "substantially complies with the standard requirements". The change in the assessment of components 7.1 and 7.3 was due to the contents of the suggestions reflected in the report of the experts' panel of authorisation in the mentioned components. In particular, according to the opinion of the Council, part of the "suggestions" provided in the above-mentioned components should have been provided as “recommendations”. Accordingly, the "suggestion" provided by the authorisation experts in component 7.1, in the opinion of the Council, was more of a “recommendation” in its content, as well as the two "suggestions" provided by the experts in component 7.3 - regarding the website and the portal, were more “recommendations” than “suggestions”. Accordingly, since two components of Standard 7 were assessed as “substantially complies with the requirements”, whole standard assessment was determined as “substantially complies with the requirements”.

Results of the vote:

In favor: 22

Against: 1

The decision:

According to Article 11(2)(a), paragraph 1¹ of the same Article, Article 12, and Article 32⁷(1) of the Law of Georgia on Education Quality Improvement, Article 56²(3)(a) and Article 56³ of law of Georgia "On Higher Education", Article 77(1)(a), paragraph 4 of the same article, paragraphs 1, 3, 4 and 5(b) of Article 79, and Article 88(2) of Authorisation Regulations for Educational Institutions approved by the Order N99/N of October 1, 2010 of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, LEPL Ilia State University (ID/Code: 204861970) should be granted the status of a higher education institution (university) for a period of 6 years, with the condition of submitting a report within one year, and student quota should be set at 17,770, including student quota for the one-level educational programme of a medical doctor (English language) to be determined as 800. The Council requested from the Center to evaluate the report submitted after one year on the implementation of recommendations within the framework of scheduled monitoring.

This decision shall enter into force on 26 September 2024.

Rector and representatives of the institution expressed their opinion and asked the Authorisation Council to clarify what caused the change of the experts' report from full compliance into the substantial; In addition, what was the reason for the decision taken by the Council to require monitoring. The Council clarified that the substantiated position of the Council would be provided in the minutes of the session.

The following recommendations and suggestions were provided to the institution:

Recommendations:

- It is recommended that the university pays more attention to correct and timely update of internal documentation;
- It is recommended that the university observes and immediately follows the legislative changes, especially in the part of educational programmes;
- It is recommended that the institution, in addition to full, associate and assistant professors in the School of Law, also has the academic staff (assistants) with a relatively low position in order to ensure the continuity and sustainability of educational programmes and the development of professionals in the field, their professional and career growth;
- It is recommended that the number of affiliated academic staff in the university is increased, which will lead to an improvement in the ratio of affiliated academic staff to the invited staff in favor of affiliated academic staff;

- It is recommended to specify the maximum/minimum number of students the partner institution can receive (internships, clinical practice) in all memoranda;
- It is recommended to strengthen the efforts to expedite the provision of relevant information on the English-language website, which will eliminate potential information problems for foreign students;
- It is recommended to reflect tasks and activities related to the creation of the new web portal in the university's strategic and action plan.

Suggestions:

- It is suggested to continue in well-started efforts to be an inclusive, open institution that proactively offers its studies to a large variety of SEN students.
- It is suggested to consider a possibility to include among the strategic goals the issue of work-life balance for the university staff, with consequent inter-organizational measures.
- It is suggested to continue in the efforts to make the ISU a place where a real integration of different cohorts of students (for instance Georgian and foreign students) effectively takes place.
- It is suggested to have more intensive and regular meetings with stakeholders for the purpose of giving feedback on actions taken by institution in response to their recommendations and suggestions, it should also be extended to all stakeholders and may take other forms of communications as well, in order to regularly motivate their valuable participation in QA research and evaluation.
- It is suggested to consider possibilities to offer more varied elective courses to students and expand the scope of their practical training.
- It is suggested to consider possibilities of establishing advisor boards for all study programs provided by the ISU.
- It is suggested to ensure the dissemination of a reasonable amount and volume of information in process of emailing.



განათლების ხარისხის განვითარების ეროვნული ცენტრი
NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

Higher Education Institution Authorization Experts'

Final Report

LEPL – Ilia State University

Tbilisi, 2024

Expert Panel Members

Chair: Milan Pol, Masaryk University, Czech Republic

Co-Chair: Azim Mirzazadeh, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Iran

Members:

Eka Lekashvili, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia

Sopio Khundadze, European University, Georgia

Khatuna Saganelidze, New Vision University, employer expert, Georgia

Magda Memanishvili, International Black Sea University, Georgia

Natia Maghalashvili, International Black Sea University, Georgia (student expert)

Authorization Report Resume

General information on the educational institution

Ilia State University (ISU) was established in 2006 through the merger of six higher education institutions. At the moment, ISU consists of four primary education units, comprising three faculties (Arts and Sciences; Natural Sciences and Medicine; Business, Technology and Education) and one school (Law). Besides it, there are one international doctoral school, 26 institutes, and 50 research centers, and six laboratories related to the ISU. According to the self-evaluation report (SER), the ISU employs 353 faculty members. There are also 17 professors with the status professor emeritus, 218 researchers, and 869 invited lectures. As for the administrative and support staff, there are 1.289 people. There are about 17 thousand students, out of them about 700 are foreign students at ISU.

ISU seems to be well established in the Georgian tertiary sector and society in broad, as well as it is well anchored internationally in relevant networks and other academic communities.

Brief overview of the evaluation process for authorization: SER and Site visit

The evaluation process started well before the very site visit by organizing online meetings of the panel and providing the panel with the information about the evaluation procedure and also with the documents submitted by the ISU. The site visit was held on June 20-25, 2024, and it was very well organized both by NCEQE coordinators, and by the ISU leaders. This way, the panel had a very good opportunity to study all the materials provided (some other materials were still additionally requested and later submitted by the ISU), to meet and interview different actors within the ISU and beyond, and also to visit the facilities in which ISU is functioning, incl. medical clinics. This all helped the panel to get a relatively complete picture about ISU's functioning.

Overview of the HEI's compliance with standards

In general, the expert team evaluated the performance of Ilia State University very positively in vast majority of areas related to the authorization standards (sub-standards). In concrete, all seven standards were evaluated as complying with requirements. The expert team formulated one recommendation and twelve suggestions. Also, an example of good practice was identified.

Opinion of the experts' team on the position of the university towards the draft report

The experts' team discussed the argumentative position of the university and accepted some of it. As a result, the recommendation related to the 7th standard was moved into suggestions. The recommendation related to the 3rd standard remained, but it was reformulated. Now it stresses the need that the university monitors and follows the legislative changes instantly. The experts' team has formulated it namely with regard to the need of implementing educational programs (for example, in accordance with "Law on Higher Education", PhD programs include not more than 60 ECTS teaching component).

These changes do not have any impact on the overall evaluation of the university which is very positive.

Summary of Recommendations

- It is recommended that the university should monitor and follow the legislative changes instantly.

Summary of Suggestions

- It is suggested to continue in well-started efforts to be an inclusive, open institution that proactively offers its studies to a large variety of SEN students.
- It is suggested to consider a possibility to include among the strategic goals the issue of work-life balance for the university staff, with consequent inter-organizational measures.
- It is suggested to continue in the efforts to make the ISU a place where a real integration of different cohorts of students (for instance Georgian and foreign students) effectively takes place.
- It is suggested to have more intensive and regular meetings with stakeholders for the purpose of giving feedback on actions taken by institution in response to their recommendations and suggestions, it should also be extended to all stakeholders and may take other forms of communications as well, in order to regularly motivate their valuable participation in QA research and evaluation.
- It is suggested the university should place greater emphasis on ensuring the accurate updating of documents.
- It is suggested to consider possibilities to offer more varied elective courses to students and expand the scope of their practical training.
- It is suggested to consider possibilities of establishing advisor boards for all study programs provided by the ISU.
- It is suggested to specify the maximum/minimum number of students the partner institution can receive (internships, clinical practice) in all memoranda.
- It is suggested that the School of Law, besides full and associated professors, also has a body of lower-level academic staff (assistants), to ensure continuity and sustainability of the programs and the growth of professionals in the field.
- It is suggested to strengthen the efforts to expedite the provision of relevant information on the English-language website, which will eliminate potential information problems for foreign students.
- It is suggested to reflect tasks and activities related to the creation of the new web portal in the university's strategic and action plan.
- It is suggested to ensure the dissemination of a reasonable amount and volume of information in process of emailing.

Summary of the Best Practices

- Establishing advisory boards at some educational programs, for instance at School of Business, Technologies, and Education, and also at School of Law.

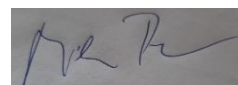
Summary Table of Compliance of HEI with Standards and Standard Components

	Standard	Compl ies wit h Req uire me nts	Subs tanti ally com plies with requi reme nts	Parti ally Com plies with Requ irem ents	Does not Compl y with Requir ement s
1.	Mission and strategic development of HEI	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.1	Mission of HEI	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2	Strategic development	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Organizational structure and management of HEI	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.1	Organizational structure and management	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2.2	Internal quality assurance mechanisms	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.3	Observing principles of ethics and integrity	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Educational Programmes	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.1	Design and development of educational programmes	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.2	Structure and content of educational programmes	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.3	Assessment of learning outcomes	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Staff of the HEI	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.1	Staff management	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.2	Academic/Scientific and invited Staff workload	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Students and their support services	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.1	The Rule for obtaining and changing student status, the recognition of education, and student rights	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.2	Student support services	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Research, development and/or other creative work	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.1	Research activities	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.2	Research support and internationalization	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.3	Evaluation of research activities	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Material, information and financial resources	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.1	Material resources	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.2	Library resources	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.3	Information resources	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.4	Financial resources	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signature of expert panel members

1. Milan Pol (Chair)



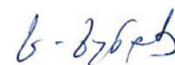
2. Azim Mirzazadeh (Co-chair)



3. Eka Lekashvili (Member)



4. Sopio Khundadze (Member)



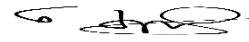
5. Khatuna Saganelidze (Member)



6. Magda Memanishvili (Member)

მ. მემანიშვილი

7. Natia Maghalashvili (Member)



Compliance of the Applicant HEI with the Authorization Standard Components

1. Mission and strategic development of HEI

Mission statement of a HEI defines its role and place within the higher education area and broader society. Strategic development plan of HEI corresponds with the mission of an institution, is based on the goals of the institution and describes means for achieving these goals.

1.1 Mission of HEI

Mission Statement of the HEI corresponds to Georgia's and European higher education goals, defines its role and place within higher education area and society, both locally and internationally.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

When defining its role in Georgia, the region and broader (European space), Ilia State University emphasizes conducting up-to-date research, academic activities of an excellent level (Western standards), effective response to requirements of the labor market, to local, regional and global challenges and establishing and promoting democratic values within the university and beyond. Academic freedom, freedom of conscience, and freedom of choice are declared as the basis on which ISU is building its work.

The mission statement of the ISU is formulated as follows: „The mission of Ilia State University is to create, disseminate, and apply knowledge to advance scientific progress and societal development, both locally and internationally.“ (SER, p. 16). This mission statement clearly relates university activities to three main pillars, learning/teaching, research/development, and public reach. From this perspective, the mission statement can be seen as well balanced.

Ilia State University declares that is centers its mission statement on three core principles of unity: (1) Integration of Research and Teaching (Research Teaching Nexus); (2) Unity of General Education Common (Liberal Arts) Curriculum and Specialized Education and Specialization; and (3) Unity of the Universal and the Local. The efforts to stick to all three principles can be seen in a number of ISU's activities, as it was evidenced in the documentation provided as well as during the interviews.

This can be confirmed that the mission statement of the Ilia State University corresponds to Georgia's and European higher education goals. It defines the ISU's role and place within the higher education area and society, both locally and internationally.

Vision statement of the ISU is positively corresponding with the mission statement, aiming at the time horizon of 2030. Until that time, "the ISU aims to establish itself as the premier

research institution in Georgia and the wider region, adhering to Western standards. This positioning will serve as the foundation for driving scientific and technological advancements, fostering high-quality educational practices, and promoting societal well-being through innovative approaches. The university is steadfast in its commitment to tackling global, regional, and national challenges. By fostering and implementing a knowledge-based economy, it aims to play a pivotal role in promoting sustainable development and facilitating Georgia's integration into Europe." (SER, p. 17)

Ilia State University declares its values as follows: autonomy, equal opportunity and inclusive environment, diversity, academic freedom, social responsibility, integrity, transparency and openness, focus on development. While there are a number of examples that can be brought as the evidence that ISU is successfully working based on these values, there is also in some cases a room for further improvement, for instance in the case of inclusivity (SEN students; Georgian and foreign students within the institution).

Mission statement of the ISU clearly defines the characteristics of the ISU based on its type and main directions of its work.

And it was proven to a sufficient extent that the mission statement is shared by the community of the ISU.

Evidence/indicators

- Self-evaluation report
- ISU mission
- Interviews

Recommendations:

None

Suggestions:

- It is suggested to continue in well-started efforts to be an inclusive, open institution that proactively offers its studies to a large variety of SEN students.

Best Practices (if applicable):

None

Evaluation

- Complies with requirements
- Substantially complies with requirements
- Partially complies with requirements
- Does not comply with requirements

1.2 Strategic Development

- HEI has a strategic development (7-year) and an action plans (3-year) in place.
- HEI contributes to the development of the society, shares with the society the knowledge gathered in the institution, and facilitates lifelong learning
- HEI evaluates implementation of strategic and action plans, and duly acts on evaluation results.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

Ilia State University has a Strategic Development Plan (2024-2030) as well as an Action Plan (for the period 2024-2026).

The Strategic Plan is based on an analysis of activities of the ISU in previous years. SWOT analysis findings clearly point at strong as well as weak sides of the ISU operation and indicate opportunities and threats that might emerge from them, as perceived by the ISU. Based on this, six strategic goals were identified in the strategic plan of the ISU for the years 2024-2030. They include Institutional strengthening; Organizational development; Enhancing teaching/learning standard; Raising the standard of research activities at the university; Development of student services; and Enhancing awareness and reputation of the university. Each strategic goal is further elaborated into a series of tasks which are clearly defined and concretized. Altogether they create a relative complex and logically built whole. This can be said the ISU's Strategic Development Plan 2024-2030 is built in such a way that it can ensure the achievement of the ISU's goals. And these goals are clearly linked to the ISU's values, vision and mission, they seem to be achievable, time-bound and measurable.

The methodology of the development of a strategic plan is clearly described and well acceptable. The strategic plan was developed in a participatory manner. Main directives that guided this process were "Formation of the Working Group and Deadlines for the Development of the 2024-2030 Strategic Development Plan of Ilia State University" as well as "Strategic Planning Methodology". Upon the approval of the Academic and Representative Boards, the ISU established a working group which was mainly involved in all key steps (review of ISU's performance in recent years, identification of actual needs, assessment of realization of previous plans). The data were collected from key actors of the ISU as well as bound, using various forms/methods. It was reported by the ISU and confirmed to sufficient extent during the interviews that this process included involvement of internal as well as external stakeholders.

The action plan concretely describes activities planned for the next three years, determines the responsibilities of those involved, formulates performance indicators and indicates financial allocations related to implementation of concrete activities.

Overall, it can be confirmed that the strategic and action plans of the ISU cover main aspects that are vital to the operation of the ISU, including the ISU's further development, quality assurance, planning and implementation of educational programs, student body planning, research and other creative activities, human and material resources, student services, infrastructure, and more.

A special emphasis is put on the third mission, social responsibility and the advancement of public welfare. Towards this end, a large number of activities are planned and many of them can be seen as a continuity and possibly further development of already existing activities.

This can be confirmed that by realizing strategic and action plans the Ilia State University contributes positively to the social development of the country, shares with the society the knowledge generated in the institution, and facilitates lifelong learning.

The ISU has developed a plan for monitoring of implementation of strategic and action plans, incl. possible response to the findings of the monitoring process.

Evidence/indicators

- Self-evaluation report
- Strategic Development Plan (2024-2030)
- Action Plan (2024-2026)
- Interviews

<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is suggested to consider a possibility to include among the strategic goals the issue of work-life balance for the university staff, with consequent inter-organizational measures.
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>

2. Organizational Structure and Management of HEI

Organizational structure and management of the HEI is based on best practices of the educational sector, meaning effective use of management and quality assurance mechanisms in the management process. This approach ensures implementation of strategic plan, integration of quality assurance function into management process, and promotes principles of integrity and ethics

2.1 Organizational Structure and Management

- Organizational structure of HEI ensures implementation of goals and activities described in its strategic plan
- Procedures for election/appointment of the management bodies of HEI are transparent, equitable, and in line with legislation
- HEI's Leadership/Management body ensures effective management of the activities of the institution
- Considering the mission and goals of HEI, leadership of the HEI supports international cooperation of the institution and the process of internationalization.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

Organizational structure of Ilia State University is clear, it describes all the key and major management bodies and structural units of an institution and clearly demonstrates subordination of each.

Effective management of Ilia State University can be demonstrated through successful fulfillment of the strategic and action plan of an institution. University has provided 2018-2023 strategy implementation progress evaluation, strategic goals and tasks and completion status. It has to be noted that all the strategic goals or tasks of Ilia State University are

either completed or mostly completed, which may be one of the proofs of effective management of an institution.

To support effective management of the organization Ilia State University uses relevant modern technologies and programs, such as:

Student Information Systems (SIS) Argus: Managing student records, enrollment, and academic progress efficiently;

"Billing" electronic system of tuition fee collection, accounting and student financial information system;

Electronic system for procedures eDocument;

Organization resource management and planning system ERP: to manage and integrate the important parts of university operations;

Institutional repository of publications and research materials E-prints;

Learning management system E-learning - E-learning Platforms: Supporting online education and facilitating blended learning approaches.

Ilia State University maintains registry of educational institutions as described in current legislation.

Organizational structure of Ilia State University, description of each structural unit of the institution, their goals, functions and responsibilities, management bodies of the institution, major principles of university management, representatives of each management body, rights and responsibilities of management bodies are described in detail through the Statute of Ilia State University.

The rule of conduct of elections at Ilia State University, authority and the code of conduct of the election commission is regulated through Election Bylaws of Ilia State University, approved by the decision of meeting #9 of the Representative Board, adopted on November 7, 2014. The document describes in detail the composition of management bodies and structural units, election procedures, the rule of registering candidates for management bodies, the announcement and holding of the elections. The procedure for election and appointment of the managerial bodies of Ilia State University is in line with legislation.

It is important to note that during site-visit interviews university representatives demonstrated to be well aware of their functions and responsibilities at the institution, they also proved to be active participants of strategic and action plan development processes of the university, as well as to be aware of target benchmarks and indicators of successful performance of their structural units.

Ilia State University has developed a Business Continuity Plan (recently updated in 2023), which aims to guarantee the uninterrupted functioning of the university processes during critical occasions and mitigate the impact of such situations through monitoring, effective coordination and cooperation. The plan addresses and minimizes risks across information technologies, material resources, proceedings, protection and security and human resources. Ilia State University management believes that in 2020, during Covid 19 pandemic the university proved to be effective in managing unforeseen and critical situations faced by the university society.

The assessment of effective management of Ilia State University related to administrative, academic or scientific activities of the organization is insured through internal quality

assurance mechanisms of the institution (details provided through component 2.2 Internal Quality Assurance Mechanisms), as well as strategic plan implementation monitoring mechanisms of the university, various reports, working documents developed at the university etc.

Supportive arrangements of Ilia State University's internationalization efforts are carried out according to its strategic plan, with specific tasks outlined in the internationalization strategy for 2018-2024 and 2024-2030. Various structural units of the university are involved in implementing the specific activities of the strategy, including the International Relations Office, International Students Department, Office of Development, Research Coordination Office, International Doctoral School and faculties. The evaluation and monitoring team of Ilia State University's Strategic Development Plan monitors and evaluates the implementation of the internationalization strategy.

Internationalization tasks of Ilia State University include:

Internationalization of learning/teaching process – to fulfill this task, the university promotes: Internationalization of educational programs, raising the quality of education in an international environment, international student mobility, internationalization of the student contingent.

Internationalization of research – to fulfill this task, the university implements a number of activities provided by the plan: encourages international collaborative research, promotes international exposure for young researchers by organizing various activities, supports to showcase the university's research achievements and the international recognition of researchers.

Gaining international recognition and institutional development – to achieve this goal: the university ensures internationalization of the third mission activities, constantly strives to integrate itself into the international scientific and educational sphere and enhance its reputation at the global level, determines and implements best practices for development.

It has to be noted that the university has provided numerous examples demonstrating implementation of various activities and arrangements supporting fulfillment of above listed tasks and relevant activities to achieve internationalization strategies, tasks and goals. However, to improve the achievements of one of the tasks related with internationalization of learning/teaching process and to improve positive effects of internationalization of the students contingent, it is better if the university continues efforts to make Ilia State University a place where a real integration of different cohorts of students (for instance Georgian and foreign students) effectively takes place.

Evidence/indicators

- Current structure and organizational chart of the university
- Functions of structural units - services and regulations
- The Statute of LEPL Ilia State University
- Election bylaws of LEPL Ilia State University
- Internal Quality Assurance concept
- Regulations of "Argus" and proceedings
- Business continuity plan 2023
- Management effectiveness monitoring mechanisms and evaluation system

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internationalization Policy/Strategy 2018-2024 • Internationalization Strategic Plan implementation report 2018-2023 • Internationalization Strategy 2024-2030 • Site-visit interview results with different stakeholders • University Self-evaluation Report
<p>Recommendations: None</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is suggested to continue in the efforts to make the ISU a place where a real integration of different cohorts of students (for instance Georgian and foreign students) effectively takes place.
<p>Best Practices (if applicable): None</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements
<p>2.2 Internal Quality Assurance Mechanisms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Institution effectively implements internal quality assurance mechanisms. Leadership of the institution constantly works to strengthen quality assurance function and promotes establishment of quality culture in the institution. ○ HEI has a mechanism for planning student body, which will give each student an opportunity to get a high quality education.
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>Aims and functions as well as the structure of Quality Assurance Office at Ilia State University is regulated through "Quality Assurance Office Statute" of the institution. Quality assurance mechanisms and procedures are clearly defined through Internal Quality Assurance Concept. The document describes in detail the evaluations and surveys that are regularly done by the QA Office, as well as the users of the survey and evaluation results. The document provides a time frame of each internal evaluation process, information about departments and stakeholders involved in the process as well as information about resources used. The internal quality assurance mechanisms serve to evaluate and continuously improve Ilia State University's academic, research activities and support services. More specifically, internal quality assurance mechanisms cover following regular assessments: internal self-assessment of programs, analysis of students' academic performance, student surveys at the end of each term (surveying students routinely each semester regarding all types of courses – standard, industrial work practice, fieldwork, PBL, labs, the clinic, bachelor's/master's theses, etc.), last year students surveys, graduates surveys, interviews with doctoral students (to assess the program's study components, research-related processes, administrative support as well as academic and visiting staff), doctoral students' survey on supervision quality, doctoral</p>

program graduates' career development survey, benchmark analysis, external review: peer assessment of academic programs, employer focus groups, survey of student satisfaction with services, survey of academic and invited teaching staff satisfaction with services, administrative and support staff satisfaction survey, administrative and support staff assessment, assessment of academic and invited teaching staff performance, assessment of research staff performance, assessment of the University's scientific research units and projects.

Besides regular evaluations (as mentioned above), QA Office may initiate other types of assessments based on different needs of an institution to evaluate particular academic activities, processes, services, etc.

It has to be noted that the Quality Assurance Office proved to have conducted all the assessments listed above through survey results and the analysis that has been provided by the institution either before or during the site-visit.

Documents provided by the institution prove QA survey results to be used for the improvements in different ways: improvement of different academic activities or services at the institution, or improvement of QA mechanisms themselves. For example:

1. The internal self-assessment system of the educational programs underwent significant changes based on challenges that were observed and identified after the use of this instrument:
2. The self-assessment instruments were refined to fit the higher education level. In particular, a different self-assessment report template was created for the doctoral level, shifting the focus to the research processes.
3. The assessment of program components has been diversified to enable identification and evaluation by course/component type (e.g.: standard course, entrepreneurial practice, laboratory practice etc.).
4. The Argus system was updated to run both Georgian and English language surveys simultaneously.
5. Through updates in the Argus system, it was possible to generate data on students' performance and termly surveys by program, and accessing these data has become easier for faculties. It is worth noting that the database of students' academic performance now includes various indicators that are relevant for performance analysis (e.g.: median, mean, standard deviation, normal distribution etc.).

Based on the evaluation results of student services, following improvements and responsive actions were made by the institution:

1. The practice of orientation meetings was revised, its structure and frequency were updated, in addition to the general meeting with newly enrolled students, orientation meetings were held with the other semester students, meetings were held for smaller groups for more interaction.
2. The faculties took steps to improve the timeliness of students' evaluations in the Argus system. Clear instructions were sent to the lecturers at the beginning of the semester, outlining the deadlines for posting grades in Argus. Monitoring was conducted during

the semester to ensure that intermediate and final evaluations were reflected promptly.

3. In order to increase students' awareness, information regarding various rules and regulations was uploaded to the Argus system (e.g. the student profile section includes information about the status recovery and suspension procedures, along with their respective deadlines, a rule for assessment appeals procedures can be accessed, etc.).
4. Information regarding individual consultations with lecturers was included in all syllabi posted to the Argus system. During the meetings with academic and invited staff that were involved in the program, the faculties emphasized the importance of utilizing the Argus system as an alternative communication channel with students, etc.

Based on the evaluation results of academic and invited staff services, following improvements and responsive actions were made by the ISU:

1. The Human Resources Management Office created a special information card at the beginning of the Fall semester of 2023, which was sent out to all invited teaching staff in order to increase awareness about the services available at the university. The card contained details about the different units and services offered by the university, as well as information regarding training programs for individuals involved in the educational process.
2. The Personal and Professional Development Center conducted information sessions and training programs for academic and invited teaching staff on the use of library databases, educational platforms, and modern teaching technologies.
3. A program has been developed to provide training for academic and invited teaching staff on project writing, grant application, and project management, etc.

In addition, it has to be noted that site-visit interviews with different stakeholders also proved consideration and the use of QA research and assessment results for the improvement of different procedures or services, as well as educational programs:

Numerous cases were named by different groups of students, employers, academic or invited staff members when their recommendations and suggestions for improvements were taken into consideration by relevant parties and responsive actions were taken for the development of educational programs or services. Here are some specific examples of it:

During site-visit interviews students named the case of increasing working hours of the library by the decision of relevant parties in response to their recommendations and requirements. Students prove to be involved in the development of educational programs, they recall specific courses (e.g. Data Analysis and Excel) that were added to particular educational programs in response to their recommendations.

Personnel implementing different educational programs as well as students proved to have different trainings and meetings organized for them to support the relevant use of library resources. Academic and invited staff also prove to be involved in the development of educational programs; they were also able to name specific courses (Tax Law) that were added to particular educational programs, they recall some courses (Academic Writing) that were moved to another study semester in response to their recommendations.

Employers proved to have focus group meetings with university representatives to evaluate different educational programs. They named specific recommendations and suggestions that were considered by relevant parties for the development of educational programs: e.g. courses oriented on the development of practical skills and soft skills, communication, group work, time management skills, critical reasoning, recommended by them were added to the study plans of particular educational programs.

Heads of educational programs also proved to have the cases of considering various recommendations of different stakeholders, they have recalled the cases of adding some elective courses (e.g. Securities Exchange Regulations) to a particular educational program based on students' recommendations. They proved to be aware of assessment of program learning outcomes and demonstrated the cases of responsive actions (e.g. modification of assessment methods) to the evaluation results.

In order to introduce QA research and evaluation results to relevant structural units, the Quality Assurance Office shares them to the Representative Council, organizes meetings with those units. Meeting representatives discuss evaluation results and needs for responsive actions. After the analysis, structural units present action plans in response to the issues that were identified during QA research, assessments and analysis. During site-visit the institution provided additional documents, protocols that proved implementation of meetings mentioned above. Protocols were supplemented with action plans of different structural units, describing responsive actions to recommendations of the Quality Assurance Office developed based on their research analysis.

According to Quality Assurance Office representatives they have recently started to organize meetings with students for the purpose of giving feedback on actions taken by institution in response to their recommendations and suggestions, however, the meetings are desired to have more intensive and regular character, should also be extended to other stakeholders and may take other forms of communications as well in order to regularly motivate stakeholders valuable participation in QA researches and evaluations.

It has to be noted that the educational programs at the School of Business do not fully comply with some of the current requirements, therefore, it is suggested that the university and the QA Office should monitor and follow the legislative changes instantly (see the details in 3.1 Design and Development of Educational Programmes).

University has developed a student body planning mechanism, in addition, there is a separate mechanism and methodology of planning the number of students for the One Cycle Educational Program in Medicine. Mechanisms describe in detail all the capacities and resources that have to be evaluated to arrive at a reasonable number of students university can properly serve. In case of those educational programs, which require laboratory resources, methodology considers evaluation of laboratory capacities, as for the One Cycle Educational Program of Medical Doctor, the mechanism additionally takes into consideration the capacity of simulation rooms.

Iliia State University determines 17 770 places for students in total, among them 1200 places are allocated for Medical Doctor Educational Program. Student body planning mechanism considers additional parameters to calculate the relevant number of students at MD educational program, such as, simulation spaces, laboratory spaces.

Formula used for the calculation above contains variable like, Maximum hourly workload of the laboratory/simulation room, Number of lab/simulation rooms, Maximum number of

students per laboratory/simulation, etc. Formulas used for the calculation above are rational and logical. University can serve requested number of students at MD educational program. The number of students for clinical practice is calculated individually for each partner clinic, considering the ratios of students and patients determined by the field descriptors.

Evidences/indicators

- Quality Assurance Office Statute
- Internal Quality Assurance Concept
- Procedures for the assessment of the implementation of higher education programs
- Tools for systematic research/assessments
- Report of the Quality Assurance Office on the results of internal self-assessment of higher education programs
- Internal self-assessment reports of programs
- Quality Assurance Research Analysis
- Student contingent planning mechanism and methodology
- The mechanism and methodology of planning the contingent of students for the One Step Educational Program for Medicine
- The procedure for evaluating the academic staff's activity
- The procedure for evaluating the research staff's activity
- The procedure for evaluating the work performed for administrative and support staff
- Site-visit interview results with different stakeholders
- Self-evaluation report

Recommendations:

None

Suggestions:

- It is suggested to have more intensive and regular meetings with stakeholders for the purpose of giving feedback on actions taken by institution in response to their recommendations and suggestions, it should also be extended to all stakeholders and may take other forms of communications as well, in order to regularly motivate their valuable participation in QA research and evaluation.

Best Practices (if applicable):

None

Evaluation

- Complies with requirements
- Substantially complies with requirements
- Partially complies with requirements
- Does not comply with requirements

2.3. Observing Principles of Ethics and Integrity

- HEI has developed regulations and mechanisms that follow principles of ethics and integrity. Such regulations are publicly accessible.
- Institution has implemented mechanisms for detecting plagiarism and its prevention.
- HEI follows the principles of academic freedom.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

Ilia State University has developed several documents to regulate academic integrity and the ethical issues at the institution: "Code of Ethics for Academic Staff and Other Individuals Involved in the Educational Process", "Student Code of Ethics", "Academic Integrity Rule for Students".

"Code of Ethics for Academic Staff and Other Individuals Involved in the Educational Process" sets the rule of professional conduct for academic and invited staff and researchers at Ilia State University, the goal of which is to set standards for professional conduct, ethical values and obligations. These standards apply to interactions with students, their legal representatives, colleagues and society.

"Student Code of Ethics" sets standards and procedures to ensure a relevant academic and research environment at Ilia State University. The document is a guide for behavior to ensure protection of common resources and rights of students and other members of university society as well as to ensure the best academic atmosphere.

"Academic Integrity Rule for Students" serves to determine and regulate issues about the academic integrity of students at Ilia State University as well as to apply penalties for breaching academic integrity. The academic integrity rule applies to students of the university.

Ilia State University has developed a checklist for students to help them prevent plagiarism in their work. The checklist lists the issues that students have to check to make sure that there are no signs of plagiarism in their work. It is a very clear and easy guide for students to support them in keeping academic integrity.

Information about regulations above are provided to relevant parties, students and academic or invited staff of Ilia State University through several ways:

The documents above are posted on the university's web-site: <https://iliauni.edu.ge/ge>, and the student's Code of Ethics is also uploaded to the Argus electronic system of the educational process management.

The Student Code of Ethics is attached to the Student Agreement. Students at the same time are informed about the rules above during orientation meetings before the academic year.

As for the academic and invited staff, Internal Regulations and Code of Ethics for Academic Staff and Other Individuals Involved in the Educational Process are part of the employment contract. They are made known to the employees at the time of signing the contract, and the employees verify their agreement by signing the contract.

The University joins Plagiarism Awareness Week every year in February. For the last three years, public lectures and webinars, mainly for academic staff, have been held, where current issues were discussed. Additionally, Ilia State University hosts a forum annually, which is led

by representatives of the company Turnitin. Forums are dedicated to the issues like: the effective use of Turnitin, online learning and academic integrity, contract cheating.

Ilia State University established an annual conference on academic integrity in 2020. The first conference was organized by Ilia State University in Tbilisi, in 2022 it was organized by Ilia State University in Batumi and hosted by Batumi State University, in 2023 it was organized by Ilia State University and hosted by Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University. The conference mainly unites Georgian partners, however, foreign colleagues from leading European universities also participate. This event allows attendees to share successful/failed practices and discuss current challenges.

Ilia State University was coordinating the project "Academic Integrity for Quality Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Institutions in Georgia" (2017–2021), which united 14 Georgian and four European universities. The project was related to the adherence to the principles of academic integrity in the teaching-learning process, awareness raising and maintenance of the accompanying mechanisms/procedures, etc.

In 2022 Ilia State University became the coordinator of the project "Responsible Conduct of Research — Research Integrity and Ethics in Georgian Universities (ETHICS)", which is a serial continuation of the implementation of principles of integrity in research. The project unites 10 Georgian universities and 4 European partners; The implementation of the project is planned for 2023–2027 and it aims to strengthen the existing practices/mechanisms/procedures in the area of research integrity.

The periodic satisfaction survey of students includes such indicators as students' awareness of academic integrity and research ethics. According to the results of the above-mentioned survey in 2022, 63% of students were informed about academic integrity and ethical norms, and 74% about the regulations related to the prevention of plagiarism. According to the survey of 2023, 75% of students were informed about the rule related to academic integrity (plagiarism), and 59% of them about the ethical norms of research.

It has to be noted in addition that during site-visit interviews students as well as academic and invited staff of Ilia State University proved to be aware of all the rules and regulations on code of ethics and academic integrity of the university.

To support the protection of academic integrity at the university, Ilia State University utilizes relevant software: Turnitin, which is integrated into the university's e-learning portal, allowing instructors to activate the plagiarism detection feature while grading student assignments. The program is a mandatory requirement for the general module courses at the Bachelor's level, academic writing courses at the Master's and Doctoral levels, as well as for Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral theses. It has to be noted that there is a growing statistic of using Turnitin by academic and invited staff of the university, many academics have started using this evaluation system to ensure academic integrity.

Evidence/indicators

- Code of Ethics for Academic Staff and Other Individuals Involved in the Educational Process
- Student Code of Ethics
- Academic Integrity Rule for Students
- A checklist for students "How to avoid plagiarism"

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turnitin license/agreement (2018–2023) • Survey of satisfaction of students, academic and invited staff with university services (reports of 2022–2023) • Site-visit interview results with different stakeholders • Self-evaluation report • Website of Ilia State University: https://iliauni.edu.ge/.
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>

3. Educational Programmes

HEI has procedures for planning, designing, approving, developing and annulling educational programmes. Programme learning outcomes are clearly defined and are in line with the National Qualifications Framework. A programme ensures achievement of its objectives and intended learning outcomes

3.1 Design and Development of Educational Programmes

HEI has a policy for planning, designing, implementing and developing educational programmes.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

Ilia State University has a methodology for planning, designing, and developing educational programs. The document "Rules and Procedures for Development, approval, amendment, and Cancellation of Higher Educational Programs at Ilia State University (<https://iliauni.edu.ge/uploads/other/83/83084.pdf>) describes rules and regulations while planning, elaborating, and launching an Academic Program. Among the various regulatory documents required for the development of educational programs, there are two crucial regulatory documents: standards for planning the contingent of students in academic programs and the development of Bachelor and Master academic programs.

All stakeholders are involved in the process of developing educational programs - students, program staff, graduates, employers, and representatives of sectoral professional associations, both in the basic rules for the development of educational programs and by the procedures described in other regulatory documents. Paragraph 1.4 of the main regulatory document specifies that in the development of the educational program of the

university faculty/school academic, along with staff, invited staff should be involved (if any), including employers, students, and graduates (if the program is new, students of the adjacent discipline program should be involved in its development graduates), and administrative staff (including faculty/school Dean, Head of Quality Assurance Service, Quality Assurance Service specialist, and others).

The package of documents presented for authorization presents several pieces of evidence that prove the ISU continuously ensures the involvement of all interested parties in the development and implementation of academic programs. The quality assurance service of schools periodically prepares surveys of students' and professors' satisfaction, and surveys of employers' satisfaction are conducted (through focus groups and interviews). The abundance of studies ISU presented in the authorization package confirms employers' involvement in designing and developing educational programs. In particular, according to the submitted documents, in 2019-2023, the School of Arts and Science conducted more than 30 surveys of employers, the School of Natural Sciences and Medicine conducted 14 surveys, and the School of Business, Technologies, and Engineering conducted ten surveys. Against this background, the Law School seems relatively less productive; under the supervision of the advisory board, the school administration prepared only one market research document (Labor Market and Cooperation with the University Analysis of Perspectives) created in 2018. The need for activating cooperation with employers is vital here since many practicing professors teach in the mentioned school.

The administration, together with the heads of the educational programs, ensures the collection of data on monitoring the student's academic performance and analyzes the compliance of the learning outcomes with the target benchmarks. If surveys identify a need, the academic council of schools approves changes to academic programs.

The ISU' Quality Service has developed mechanisms for evaluating educational programs. The content of the program's internal monthly evaluation report form makes it clear that the ISU evaluates the programs from different perspectives — through periodic surveys of students, graduates, academic and visiting staff, and employers. The ISU evaluates academic programs quantitatively (student enrollment rate, indicators of program learning outcomes, statistical indicators of student performance) as well as by the use of qualitative methods. For quantitative data analysis, the ISU uses the data collected using its software Argus. For qualitative analysis, data are collected by direct survey methods other than Argus – focus groups and questionnaires. As the representatives of the quality service mentioned during the interviews, telephone interviews are also used to question the graduates. In addition to stakeholder surveys, educational program evaluation includes peer and external reviews.

To closely connect with employers and the changing labor market, several educational programs in the School of Business, Technologies, and Education have an advisory board consisting of professionals in the field (including employers). This way, they keep up with the changing labor market demands. The School of Law has an advisory board as well. From the point of view of the expert team, establishing advisory councils is the best practice, and its implementation can be helpful for other Schools and educational programs operating at Ilia State University.

It has to be noted that the educational programs at the School of Business do not fully comply with some of the current requirements of the qualification framework and the classifier of the fields of study (e.g. the volume of concentration at the bachelor level

exceeds 30 ECTS, the number, classification and the formulation of learning outcomes of educational programs are developed so that it complicates the process of their assessment). However, it has to be noted as well that Business School educational programs are already renewed and updated to comply with the qualification framework and the classifiers of the fields of study and the new versions of the programs have already been submitted for the accreditation purposes and for detailed content evaluation. In addition, the mentioned educational programs, according to the order #69/n of April 10, 2019, of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia were allowed to comply with the qualification framework and the classifiers of the fields of study till September 30, 2024.

In addition, the PhD educational program in Business Administration is structured as a 180 ECTS program. According to the Law of Georgia on Higher Education (chapter VII, article 46, paragraph 2) doctoral educational programs should be designed as a maximum 60 ECTS study component plus research component with no credits. PhD educational program in Business Administration is also updated for a given moment and submitted for accreditation purposes, however, it is suggested that the university should monitor and follow the legislative changes instantly.

However, the number of credits in the documentation was identified by the experts as a technical error, given that changes were made in other documents. Therefore, the university should place greater emphasis on ensuring the accurate updating of documents."

According to the self-evaluation report submitted for authorization, Ilia State University canceled ten educational programs after authorization in 2018. During the interviews, the school's administrative board members noted that the board may cancel an academic program based on market demands. During the interview with the deans of the schools, the respondents mentioned that in such a case, a school administration would either put an academic program into a temporary mode or merge it with another related program. For example, The School of Arts and Sciences administration decided to merge the bachelor's program of Oriental Studies with the bachelor's program International Relations: Europe and Middle East (Major).

Legal Entity of Public Law Ilia State University Policy and Procedures for the Development, Approval, Modification, and Cancellation of Higher Education Programs (<https://iliauni.edu.ge/uploads/other/83/83084.pdf>) regulates the study of those students Continuation of the process, those who are studying temporarily, or in canceled educational programs. Article 3 of the governing document regulates the cancellation/merger of academic programs in HEI. According to Article 3, Clause 5, when students study in a canceled educational program, their learning will be provided by the rule regarding the student's mobility and recognition of education received during the period. Thus, students can continue their studies in an educational program transferred to the transfer mode or transfer to an adjacent program through mobility.

Evidence/indicators

- Methodology for planning, designing and development of educational programs
- Analysis of labor market and employer demands
- Student, alumni, employer satisfaction surveys and analysis
- Student academic performance monitoring results

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures for program approval, amendment and annulment • Mechanisms providing further educational opportunities to students, in case of the amendment/annulment of educational programs • Interview results • Educational programs
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is suggested the university should place greater emphasis on ensuring the accurate updating of documents.
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>
<p>3.2 Structure and Content of Educational Programmes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Programme learning outcomes are clearly stated and are in line with higher education level and qualification to be granted ○ With the help of individualized education programmes, HEI takes into consideration various requirements, needs and academic readiness of students, and ensures their unhindered involvement into the educational process.
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>The credit accumulation system at Ilia State University is in line with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) guidelines. In particular, "Rules for the Assessment of Students/Vocational Students at Ilia State University, Assigning of Credits, Rating, and Fees for Additional/Retaken Courses/Components" (The academic council adopted the rule mentioned in 2015, and since then, several changes have been made to it). According to Article 3 of the mentioned rule, "The number of credits in each course/component is determined by the time (independent and contact hours) required to achieve the goals and outcomes of the course/component. One credit consists of 25 hours." The credit system of the programs of the higher educational institution is based on the ECTS methodology.</p> <p>The learning outcomes of educational programs are clearly formulated, facilitating the measurement and evaluation of learning outcomes. The learning outcomes of the MD program are aligned with specifications of the field of medicine and relevant sector benchmark. The learning outcomes of the educational programs are consistent with the level of the educational program and the qualification awarded.</p>

The specifics of the field of study and the national qualifications framework are considered when forming the learning outcomes of training programs.

It is important to note that the educational programs at the School of Business should be reviewed to align with certain current requirements of the qualification framework and the field of study classifier.

The structure and content of the higher education programs are logically related to learning outcomes. The curriculum's design ensures that an average student can overcome the semester curriculum in terms of time and the amount of material to be digested.

The structure of the MD program which includes different phases of normal structure and functions, abnormal structure and function, clerkship and also internship are well designed and are appropriate for attainment of the program learning outcomes. The internship phase is a very good opportunity for MD students to practice medicine under close supervision of the faculty members. Considering its innovative nature, it seems necessary to define the details of the internship phase before a real implementation for the first cohort of students which enter this phase.

In the structure of higher education programs, there is usually enough space for the student to have the opportunity to choose subjects of interest, both within the main field of study, and outside the main field of study, since the majority of bachelor's programs have 60 ECTS places allocated for free credits. Even though the structure of the educational programs guarantees the completion of elective subjects and free credits, some students and graduates during the interview expressed the desire that the program administrators would offer them more elective subjects, as well as - to have the opportunity to undergo field and practical studies more intensively. In the MD and in some other regulated programs the number of elective courses are aligned with the sectoral benchmarks of the field.

The analysis of educational programs confirmed that the specifics of the field and learning outcomes determine the scope of academic programs. In addition, undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral-level standards are maintained. For the development and implementation of programs at all three levels of higher education, the ISU has developed a separate standard that defines the specifics of the level of higher education and the characteristics of the program to be developed.

Educational programs consist of various teaching and learning methods. These methods take into account the specificity of the field of study and the tasks of a particular subject and ensure the achievement of the training course goals.

The ISU provides access to higher educational programs. The university's website describes the accredited academic programs, course catalogs, and curriculum (including the semester curriculum). The information on the website about the educational programs is updated and corresponds to the latest versions of the academic programs.

The ISU's administration considers the learning characteristics of students with different needs. Article 4 of the document "Legal Entity of Public Law Ilia State University Policy and Procedures for the Development, Approval, Modification, and Cancellation of Higher Education Programs" explains the procedures that students with special needs follow. In particular, point 4.4 states, "A student/trustee with special educational needs should apply

to the faculty/school implementing the relevant program with the request of drawing up an individual program." The student's/trustee's application must be confirmed with documentation revealing special educational needs.

In addition to the general rule, the ISU has a unique regulatory measure, "Rules for organizing the educational process for disabled and special needs students at Ilia State University," which describes in more detail the measures that the university implements to ensure the proper educational process of students with special needs or limited abilities. This rule underscores the university's unwavering support for students with special needs, providing them with the necessary resources and assistance to ensure their academic success. According to Article 4 of the mentioned rule, "University: a) provides for disabled/special educational needs equal access to the process of getting education for people without any discrimination; this means appropriate material, human, and training resources, including ramps, a learning environment equipped with an elevator, a sanitary unit, and more effort; b) ensures, if necessary, the invitation of an additional specialist and/or receiving a recommendation to appeal to organizations with relevant knowledge and specific work experience. Cares about the accessible format of educational materials (reading materials Audio/Electronic/Braille/Enlarged; Educational videos wanted with translation/audio description and others) on ensuring the existence of all educational program's direction. During interviews with the authorization expert group, representatives of higher education institutions mentioned that they have special assistants who help students with special needs.

It is important to note that Ilia State University has been running the Georgian language preparation program for many years. This program offers students from regions of Georgia where the level of teaching the Georgian language is not satisfactory the opportunity to study for free. Upon reaching the required level of proficiency, these students can enroll in the educational programs of their choice.

The authorization experts team had the chance to interview students of the Georgian language educational program. These students confirmed that their knowledge of the Georgian language significantly improved during their studies in the program. They also expressed their readiness to continue their studies in the bachelor's programs of their choice, which is a testament to the program's effectiveness.

Ilia State University periodically conducts graduate surveys. One purpose of the survey is to study graduates' employment rates. The document "Survey of Undergraduate Students of Ilia State University" is in the authorization documentation package. The quality service surveyed bachelor program graduates in the spring semester of 2023.

According to the document, the study aimed to determine the bachelor of Ilia State University degree of graduates one year after graduation and evaluate the training program. It also aimed to determine what percentage of graduates are employed and how satisfied they are with the program.

The survey results of 997 graduates of undergraduate programs showed that the share of employees among the respondents is 78%. Compared to the previous academic year index, it has increased by 7%. Notably, 34% of graduates are employed in their majors or in a related field, demonstrating the relevance of their degree. 36% are employed, but not in a specialty. Compared to the previous year, the percentage of respondents not working in their professional field has increased by only 1. It should be noted that there are self-

employed people in the specialty or related field, and 3% of the respondents are self-employed, but 4% do not have a specialty. (p. 11).

The quality service interviewed 456 graduates who finished master's programs in 2022. According to the results of the research, the employment rate among the respondents is 91%, a modest 1% increase from last year. 70% of graduates are employed in a specialty or related field, and 16% are employed in a non-specialty field. Compared to the previous year, the share of respondents who are employed in a specialty or related field has decreased by 3%. However, it's encouraging to note that 2% are self-employed in a specialty or related field, and 3% are self-employed but not in a specialty, indicating a positive trend in entrepreneurial endeavors. The share of the unemployed is 9%, which is only 1% less than the figure of the previous year. (pp. 6,22)

In conclusion, we note that the number of employees is high. In particular, 78% of bachelor's graduates and 91% of master's graduates are employed. Although the number of employees by specialty is relatively small (37% for bachelor's degrees, 72% for master's degrees), this is a general trend for higher educational institutions.

Evidence/indicators

- Educational programs, syllabi
- Regulations for planning, implementing and assessing scientific-research component
- Catalog of educational programs
- Interview results
- Ilia State University Undergraduate Alumni Survey, Spring 2023
- Ilia State University MA Alumni Survey, Spring 2023

Recommendations:

- It is recommended that the university should monitor and follow the legislative changes instantly.

Suggestions:

- It is suggested to consider possibilities to offer more varied elective courses to students and expand the scope of their practical training.
- It is suggested to consider possibilities of establishing advisor boards for all study programs provided by the ISU.

Best Practices (if applicable):

- Establishing advisory boards at some educational programs, for instance at School of Business, Technologies, and Education, and also at School of Law.

Evaluation

- Complies with requirements
- Substantially complies with requirements
- Partially complies with requirements
- Does not comply with requirements

3.3 Assessment of Learning Outcomes

HEI has a law-compliant, transparent and fair system of learning outcomes assessment, which promotes the improvement of students' academic performance.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

The ISU has a general rule for assessing the learning outcomes of educational programs, which is spelled out in the internal regulatory document "Rules for the Assessment of Students/Vocational Students at Ilia State University, Assigning of Credits, Rating and Fees for Additional/Retaken Courses/Components". In particular, in Article 10 of this document. Examining the syllabi of the educational programs submitted for authorization, it became clear that the evaluation system within the subjects (as well as learning methodology and activities) is different, as it corresponds to different fields and takes into account their specificities. However, the general rule of assessment is in line with the university regulation.

The mentioned rule applies to all educational programs operating in a higher educational institution; however, in some cases, depending on the specifics of the field, the evaluation system may change slightly. According to articles 10.1 and 10.2 of the mentioned document, "taking into account the objectives, learning outcomes, specifics, and minimum competency requirements of higher education programs, it becomes feasible to set a minimum passing grade that differs from the one indicated in clause 10. This minimum passing grade should not be below 51 points or exceed 60 points. (Update - 6.07.2022). In the case when subject benchmarks for academic programs in art and performance allow it, academic programs in these fields may include the following assessment scale for arts/performance projects/assignments:

- a) Pass with excellence – 91-100 points;
- b) Pass – 51-90 points;
- c) No pass – 50 points and less.

The system of evaluation of learning outcomes of educational programs takes into account the specificity of the field, though.

The evaluation system described in the syllabi is transparent. The scoring of individual components is adequate and described in a comprehensible way. Thus, the evaluation system, both for university and individual educational programs or at the level of specific subjects, is transparent. Students can learn how learning outcomes are evaluated at all levels.

The university's grading systems, designed to eliminate inequality, are easily accessible. The regulations on credit awarding, which define the grading system at the university level, are openly available. The evaluation system for each subject is clearly outlined in the syllabuses, which are easily accessible on Moodle's electronic resource. These regulations are standard for all students, ensuring an equal approach for everyone. The assessment system for each subject is integrated into the university software Argus, where the various midterm assessment components are permanently displayed throughout the semester.

During interviews with students and graduates, it was confirmed that they are familiar with evaluating learning outcomes. If necessary, the score of a separate component of the

midterm assessment was specified, and additional feedback was requested from the subject professor about the assessment received in the final/midterm exams.

"Rules for the Assessment of Students/Vocational Students at Ilia State University, Assigning of Credits, Rating and Fees for Additional/Retaken Courses/Components" describes the assessment appeal procedure. In particular, according to Article 9, "Students and vocational students have the right to appeal their midterm and/or final evaluations for any components of their educational program within two working days of receiving the notification of the results. As directed by the Dean, their appeal will be reviewed by a specialist in the field or the complaints commission, which must consist of no fewer than three members." (Addition - 4.07.2017)

When reviewing a complaint, the field specialist or complaints commission has the authority to evaluate the accuracy of midterm, or final assessments mentioned in the application. They can decide within three days to either increase the student's grade, deduct points, or leave the grade unchanged. Additionally, a specific school or faculty may set alternative deadlines for master's projects, theses, creative works, or other scientific papers, considering the project's scope, the academic calendar, and administrative requirements.

Sharing the outcomes of the midterm and final examinations in accordance with paragraph 94 of this policy implies that the responsible individual inputs the results into the educational process electronic management system Argus. (Addition - 4.07.2017).

The system mentioned works, as confirmed during the interviews by students who had appealed the evaluation score.

Ilia State University ensures that students are informed about their grades. Most of the test exams are held in the exam center, and students receive information about the evaluation of the midterm and final exams through the university software program "Argus."

During interviews with students and graduates, the respondents confirmed they can always get additional information about the evaluation if they are interested. Subject teachers always explain the arguments for assessment. Most interviewers confirmed that they are familiar with the mechanisms of appeal.

The medicine program at the university includes 12 OSCE (Objective Structured Clinical Examination) stations, fully equipped with simulators, case scenarios, and checklists, all in accordance with sectoral benchmarks. These stations meet the required standards, ensuring that both the number and the equipment align with industry expectations.

To provide post-assessment feedback, the institution not only informs students about the goals they have achieved, gaps in their knowledge or skills, and ways to improve, but also organizes individual meetings with supervisors or OSCE examiners. These meetings offer students personalized feedback and guidance, helping them better understand their performance and how to enhance their learning outcomes.

Evidence/indicators

- System for learning outcomes assessment and its accessibility to all interested parties
- Educational programs, syllabi

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student survey results ● Interview results
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="radio"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements

4. Staff of the HEI

HEI ensures that the staff employed in the institution (academic, scientific, invited, administrative, support) are highly qualified, so that they are able to effectively manage educational, scientific and administrative processes and achieve the goals defined by the strategic plan of the institution. On its hand, the institution constantly provides its staff with professional development opportunities and improved work conditions.

4.1. Staff Management

- HEI has staff management policy and procedures that ensure the implementation of educational process and other activities defined in its strategic plan.
- HEI ensures the employment of qualified academic/scientific/invited/administrative/ support staff.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

According to the SER, a total number of the ISU's staff (including academic, scientific, invited, administrative, and support staff) is 2.729, out of them there are 353 academic staff members (123 professors, 172 associate professors, 58 assistant professors), and 218 scientific staff. The number of international academic, scientific, invited staff involved in teaching is 31, and of those involved in research 23. Also, there are 869 invited staff involved in teaching. The total number of administrative and support staff is 1.289.

As the expert team calculated, the ratio between academic and invited staff at Ilia State University is 2.4. (864 invited lecturers / 353 academic staff). The fact that the number of invited lecturers is 2.4 times higher than the academic staff does not threaten the stability of the university. The total number of students in the university is 15,597. According to the SER quantitative data, the ratio of the academic and scientific staff number to the number of invited staff is 1/2 (571/869); the ratio of the affiliated staff number to the number of students is 1/43.8 (356/1557); The ratio of the academic, scientific, invited staff number to the number of the higher educational programs is 14/1 (1440/105). The ratio of students to affiliated staff at the master's and doctoral levels is much smaller. The ratio of the number of supervisors and master students is 1/4 (646/181), and the ratio of the number of supervisors and doctoral students is 1/2 (187/112).

The retention rate for academic staff, invited staff, and administration and support staff is higher than 90% (according to the list, 97%, 93%, and 95%). ISU's benchmark is maintaining the ratios mentioned for at least three years.

University-wide staffing ratios with various quantitative data ensure the sustainability of the work of the higher educational institution

The ISU has developed a clear policy for hiring new employees, which ensures that professional employees are hired through competitive and transparent competition. LEPL Ilia State University

Internal Regulations describe the rights and obligations of the employer and employee. The documents on the recruitment policy for academic, research, administrative, and support staff describe more detailed rules for employee selection. The ISU has a procedure for ensuring the integration of new employees – the New Employee Guide – which explains all essential issues – the university structure, remuneration rules, and insurance guidelines.

Staff management policy of the ISU is aligned with the institutional mission, vision, and strategic plan. The ISU's documents that relate to staff management policy are underlying values of fairness and impartiality, equal opportunities, integrity, innovativeness and initiative, transparency and openness, teamwork, high ethical standards, democratic management style, and quality assurance. Such a set of values can be seen as highly relevant; together these values are creating a relative complexity, with a potential to ensure implementation of educational processes and other activities defined in the strategic plan of the ISU.

Procedures for hiring academic, scientific, invited, administrative and support staff seem to be transparent and objective. The unit that is in charge of these processes is the Human Resources Management Office.

As for participation/involvement of the staff in decision-making processes that relate to main aspects of the ISU's operation it is guaranteed by the statute of the ISU, faculty bylaws and some other regulations of specific units of the ISU, including election regulations of the ISU.

Selection and integration of the staff includes, among other processes, induction activities, incl. the development of a professional development plan. The selection aligns with qualification requirements, the existing legislation and institutional regulations, as the documentation provided by the ISU showed.

A part of the human resource management is evaluation and management of the performed work done by the staff members. The evaluation system has the potential to generate data about work performance of the staff members, provide feedback to employees, and relate it to the identification of needs and remuneration system. The cycle consists of several phases: planning, evaluation, summarization, feedback, planning/implementation of activities. Target benchmarks, mandatory criteria, and performance indicators are in place, and they are linked with qualification requirements and competencies.

Evaluation of the academic staff's work has been implemented since 2018 at the ISU, with some amendments done during the years. At the moment, it is done in a way that emphasizes behavioral, professional and technical competencies in particular.

Principles of remuneration and encouragement seem to be predefined and they are related to performance evaluation results of the staff at ISU.

This can be said, the ISU has developed and used adequate approaches to professional development of its staff. Various forms of professional development activities are in place at the ISU, and two units formally related to the Human Resources Management Office seem to be the main actors here: the Center for the Development of Academic Staff and Teachers, and the Personal and Professional Development Center. A number of examples of the courses and other staff development opportunities were enlisted in the self-evaluation report, and the ISU's staff (both academic, and administrative) confirmed their relevance during the interviews. Some of these activities are also related/supported with Erasmus+ and other projects in which the ISU has been involved, and some reach an even broader professional public (such as school teachers, for instance).

The ISU is using human resources management software with the help of which it also collects data about the employees, generates statistics, allows quick and efficient data retrieval, and more - in other words, the ISU works with the data on its employees in an up-to-date way. The data are collected via various surveys conducted mainly but not only within the ISU.

In response to the recommendation from the previous authorization process, the ISU developed job descriptions and the criteria related to the qualification requirements, and clarified behavioral and technical competencies for all positions within the ISU. This can be said, the ISU has clearly defined qualification requirements of all staff categories.

Overall, the ISU's staff qualifications are in line with the higher education institutions' qualification requirement.

The affiliation of academic staff to the ISU is regulated, namely by the Rule of Competition for an Academic Position at Ilias State University and Conditions of Employment in an Academic Position.

Evidence/indicators

- Self-evaluation report
- Regulations of the Human Resources Management Office
- Policy documents regarding to recruitment of Academic, Research, Administrative and Support Staff
- New Employee Guide
- Survey results
- Interviews

Recommendations:

None

Suggestions:

None

Best Practices (if applicable):

None

Evaluation

- × Complies with requirements
- Substantially complies with requirements
- Partially complies with requirements
- Does not comply with requirements

4.2. Academic/Scientific and Invited Staff Workload

Number and workload of academic/scientific and invited staff is adequate to HEI's educational programmes and scientific-research activities, and also other functions assigned to them

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

As for the workload of academic, scientific and invited staff, the ISU has developed workload charts that adhere to university regulations, namely those related to the employment of academic staff and guidelines for determining the student population at the ISU.

The workload scheme includes teaching, scientific research, and other workload according to the academic staff's functions and duties. The regulatory document "Rules for holding a contest for an academic position at Ilia State University and Terms of Employment in an Academic position" describes conditions for announcing and holding a competition for academic staff vacancies and signing an employment contract. The Academic Council and the Entrepreneurial Council made the last changes to the document in November and December 2023.

The workload schemes are regularly updated, the methodology of establishing student enrollment quotas, considering program specifics, existing student numbers, and anticipated intake is in place. This way, for instance, in 2023 the update of the methodology was aligned with the ratios (target benchmarks) of student to academic and invited staff involved in the teaching within the educational programs.

Higher education institutions have a methodology that considers the specifics of educational programs and determines the ratio of students and teachers using unique formulas. Two documents describe student contingent Planning Mechanisms: 1. "Ilia State University Student Contingent Planning Mechanism and Methodology," and 2. "Ilia State University Student Contingent Planning Mechanism and Methodology for MD Program." According to the methodology, "When planning the student contingent for undergraduate-level programs (excluding programs in Law, Business, and Administration, as well as Travel, Tourism, and Leisure), one professor is assigned to a maximum of 70 students. However, up to two professors are required for each program, and the qualification and/or research profiles of both professors must correspond to the specific program's requirements." ("Ilia State University Student Contingent Planning Mechanism and Methodology", p. 1).

In undergraduate Law programs, ten professors are allocated for every 1000 students. For 2000 students, there are 17 professors with at least ten professors' qualifications and/or research profiles matching the program's specified criteria. Depending on the field of study, the student-to-academic/invited staff ratio is at least: 1/17.

For undergraduate programs in Business and Administration, as well as Travel, Tourism, and Leisure, ten professors are allocated for the first 1000 students and eight professors - for each subsequent 1000 students, and depending on the field of study, the student-to-academic/invited staff ratio is at least:

Management and business administration 1/25

Finance, banking, and insurance 1/25

Travel, tourism, and recreation 1/35 ("Ilia State University Student Contingent Planning Mechanism and Methodology," pgs:2-3).

School of Medicine approved a different academic staff workload ratio. According to the methodology regulation document, "based on the type of instruction, the ratio of teaching staff and students should not be less than: Type of teaching	students/ personnel involved in teaching ratio
Basic (science) education	1/20
CBL/PBL	1/80
Simulation in medical instruction	1/60
Clinical training	1/10

The document ("Ilia State University Student Contingent Planning Mechanism And Methodology for MD Program") mentions that the student contingent is calculated based on the lowest indicators.

Ilia State University's "Mechanism and methodology of student quota planning" ensures that the number of professors determines the number of academic staff according to the individual needs of the programs. Although the ratio of academic staff to students varies from 1/12 to 1/35 in different educational programs, it does not exceed 70 in any program (the exceptions are academic undergraduate programs in law, business and administration, and travel, tourism, and recreation). At the master's and doctoral level, the program should include at least two professors, and the ratio between academic staff and students should not exceed 1/40. In addition, one academic staff can supervise a maximum of eight theses at the same time.

As concerns the scientific staff, research benchmarks are being established, in alignment with the prerequisites of scientific research projects, and with consideration of individual agreements.

This can be confirmed that the academic staff defines its primary affiliation to the ISU based on the agreement between the staff and the ISU.

The authorization experts group finds it noteworthy that the law school's academic staff comprises only associate and full professors. The school should also have lower-level academic staff (assistants), which is necessary for the sustainability of the programs and the growth of professionals in the field.

The academic and research staff is affiliated only with Ilia State University. According to the "Academic Staff Recruitment Policy" document, a selected candidate who holds the academic position of professor, associate professor, or assistant professor at Ilia State University cannot work in another higher educational or scientific research institution in Georgia in an academic/administrative and scientific position or in the scientific/academic position of another name, which involves research and teaching as the main activity (Article 7). The last three paragraphs of Article 7 of the same rule describe the exceptional cases when ISU-affiliated academic staff can give lectures in another higher educational institution without holding an academic/scientific/researcher position in another educational institution. In all such exceptional cases, the person holding an academic position must discuss a case with the university administration and obtain written permission of the rector.

At the beginning of each academic year, the ISU evaluates the activities of the academic staff; academic staff members describe their activities annually through self-evaluation

reports. Every two years, the ISU evaluates the academic staff's performance according to pre-established benchmarks that relate to teaching, research, and social impact in university life. Based on the evaluation results, the administration of schools, research institutions, and other units makes encouraging decisions— job promotion, financial incentives, funding of scientific trips, and promotion of participation in exchange programs.

- Evidence/indicators**
- Academic/scientific staff-students ratio indicated in SER
 - Regulatory document(s) for affiliation terms and conditions
 - "Iliia State University Student Contingent Planning Mechanism and Methodology"
 - "Iliia State University Student Contingent Planning Mechanism and Methodology for MD Program."
 - Benchmarks set by the ISU
 - Evaluation Outcomes of the Academic and Research Staff and implemented activities
 - Rules of remuneration and bonuses, social monetary assistance to university employees
 - Interviews

Recommendations:
None

- Suggestions:**
- It is suggested that the School of Law, besides full and associated professors, also has a body of lower-level academic staff (assistants), to ensure continuity and sustainability of the programs and the growth of professionals in the field.

Best Practices (if applicable):
None

- Evaluation**
- Complies with requirements
 - Substantially complies with requirements
 - Partially complies with requirements
 - Does not comply with requirements

5. Students and Their Support Services

HEI ensures the development of student-centred environment, offers appropriate services, including career support mechanisms; it also ensures maximum awareness of students, implements diverse activities and promotes student involvement in these activities. HEI utilizes student survey results to improve student support services

5.1. The Rule for Obtaining and Changing Student Status, the Recognition of Education, and Student Rights

- For each of the educational levels, HEI has developed regulations for assignment, suspension and termination of student status, mobility, qualification granting, issuing educational documents as well as recognition of education received during the learning period.
- HEI ensures the protection of student rights and lawful interests.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

Ilia State University has regulatory documents for obtaining student status, suspension, and termination, as well as mobility, qualification granting, issuance of educational documents, and recognition of education received during the learning period.

The institution has put internal policies into place and enforces them, along with a code of ethics for students, academic staff, and other stakeholders in the educational process, all aimed at protecting the rights and legal interests of students.

Students who participated in interviews confirmed that the contract, the Argus platform and the website are the primary sources from which they can obtain information about their rights and responsibilities.

The ISU has established appeals process for students who feel their rights have been violated or are unsatisfied with the academic outcomes. During the interview, students confirmed that they have used the method of appeals multiple times (especially when they are not happy with the assessment points). The appeal procedure is initiated on the Argus platform and is later carried out at the faculty level, at the dean's office. Before starting the appeal process students usually approach lecturers during consultation hours to express their dissatisfaction.

The student profiles have been updated with a guide and checklist for preventing plagiarism, as well as information on the steps and due dates for status restoration and suspension.

Students have various channels of communication with the administration, which was also confirmed by students during the site visit.

Ilia State University has a transparent process for student exchange mobility. Students can apply simultaneously for various exchange programs. The main criteria are to match the program requirements and have competitive academic results. If the student is not selected for mobility, he/she is recorded on the waiting list. If students have the same points, the socially, economically or otherwise disadvantaged student will be prioritized for mobility.

International students are admitted to the programs without unified national exams. However, preconditions for program admission are described in program curriculums (Education recognition). Minimum English language proficiency is B1 level, in some cases such as Business Administration undergraduate program it is B2 level. Ilia State University is accepting international language proficiency certificates such as TOEFL, CBT, IELTS, FCE, BEC Vantage, PTE, PTE Academic, Michigan.

During interviews with international students, their English language skill was proven. Students could freely communicate in English and understood the expert's questions. It has to be mentioned that international students underlined the support of the international relations office in helping their smooth transition and adaptation to local culture.

Evidence/indicators:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self-evaluation Report ● Interviews ● Rule regulating the status of a student/vocational student at Ilia State University ● Rule of recognizing of education received during student mobility and training period at Ilia State University ● Rule of recognizing the education received within the framework of the amended or canceled educational program in the case the educational program is amended or canceled on the initiative of the university ● Rule of granting qualifications at Ilia State University ● Student code of ethics ● Sexual harassment prevention policy document of Ilia State University ● Samples of the agreement to be signed between the university and the student ● Student Exchange mobility participation regulation
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>
<p>5.2 Student Support Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HEI has student consulting services in order to plan educational process and improve academic performance ○ HEI has career support service, which provides students with appropriate counselling and support regarding employment and career development ○ HEI ensures students awareness and involvement in various university-level, local and international projects and events, and supports student initiatives ○ HEI has mechanisms, including financial mechanisms to support low SES students

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

A variety of services and support systems are available at Ilia State University to accommodate the various demands of its students. These consist of career development and planning advice, academic and university life counseling, help with student projects and activities, extracurricular skill-building activities, psychological support services, and resources for students with special needs.

During interviews, students confirmed that different trainings are conducted to address their needs such as soft skills training by San Diego University. Students emphasized that training enhanced their interpersonal communicational skills.

The library has developed a set of trainings where students can register online and wait until the number of participants reaches 7-10 students, which allows trainers to conduct the training. Library's halls are completely wheelchair-accessible, the administration of the library works closely with faculty members to determine what needs the students have that cannot be met by audio or reading programs.

Students' services are provided with various channels of communication developed by the university: UNIJOBS, Argus, Moodle, Emails, Phone.

Annual activities are planned by Ilia State University's Department of Student Affairs to help graduates and students advance their careers.

These include regular projects, external partners, and various University offices in which the below activities are carried out: employment forums, meetings with company representatives; career development accelerator; web-page tutorials; collaborations with Gepra consultation firm; student paid internships.

Throughout the year, the university regularly holds job fairs where representatives from various companies meet students with a range of specializations and introduce them to positions that are tailored to their needs.

During the site visit students highlighted the fact that some of the trainings are also carried out by students, such as coaching in CV writing.

International students have various supportive services starting with the preparations for the visa process, ending with orientation meetings and obtaining a residence permit. During interviews, international students emphasize a constant support from the International Office, which monthly sends reminders not to forget to extend the residence permit document.

The university is in the process of establishing a Buddy program, which should allow especially international students to match with local students for guidance and advice for navigating the University's new culture.

During interviews, international students confirmed their participation in cultural festivals, although expressed willingness to be involved more in student life.

Ilia State University realizes a number of projects where students are actively involved at all levels of study programs. Some of examples include:

FabLab - provides students (and other interested parties) the opportunity to transform innovative ideas into reality with the assistance of qualified staff and modern equipment.

UniLab - Cyber Laboratory provides educational activities and a professional acceleration program for students and others, helping them accumulate theoretical knowledge and practical experience in the field of digital technologies.

QartNLP - a tool for digital processing of the Georgian language in cooperation with the ISU Institute of Linguistic Studies, which makes the Georgian language analyzer created at the Ilia State University accessible to a wider audience.

<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self-evaluation report ● Interviews ● Electronic Selection System Argus ● Student and University Agreement Samples ● Library website ● E-Learning Portal eLearning Iliiauni ● Turnitin Feedback Studio ● Psychological Counseling Center for Students ● Financial support of the University and related orders
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>

6. Research, development and/or other creative work

Higher Education Institution, considering its type and specifics of field(s), works on the strengthening of its research function, ensures proper conditions to support research activities and improve the quality of research activities

6.1 Research Activities

- HEI, based on its type and specifics of its fields, carries out research/creative activities.
- Ensuring the effectiveness of doctoral research supervision
- HEI has public, transparent and fair procedures for the assessment and defense of dissertations which are relevant to the specifics of the field

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

The University's research strategy was prepared by the Rector, the Rector's Consultant for Research and the Research Coordination Office in cooperation with scientific research units, faculties/schools and the strategic planning working group. In the process of developing the research strategy document, the studies conducted to evaluate the University's activities were also used. Goals and objectives were identified, and the action plan defined the relevant activities.

The goal of the University's 2024-2030 research strategy is to create a leading, robust and open research environment in the region and broader; to support interdisciplinary research activities at the University; to maintain institutional and various sectoral indicators in

international research rankings; and maximize the support and performance of prospective destinations.

The Research Strategy's mission is to strengthen the strategies of the faculties to jointly create space and conditions focused on development and success, both for the University's academic and scientific staff and scientific units, as well as for students and young researchers.

The vision presented in ISU's research strategy is an essential tool for implementing the University's research activities, with which the University should achieve research excellence, social impact, growth of knowledge and the University's reputation, both in the academic community and beyond.

By implementing a Research Strategy, the University creates an enabling environment where research is linked to teaching and practice, and all three are enhanced by working together.

Strategic objectives:

1. Ensuring and promoting the sustainability of research activities
2. Raising the standard of research activity

The University's mission is to create a flexible environment for research activities within its capabilities, encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, and support ethical and responsible research practices. This is bolstered by projects funded through various international partnerships, including:

Erasmus+ Projects:

1. [Responsible Conduct of Research - Research Integrity and Ethics in Georgian Universities \(ETHICS\)](#).
2. [Advancing Open Science In Eastern Partnership Region \(BE-OPEN\)](#)
3. [RAISING RESEARCH CAPACITY OF GEORGIAN HEIS THROUGH DEVELOPING R&D UNITS \(HERD\)](#)
4. [„Strengthening the Quality and Relevance of the 3rd mission in Georgian Universities“ \(SQUARE\)](#)

Also the University participates in 4 International Consortia of the European Cooperation Program - COST and in the EMBRACE Project funded within the Horizon Europe Program and 4 projects funded within the Horizon 2020 Program. In line with the Horizon Europe guidelines, Ilia State University developed a Gender Equality Plan. This plan represents the University's declared and agreed-upon approach, with specific tasks and actions outlined for a three-year period.

The University aims to support academic, scientific, and visiting staff, along with students, by offering appropriate structures and resources to participate in relevant programs.

During the interviews it was mentioned that one of the University's research priorities is fostering a culture of openness and transparency through the implementation of open science and data management policies. This involves creating platforms for open data access and sharing, making research data available to other researchers according to international standards. The University has established a computing center focused on data analysis and big data processing tools. In collaboration with research units and the Research Coordination Office, the center supports open repositories and backup services. As part of this collaboration, a digital collection/database of the National Herbarium of the Botanical Institute is being created, with plans to digitize and include 32,000 herbarium sheets by the project's end.

Additionally, a biodiversity database of Georgia is being developed with the Institutes of Ecology and Zoology. Future plans include developing electronic infrastructure and integrating it into the European Open Science Cloud.

At present, research units are carrying out projects with various external partners and economic agents, operating jointly and on their behalf. These collaborations are governed by relevant memorandums, service agreements, and consulting contracts. The collaboration involves scientific and consulting activities, including preparing questionnaires, providing laboratory services, developing training courses, conducting soil and forest research, and more.

The university provided a comprehensive document that included a detailed list of studies conducted by various research institutes. This document showcased the extensive research work undertaken by these institutes, highlighting their contributions and areas of focus.

At the ISU, artistic and creative activities are incorporated into educational programs like Film Studies, Music, and the Art of Live Theatre. These programs ensure the development of students' creative and performing skills and their involvement in creative projects ((For example the annual Kutaisi Short Film Festival). They include components designed to nurture and develop creative talents, utilizing both the Music Center and the ISU Theatre at Ilia State University, as well as partner organizations with which memorandums have been signed.

At the University, several key aspects highlight the integration of teaching and research. PhD students participate in the teaching process as assistants, providing valuable support and gaining teaching experience. Academic staff and researchers involved in relevant research institutes also contribute to teaching, ensuring that students benefit from their active engagement in research. To support this integration, international electronic databases of periodicals are accessible to both students and staff involved in the teaching process.

In the interviews with the PhD graduates, it was noted that they had the option to select their supervisor and could switch supervisors if they desired. All supervisors were well-qualified and knowledgeable in their fields.

A thorough examination of the supervisors' curricula vitae and scholarly publications confirms their qualifications and expertise in their respective fields. This detailed assessment underscores their academic rigor, extensive research experience, and substantial contributions to their disciplines, all of which validate their suitability for mentoring advanced-level students. The depth of their academic achievements and the relevance of their research portfolios demonstrate that they are well-equipped to provide high-quality supervision, ensuring that the academic integrity and excellence of the programs are upheld.

According to university regulations, master's and doctoral programs must include at least two professors as part of the academic staff, ensuring that the ratio between students and faculty members does not exceed 1:40. Furthermore, these regulations stipulate that any single academic staff member is limited to supervising a maximum of eight theses at a time. These guidelines are in place to maintain high standards of academic quality and provide students with the necessary support and mentorship throughout their research endeavors. At this stage, the university has 213 active PhD students

Moreover, academic staff use their published papers, such as books and monographs, as learning resources in educational programs. Master's and doctoral students conduct qualifying research as part of the University's scientific projects, often utilizing partner research institutions and bases, particularly within the Faculty of Natural Sciences and the Institute of Chemical Biology. Additionally, the experimental, laboratory, field, and expeditionary work outlined in educational programs are conducted at Ilia State University's facilities and partner research institutions and laboratories.

To ensure effective management of doctoral research, the "Regulations on Dissertation Council and Doctoral Studies" are in place at the faculties. These regulations clearly outline the responsibilities of PhD supervisors, while allowing some flexibility to accommodate the specific needs of different fields. However, since the "communication" terms between students and supervisors are not strictly regulated, instances of "insufficient" communication sometimes occur. The doctoral thesis process involves gradual and consistent steps, including systematizing the research process, providing intermediate progress reports, and receiving periodic feedback. To ensure high-quality doctoral research, the regulations on the dissertation council and doctoral studies require the presentation of relevant international publications indexed in periodicals specified by the university. Interviews with involved parties revealed that the workload of academic and scientific staff allows for effective supervision of scientific and creative projects, ensuring high-quality work. These regulations also establish transparent, objective, fair, and publicly accessible procedures and criteria for evaluating and defending dissertations.

International Doctoral School of Ilia State University represents a cross-faculty administrative support unit at ISU assigned to support (structured) international doctoral education of high academic standards based on Cotutelle agreements between partner institutions, streamlining processes by supporting faculties and doctoral students in achieving academic excellence. In this process, ISU can be envisioned as a home or host institution. All doctoral students are admitted by ISU Faculties/schools, but only those (doctoral) students, and respective supervisors, become IDS members who have the consent letter of both supervisors (local and international), followed by Cotutelle agreement signed between home/host institutions. His/her membership is terminated upon the completion and/or suspension of the study in accordance with partner universities regulations.

The ISU upholds public, transparent, and fair procedures for the assessment and defense of dissertations, tailored to the specifics of each field. This ensures that the evaluation process is rigorous and equitable, reflecting the unique requirements and standards of diverse academic disciplines. Dissertations are subject to a structured review process, involving internal and external examiners who are experts in the relevant field. This multi-layered evaluation guarantees that the research meets high academic standards and contributes meaningfully to the field.

The defense process is conducted openly, allowing members of the academic community and other stakeholders to attend. This transparency fosters a culture of accountability and scholarly integrity. The procedures are clearly documented and accessible to all doctoral candidates, providing them with a comprehensive understanding of the requirements and expectations. Regular updates and training sessions are conducted to ensure that faculty and examiners are well-versed in the latest assessment criteria and methodologies.

In summary, Ilia State University conducts research and creative activities tailored to its type and field specifics. It ensures effective supervision of doctoral research to maintain high academic standards. Additionally, the University has established public, transparent, and fair procedures for the assessment and defense of dissertations, ensuring these processes are relevant and appropriate to the specifics of each academic field. This approach supports the University's commitment to academic integrity and excellence in research.

Over the period from 2018 to 2023, the Development Office managed a diverse portfolio of funded projects and grants that significantly contributed to the advancement of research, education, and community development initiatives. The funding was sourced from various prestigious organizations, including the Volkswagen Foundation and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), among others.

In 2018, the Volkswagen Foundation funded the "Lehmann-Haupt International Doctoral Program," a substantial project with a total budget of 406,000 EUR, equivalent to 1,218,000 Georgian Lari. This program was launched on January 11, 2018, and was successfully

completed by June 30, 2023. The primary objective of this project was to foster international collaboration and provide doctoral candidates with comprehensive research opportunities in their respective fields.

Another noteworthy project in 2018 was funded by UNDP, titled "Modernization of Vocational Education and Training." With a budget of 30,020 USD (84,056 Georgian Lari), this project aimed to enhance the quality and relevance of vocational education, aligning it with modern industry needs. The project commenced on March 7, 2018, and concluded by September 7, 2018, providing valuable outcomes in terms of educational infrastructure and curriculum development.

These projects are a testament to the continuous efforts to support academic and developmental goals through strategic funding and partnerships. The diversity in project types, from research-oriented initiatives to vocational training modernization, highlights the broad impact of these funded endeavors on both the academic community and society at large.

From 2018 to 2023, the Development Office actively pursued external funding by submitting numerous grant proposals to various prestigious organizations. These efforts were part of a broader strategy to secure financial support for projects that aimed to enhance research, education, and community development across different institutions.

In 2018, several significant proposals were submitted. For instance, the project titled "Strengthening the Research and Teaching Capacity in the Field of Communication Technologies," in collaboration with Klagenfurt University, aimed to bolster the institution's research capabilities in communication technologies. This proposal was submitted to the APPEAR program, reflecting a commitment to fostering academic excellence through international collaboration.

Another notable proposal in the same year was "PAVING THE WAY TO A KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY: ENHANCING ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS," submitted by Iliani to the US Embassy. This project sought to support the development of a knowledge-based economy by enhancing entrepreneurial skills among students and faculty, thereby contributing to the country's economic growth.

Throughout the five-year period, the Development Office engaged with a diverse range of donors, including the U.S. Mission to Georgia, the University of California, and Cleveland State University, among others. The proposals submitted covered a wide array of topics, from advancing entrepreneurial skills to promoting networking in brokerage events, demonstrating the Office's strategic focus on leveraging external partnerships to drive institutional development.

The database of submitted proposals showcases the proactive approach taken by the Development Office in identifying funding opportunities and crafting proposals that align with both institutional goals and donor priorities. This narrative highlights the key initiatives undertaken and the breadth of the Office's efforts to secure funding for impactful projects.

The university put forward agreements for international research grants, seeking to secure funding for collaborative projects on a global scale. These agreements were designed to establish partnerships with various international organizations and institutions, aiming to enhance the university's research capabilities and foster innovation through global collaboration.

Evidence/indicators

- The University's mission and vision as research university

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ilia State University Strategy of 2024-2030 and Action Plan of 2024-2026 • 2024-2030 University Research Strategy of 2024-2023 • Memorandum • Faculties' Bylaws of the Dissertation Board and Doctoral Studies • Dissertation Thesis Guidelines • Dissertation Defense Indicators • Policy of International Doctoral School of Ilia State University • Website • Interview results
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>
<p>6.2. Research Support and Internationalization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HEI has an effective system in place for supporting research, development and creative activities ○ Attracting new staff and their involvement in research/arts-creative activities. ○ University works on internationalization of research, development and creative activities.
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>Ilia State University's research activities are supported by various structural units, with the Research Coordination Office and the Office of Development being the most significant. The statute of Ilia State University governs administrative aspects of ongoing research, while bylaws regulate each scientific research unit and support office.</p> <p>The decision on internal university funding is made by the Academic Council and the Rector:</p> <p>A. In the case of research units, the Academic Council accepts the financing of research activities within the income received from the University's economic activities, based on the recommendation of the Research Council.</p> <p>b. In the case of the University's Institutional Development Grant competition, upon the recommendation of the Research Council, the Rector approves by order.</p> <p>c. Decisions about various prizes, awards and initiatives supported by the University are governed by the relevant regulations and rules</p>

Ilia State University's existing scientific-research and creative-artistic units provide a strong foundation for involving master's and doctoral students, as well as young employees, in both fundamental and applied research and artistic activities. This is supported by the bylaws of the University's research units, which establish a unified research and education space through the collaboration of professors, researchers, and students. The academic and scientific staff assist students in publishing their research in scientific journals, such as *Caucasiana* and *Kadmos*, and in presenting their papers at international or local conferences.

Ilia State University's research strategy (2018-2024 and 2024-2030) aims to create an international-level research environment, support scientific activities, and actively involve students for their academic and professional growth. This approach enriches the research community with fresh perspectives and talent. To achieve this, the University encourages student participation in research activities. For example: The Institute of Theoretical Physics has seen an annual increase in student-implemented projects funded internally since 2018. Also, the ISU's students (21) are involved in the international mega research project CaBOL - Caucasus Barcode of Life, led by the Institutes of Ecology and Zoology and funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. This project allows students to participate in international biodiversity research and exchange programs, enhancing their knowledge in ecology, applied genetics, taxonomy, evolutionary biology, forestry, and species conservation through collaboration with international scientists.

The Research Coordination Office aids scientific units and staff in securing and managing national scientific projects, organizing activities for intramural research, implementing the open science policy, and arranging science engagement events like the University Science Picnic. This picnic, the first outdoor science promotion event, involves the Young Explorers Clubs, created in collaboration with the Copernicus Science Centre. These clubs, coordinated by the Science Education Research Centre SALiS, foster a new student-teacher relationship through scientific experiments, promoting critical and creative thinking among young people. In November 2023, 11 Young Explorers Clubs from University attended the International Copernicus Forum in Poland.

Additionally, the Research Coordination Office supports the Research Board, which develops the University's research agenda and regulates research evaluation processes. The Research Board follows specific guidelines for evaluating research activities and projects at Ilia State University.

Ilia State University offers several types of intra-university research support. The Institutional Development Projects, launched in 2019, aim to develop new areas at the University, integrating research and teaching. Since its inception, 35 projects have been funded, requiring student involvement. Priorities include developing research activities, preparing for broad grant calls, creating joint programs with international partners, and promoting science. Notable achievements include the development of an English-medium master's program in Public Health, the creation of the Innovative Education Research Center, and the establishment of the "Nanostructures for Renewable Energy" laboratory, which received further grants and a patent.

The Pascal Prize is a monetary award that encourages young scientists at Ilia State University by recognizing essential international publications. Since 2018, 21 Pascal Prizes have been awarded. The Ilia Medal, established in 2017, honors academic staff for their unique contributions to the University's academic activities and has been awarded to nine professors for their significant scientific publications. The University Scientific Prize, introduced in 2022, is awarded to high-impact scientists who make significant contributions to their fields through international publications. The first recipient was a Professor Emeritus for contributions to botanical and phytoecological sciences.

The University also supports academic staff and students in publishing in high-impact journals and participating in conferences. Since 2018, 105 individuals have been funded to attend scientific meetings, and more than 35 publications have been financed.

One of the key tools for supporting scientific activities are the University's scientific journals, which are created and managed by the institution. These journals are published on the OJS platform website and follow the Open Access (Open Source) principle. University Press provides printing of scientific books, journals, and materials, which are then placed in the university library, digital repository, and on the University Press website.

To internationalize the University's research activities, the International Relations Office facilitates the international mobility of academic staff and doctoral students through exchange programs. According to SER, between 2018 and 2023, 233 professors and teachers, as well as 70 doctoral students, participated in these programs, with increasing numbers each year. The Office also promotes mobility for foreign researchers and professors at Ilia State University and organizes orientation meetings with potential partners, such as the Brokerage Events with Aachen University. Information on international opportunities like research grants and scholarships is regularly shared, and support mechanisms for visiting researchers are in place, with 83 visiting researchers hosted between 2018 and 2023.

The Office of Development supports the University's research activities by helping academic and scientific staff find international funding sources. It aids in developing project proposals, managing funded programs, and ensuring the University meets Western research standards. Between 2018 and 2023, 65 international research projects received over 20,300,000 GEL in funding from significant international donors. The Office's objectives include identifying external funding opportunities, informing relevant groups about grant competitions and partnerships, and providing consultation during the application process.

The funds earmarked for research and scientific initiatives amount to 24,862,713 GEL, comprising close to one-fourth of the university's entire financial plan. This significant allocation underscores the university's commitment to advancing its research capabilities and supporting scientific innovation as a central aspect of its mission.

The university has established public, transparent, and equitable procedures for research funding. These procedures ensure that all funding opportunities are accessible to eligible researchers, with clear criteria and processes that promote fairness and integrity. By adhering to these principles, the university fosters a competitive and open environment that supports high-quality research across all disciplines.

Research units enhance the University's internationalization through strategic partnerships, funding acquisition, and training programs. Joint master's and doctoral programs, including double degree and exchange programs, are developed and implemented with international partners. Academic staff actively participate in these programs, particularly those run by the International Doctoral School under joint co-leadership initiatives.

As part of a multi-year strategic partnership with San Diego State University, programs are continuously developed to enhance the research capabilities of Georgian scientists. Collaboration efforts are also planned to strengthen STEM education at the general and preschool levels.

In 2023, Ilia State University received a post-doctoral research grant under the MSCA4Ukraine program, which involves hosting a Ukrainian social sciences researcher for 24 months to jointly implement the project "Identifying effective ways to find children and adults with disabilities among Ukrainian refugees."

The EU Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions project "Chromatin accessibility landscape and transcription changes in recognition memory after visual imprinting in chicks — CHARM-Vis" aims to study changes in the chromatin landscape and transcriptional activity in domestic chickens' brains after visual imprinting.

To enhance the internationalization and visibility of its scientific activities, Ilia State University regularly analyzes international scientific databases and updates its information on significant international systems and platforms.

Since 2021, Ilia State University has led Georgia in the Times Higher Education World University Ranking and is the only Georgian institution in the 2023 Young University Ranking.

Since 2021, Ilia State University has also been ranked in the U.S. News & World Report Best Global Universities, placing 801st globally and 447th in physics among 1,750 institutions from 90 countries in 2023.

In Stanford's annual ranking of the world's top 2% scientists, published since 2020, eight Georgian scientists are listed in 2023, including three from Ilia State University. Stanford's rankings use Scopus data and criteria such as Hirsch's h-index and Schreiber's hm-index.

Updating researcher profiles enhances the University's reputation and fosters new collaborations and partnerships. To raise awareness of research and opportunities, Ilia State University uses various communication channels. In 2020, it launched an online platform providing bilingual information about research units, grant calls, and projects. Tools like ORCID are also promoted and supported by the Research Coordination Office.

Since 2020, Ilia State University has been developing updated websites for its research units, providing dedicated online spaces for sharing information on publications, conferences, digital databases, and projects.

Starting in 2023, the University launched a platform for university blogs, where professors and researchers post scientific content to share new knowledge with students and the professional community. This initiative enhances the University's visibility and communicates its research achievements globally.

Ilia State University has signed a memorandum with state theaters, theatrical studios, schools, and organizations promoting theater development, along with the Georgian State University of Theatre and Cinema. These agreements aim to foster artistic and creative activities and develop practical, scientific, performing, research, and transferable skills among involved students.

Additionally, agreements with institutions like the Georgian Composers Creative Union, State Folklore State Center of Georgia, State Museum of Georgian Folk Songs and Instruments, and Georgian Sinfonietta provide university staff and students access to necessary resources. These collaborations enable joint educational and research activities, leveraging intellectual and technical resources across various domains.

The university actively engages with the community through research-driven programs and initiatives. Public lectures, workshops, and cultural events based on university research are regularly organized and open to the community, facilitating knowledge dissemination and cultural enrichment. Faculty and students participate in community service projects and volunteer work, applying research findings to address local issues. Collaborations with local non-profits, schools, and government agencies leverage research to develop solutions for community challenges. Continuing education programs offer non-degree courses, training, and certifications based on current research, promoting lifelong learning and professional development within the community.

During the interview with the directors of the institutes, it was mentioned that the university ensures its research has a real-world impact through effective knowledge transfer and innovation. Technology transfer offices facilitate the commercialization of research by helping patent innovations and bring them to market, ensuring that academic research contributes to technological advancements and economic growth. Collaborative research projects with external partners address societal challenges, combining strengths and resources to generate impactful solutions. Open access initiatives promote the availability of research outputs to the public, supporting further innovation and development. University experts provide research findings and insights to inform and shape public policy at local, national, and international levels, enhancing governance and societal outcomes.

In summary, University effectively supports research, development, and creative activities. It focuses on attracting new staff and involving them in these activities while also working on the internationalization of its research and creative endeavors.

Evidence/indicators

- The Statute of the ISU
- The Vision of the ISU
- The rule of evaluation of scientific-research activity and university financing
- Research Coordination Office Bylaws
- The Bylaws of the Office of Development
- International Relations Office Bylaws
- Agreements
- Statistics of bilateral mobility of doctoral students and teaching staff
- Annual Reports of the Research Coordination Office (2018-2023)
- Annual Reports of the Office of Development (2018-2023)
- The decision of the Academic Board to establish the Pascal Prize
- The decision to approve the ISU Scientific Award
- Doctoral Dissertation Evaluation and Defense Regulation
- The Regulations of the Dissertation Council and Doctoral Degree of Ilia State University
- Research/Scientific Evaluation and Support Mechanisms
- Interview results

Recommendations:

None

Suggestions:

None

Best Practices (if applicable):

None

Evaluation

- Complies with requirements
- Substantially complies with requirements
- Partially complies with requirements
- Does not comply with requirements

6.3. Evaluation of Research Activities

HEI has a system for evaluating and analysing the quality of research/creative-arts activities, and the productivity of scientific-research units and academic/scientific staff.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

The Policy "Job Performance Evaluation Policy for Research Staff" applies to the research staff employed at Ilia State University, including researchers, associate researchers, and research assistants, governing their job performance evaluation system. Evaluation of scientific staff is made once in two years, and unified self-evaluation questionnaires are used as an evaluation instrument. The self-evaluation reporting period for 2023 of the researchers at the faculties and research institutes of Ilia State University covered the years 2021-2022. The university has presented an analysis of the evaluation of research activities by faculties, where the information is given in detail.

Research Evaluation Criteria

- Publication (The author's affiliation must explicitly state Ilia State University; otherwise, the publication cannot be utilized to assess the author's research result):
 - Article in a peer-reviewed journal from international academic databases (Scientific publication featured in international peer-reviewed thematic journal(s) listed in reputable international databases such as Thomson Reuters Master Journal List, Scopus, Ulrich's Index, ERIH PLUS, EBSCOHost, Latindex Catalog). For natural sciences, exact sciences, engineering, and medicine, the articles should be published in a journal with an impact factor above 0.5 accessible in the Thomson Reuters Web of Science database or a journal with an impact factor above 0.5 cites core accessible in the list of Scopus)
 - Article in an international peer-reviewed journal
 - Article in a local scholarly journal
 - Monograph/book
 - Chapter in a book/compilation (international edition)
 - Chapter in a book/compilation (local edition)
 - Conference materials included in international databases (Thomson Reuters Master Journal List, Scopus, Ulrich's Index, ERIH PLUS, EBSCO Host, Latindex Catalog)
 - Conference materials
 - Manual
 - Vocational publication (Publication, which is not subject to peer review, is intended for a vocational audience and is a report of research conducted by the author or a database created by them. Such publications can be a result of collaboration with various organizations).
- Grant
- Membership in international collaboration
- Award

- Patent
- Participation in an international scientific conference
- Project with creative/performative elements, expedition, exhibition, design, public rendition (e.g., in the field of music); software;
- Knowledge transfer:
 - Supervision of a master's thesis
 - Supervision of a PhD dissertation
 - Membership on the editorial board of an international peer-reviewed journal
 - Membership on the editorial board of a local peer-reviewed journal
 - Peer-reviewing for international publications

Outlined criteria are not mandatory and exhaustive. Each scientific research unit/faculty reserves the right to independently determine each case's evaluation criteria and quantity for research assessment.

Each scientific and research unit establishes the minimum threshold for evaluating researchers in collaboration with the faculty or independently by the faculty. The evaluation is conducted following the criteria outlined in the Policy. The distribution of points among the criteria for evaluation of the research is determined and regulated independently by each faculty/scientific research unit in collaboration with the faculty. An individual researcher's performance may be assessed with more points than the prescribed minimum threshold if they accumulate additional points based on the selected criteria.

The administration of each scientific research unit or faculty reviews survey findings and self-evaluation reports from researchers. They then present these to the research staff, recommending actions for improvement or sustainability. Based on these outcomes and suggestions, recommendations are forwarded to the Faculty or School Board.

Once approved, these results and recommendations are communicated to the Rector, the University Research Board, the University Quality Assurance Office, the Human Resources Management Office, and the Research Coordination Office. Other relevant individuals or bodies are informed as necessary. The Research Board's decision and the reports from the research units are presented to the Academic

Board for review and approval of the recommendations and any further actions.

According to policy "Rule of Evaluation. University Support and Research Activities of Research units and Scientific projects of Ilia State University" the research activities of the University must comply with international standards. The main goal of the support and evaluation of research activities is the financial support of individual research units and scientific projects using a formal and systematic approach to the assessment of their contribution to the research activities of the University, which, in turn, serves to improve the quality of research. Improvement, as well as institutional development of the University in three main directions:

- a) promotion of successful, high impact research;
- b) promotion of important research for the region and the country;
- c) Promotion of research inspired by the University's responsibility towards the development of society, including social responsibility.

Assessment of scientific research activities serves the following tasks:

- management of intra-university funding for efficient distribution of resources;

- outline the priority directions of development and to plan future studies;
- identify and recognize high-impact research. Recognition of outstanding researchers, achievements and special projects with awards;
- strengthen research ethics;
- promotion of studies;
- creation and maintenance of the necessary environment for the implementation of international-level research, active support of the Academic and Scientific community of the University and active involvement of students in it;
- evaluation of the University's third mission and community impact.

The evaluation of the research activity performed by the research unit and the scientific project financed within the framework of intra-university funding is carried out in a formal way, with a specified periodicity, at least once a year and in a predetermined form.

The evaluation of the University's research efficiency and ranking is carried out using local and international institutional ranking systems.

The system for evaluation of the research activities in Ilia State University is a part of the internal quality assurance mechanism of the university and includes the evaluation of scientific research units and projects, on the one hand, and the evaluation of activities of the academic and scientific staff, on the other.

It should be noted that in 2021-2023, the scientific profile of Ilia State University has significantly developed. The outcome is confirmed by the data of important scientific databases, such as Clarivate WoS, Scimago, and Elsevier Scopus - with the growth rate of publications and citations.

Since 2021, Ilia State University has been at the forefront in the 2024 Times Higher Education World University Ranking (THE World University Ranking) in Georgia. Additionally, Ilia State University stands as the sole institution included in the 2023 Times Higher Education Young University Ranking (under 50 years). Notably, Ilia State University excels with a particularly high score of 47.7 points in research quality. In the field of Physical Sciences, Ilia State University achieves the highest position, ranking 351st with an indicator of 71.5.

Evidence/indicators

- Rules of evaluation of the activities of the academic and scientific staff of Ilia State University
- Rules of evaluation of scientific research activity and financing of the ISU
- Rule of Evaluation University Support and Research Activities of Research units and Scientific projects of Ilia State University
- Interview results
- SER

Recommendations:

None

Suggestions:

None

Best Practices (if applicable):

None

Evaluation

- Complies with requirements
- Substantially complies with requirements
- Partially complies with requirements
- Does not comply with requirements

7. Material, Information and Financial Resources

Material, information and financial resources of HEI ensure sustainable, stable, effective and efficient functioning of the institution, and the achievement of goals defined through strategic development plan.

7.1 Material Resources

- The institution possesses or owns material resources (fixed and current assets) that are used for achieving goals stated in the mission statement, adequately responds to the requirements of educational programmes and research activities, and corresponds to the existing number of students and planned enrolment.
- HEI offers environment necessary for implementing educational activities: sanitary units, natural light possibilities, and central heating system.
- Health and safety of students and staff is protected within the institution.
- HEI has adapted environment for people with special needs

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

Based on the self-evaluation report for the authorization of Ilia State University, the attached documents, interviews conducted within the framework of the authorization visit, examination of additional requested documents, and inspection of material and technical resources, it was determined that the real and movable property owned/legitimately held by the university is used to achieve the goals defined by the university's mission, aligns with the university's mission, educational and research objectives, and the existing and planned number of students.

Ilia State University is a multi-profile educational and research university that integrates diverse educational and research directions and successfully positions itself at both national and international levels with significant research, educational, and societal impact.

The university serves a maximum of 17,770 students, including up to 700 international/foreign students. According to the self-assessment report, the actual number of active students at the university is 15,597, of which 32 are students with special educational needs. The total number of employees at the university (including academic, scientific, invited, administrative, support staff) is 2,829. The total area of the institution is 63,213.62 square meters, the total educational area of the institution is 24,037.21 square meters, and the total support area of the institution is 39,176.41 square meters.

To ensure high-quality research, educational, and administrative services, the institution has set target benchmarks at both the university and faculty levels. These benchmarks reflect the actual situation and are to be maintained by the institution over the next three years. During the interview process with representatives of the quality assurance service, it was clarified that the institution has actual conditions as indicators for the target benchmarks but also observes the experiences of other universities in forming them for benchmarking purposes. The actual

conditions, achieved learning outcomes, and interviews confirm that there are no significant deviations in relative data, and the existing indicators do not present problems. However, the institution noted that they plan to improve both primary and additional adaptive spaces/environments, which is reflected in the strategic plan for 2024-2030 and the action plan for 2024-2026. Additionally, the institution presented architectural sketches of planned construction projects and noted that the agreement process with the relevant regulatory bodies is ongoing. One of the main projects is related to student housing, which is designed for 300 places. These processes are in the initial stage of implementation according to the PDCA model. Consequently, to achieve the goals defined by the university's mission, Ilia State University constantly cares for the development of its infrastructure. Alongside planned works, infrastructure projects are being implemented that align with educational and research objectives and the existing and planned number of students.

In accordance with its mission to achieve its defined goals, Ilia State University continuously strives to develop its infrastructure. Alongside planned works, infrastructural projects are being implemented that align with educational and research objectives and the existing and planned number of students. More specifically, to achieve Strategic Goal #2, the following tasks are planned:

As for the development of educational and working spaces and research infrastructure, the ISU will ensure the further development of students' educational, working, and recreational spaces, thereby creating all the necessary conditions for learning and relaxation. It will also develop working spaces for academic and administrative staff. For infrastructure development, the university will collaborate with state agencies to obtain the necessary financial support. The following works will be carried out:

- Completion of G building works (grounding/elevator/uninterrupted power supply for laboratories).
- Rehabilitation of C building.
- Extension of T building.
- Work on the plan for the construction of a student dormitory.
- Preparation of a space optimization plan to reorganize and efficiently use spaces after the partial introduction of online learning."

These tasks are part of other tasks under Strategic Goal #2, for which the budget for 2024 is 4,240,000 GEL, for 2025 is 4,844,750 GEL, and for 2026 is 5,485,588 GEL. To assess the adequacy of material and technical resources to achieve the goals defined by the institution's mission, educational programs, and research activities' requirements, as well as the existing and/or planned number of students, the expert group additionally requested the following documentation:

- Measured drawing of the building (presented in printed version);
- Corresponding internal space of the measured drawing of the building (presented in printed version);
- Documentation confirming the ownership of movable property (presented in printed version);
- Documentation confirming safety in educational/scientific research laboratories (presented electronically);
- Receipts confirming payment for electricity, water, and natural gas (or payment confirmation document/bank statement, if available, for at least the last 3 months) (presented electronically);

- Document confirming the proper operation of the heating and ventilation system and its operational period (presented electronically);
- Document confirming compliance with sanitary norms (presented electronically);
- Documentation confirming the procurement of resources (presented electronically with selected resources);
- Fire-fighting inventory with detailed instructions for its use and approved evacuation plans by a competent body, LEPL - 112, or another state-accredited body/certified independent person (presented electronically);
- Document confirming the approval of evacuation plans (presented in printed version);
- Documentation confirming the ownership of fire-fighting and medical inventory, security cameras (relevant contract/acceptance-delivery acts/inventory materials, along with the need for their visual inspection). Conclusions from relevant structures (accredited bodies/certified person) (presented electronically);
- Adapted environment and/or development plan (presented electronically).

According to the authorization standards' requirements, information on the institution's area is presented based on actual addresses, cadastral codes of real estate, and extracts. Additionally, the institution presented measurement drawings of all spaces under its management, indicating educational and auxiliary areas as well as internal spaces.

The buildings are renovated and equipped with furniture, lighting, and necessary teaching inventory. Appropriate spaces are allocated for conducting educational, research, and administrative processes at a high level: classrooms, a conference hall, professors' offices for student consultations, educational/research laboratories, a library, a book storage room, a foyer, recreational spaces, theoretical teaching auditoriums, administrative rooms, group workspaces, sanitary facilities, a library, specialized laboratories, educational rooms, and archives. Their layout ensures the effective conduct of educational and administrative processes.

A significant role in the university's development was played by the construction of a new four-story, 5000 sq. m. educational building equipped with the latest technology, in collaboration with the San Diego State University Research Foundation and funded by the Millennium Challenge Corporation. The project, completed with the university's participation, was finished in 2019. The university co-financed the construction of the building's structure, roofing, and finishing, while the foundation carried out interior repair work and equipped laboratories. The building houses six educational laboratories of international standards for electrical and civil engineering, a cyber-laboratory, 16 classrooms, a reading room, a student space, and a conference hall equipped to modern standards.

Moreover, the Material Resources Service implemented infrastructural projects from 2020-2022. These included student spaces in buildings A, G, and S, and a conference hall in building G, equipped with modern conference equipment necessary for international conferences. Research bases in Kazbegi and Dedoplistskaro were rehabilitated to support research activities and university events, including student activities.

The university has well-equipped laboratories for the School of Medicine (4th floor of building G), a microbiology teaching laboratory (building E), a biochemistry teaching laboratory (building E), a microscopy laboratory (G 306), a genetics laboratory (3rd floor of building G), an anatomical laboratory (S 903), a clinical skills center (S901, 902, 904, 905, 906), and a research laboratory of the Institute of Chemical Biology (G 213). The laboratories are equipped with the

necessary teaching and research inventory and materials. Established rules ensure safety, including ventilation, fire safety equipment, and special clothing. This was confirmed by inspecting the laboratories. The university has educational/research laboratories, practical components inventory, and information technology equipment. Due to the specific nature of some educational programs, the university uses resources from partner institutions, as reflected in the memorandums or agreements between the university and the respective institutions. During the interview process, students, academic staff, and administration representatives confirmed that the laboratories have sufficient resources (reagents, materials, etc.) to achieve the educational program's goals and learning outcomes. If needed, stock replenishment is carried out through procurement.

The School of Medicine collaborates with various clinics and organizations (34 in total) to ensure the implementation of clinical and scientific practice. The university has signed memorandums with partner organizations, valid from 2024 to 2028. These memorandums outline cooperation goals and activities. While in some agreements the number of students is determined, in some others a specification of maximum/minimum number of students for partner institution can accommodate is missing.

Ilia State University owns 26 light/high-clearance vehicles, 6 water-crafts (1 ship, 1 boat, and 4 rubber boats), and 11 special-purpose equipment (1 tractor, 1 bus, 2 minibuses, 3 trailers, 1 passenger vehicle, and 3 trucks). A small ship safety certificate (inspection date 15.12.2023) issued by Georgian Veritas under the "Rules for Technical Inspection of Small Watercraft" was presented, valid until 15.12.2024. Copies of the passports for all technical equipment were also provided. The interview process revealed that these means are used for both curricular and extracurricular activities. An annual inventory process is conducted, as confirmed by inventory documents and interviews with auxiliary administrative services representatives.

The ISU has the necessary environment for educational activities: an uninterrupted electricity supply system, sanitary facilities, natural lighting, and central heating.

The ISU has created an alternative continuous electricity supply system (Tbilisi: I. Chavchavadze Ave. N32, K. Cholokashvili Ave. N3/5, G. Tsereteli Alley N1, Sh. Nutsbidze St. N77, Botanical N1). Constant power supply sources are installed at seismic station bases across the country. Solar systems were installed and functioned at K. Cholokashvili Ave. N3/5, generating up to 35 kilowatts of electricity, fully supplying the university's F building. The university is equipped with a central heating system, and every classroom and workspace have an individual conditioning system purchased with a warranty and additional technical services.

Sanitary and hygienic norms are maintained at the university. Internal rules and instructions for sanitary maintenance and a responsible person for these duties (cleaner's internal regulations) and disinfection and pest control contracts are developed. The expert group studied the 2023 lecturer survey on university services. Survey results allowed respondents to rate their satisfaction with various university services and resources on a 5-point scale. According to the average scale indicator, respondents most positively rated the reading rooms and research bases of the library (4.5) and the temperature (heating/air conditioning), classrooms, laboratories, cleanliness, and research centers/laboratories equally (4.3). The lowest rating (3.9) was given to WiFi internet. Among the 438 surveyed lecturers, more than half (53%) are very satisfied with cleanliness, 3% are dissatisfied, and 4% are very dissatisfied. The majority of respondents (57%) could not evaluate the research centers or laboratories due to a lack of relevant experience, but 24% are very satisfied with these resources. Academic staff positively rated the library's reading rooms, with 44% very satisfied and 20% satisfied. However, during

the interview process, no dissatisfaction was recorded among respondents (students, graduates, lecturers). The survey was also conducted by schools. The university administration uses survey results to improve university services.

The university ensures the safety and health of its staff and students. Specifically, fire safety, first aid, and order maintenance mechanisms are developed, with appropriate inventory confirmed during the inspection of university spaces. It was noted that training is conducted for employee preparation on safety issues. Each department has its regulations posted on the university website, defining the roles and responsibilities of the employees.

Fire safety equipment with detailed usage instructions and evacuation plans approved by the LEPL - 112 are installed on each floor. The institution has a medical cabinet equipped with necessary first aid supplies, continuously stocked with hot and cold water. A qualified responsible person is employed for first aid, confirmed by a contract. The university has first aid kits with necessary medications. Additionally, designated cabinets are in buildings A and E.

Order is maintained throughout the institution's building perimeter. A "hotline" is established for this purpose. Ilia State University's Order Maintenance and Support Measures Rule outlines security measures. Security personnel undergo annual safety and occupational safety training. For enhanced security and order, security cameras with video recording functions are installed throughout the buildings' interior and exterior perimeters. Video recordings are stored for one week.

Interviews confirmed that the university effectively overcame the COVID-19 pandemic, turning this challenge into an opportunity by creating a video lecture platform that continues to develop successfully. Initially, there were uncertainties, and results reflected on practical course outcomes.

The institution has an adapted environment for persons with special needs. The university continuously ensures an adapted environment for students with special educational needs. Electric elevators are installed at central entrances and between buildings. Sanitary facilities are adapted. Buildings A, E, and S. have appropriate elevators. Parking spaces are designated for persons with disabilities, and during the rehabilitation of building E's yard, an adapted parking space was arranged. An electric vehicle charging station was set up in building T's underground parking. Ramps were installed at research bases during renovation works. The university continues to improve adapted spaces and strives to enhance infrastructure based on individual needs.

Evidence/indicators

- Extracts from the Public Registry regarding immovable property (information on immovable and movable property is stored in the Legal Office, Accounting and Reporting Office and Material Resources Office)
- Building Plans
- Building shells and safety (available at the university)
- Memoranda and agreements signed with various clinics and organizations to facilitate the implementation of clinical and scientific practice at the School of Medicine
- Movable property purchase agreements/stocktaking documents
- Documentation for the purchase of watercraft
- Receipts confirming the payment of electricity, water and natural gas

- Solar-powered system and its documentation
- Order N344-02, dated 19 February 2024, on approval of internal regulations of Ilia State University for employees responsible for cleaning, issued by the Head of Administration
- Documents confirming rehabilitation of the buildings of Ilia State University (I. Chavchavadze Ave N32, K. Cholokashvili Ave N3/5, G. Tsereteli exit N3) and Buildings A, B and S (I. Chavchavadze Ave N32, G. Tsereteli exit N3) (SPA150029540; Agreement N12/056 dated 14 December 2015)
- University strategic development plan 2024-2030 and action plan 2024-2026
- Infrastructure Development Projects (available at the university)
- Student Housing Projects
- Agreement signed with the San Diego State University Research Foundation regarding laboratories and inventory located in the building (SDSU Assets Handover Act)
- Order N56-02, dated 11 January 2017, on the procedure for conducting measures to promote order at Ilia State University, issued by the Rector
- Order N02-2710, dated 19 December 2012, on the establishment of a "hotline" to ensure safety and security within the territory of Ilia State University, issued by the Head of Administration
- Mechanisms for fire safety, medical assistance and order protection
- Documentation verifying the possession of fire-fighting and medical equipment, as well as security cameras
- Sample employment contract signed with the individual responsible for maintaining order and providing medical assistance
- Memoranda signed with partner institutions
- Student and staff survey reports
- Heating and cooling systems, along with additional sources of electricity supply
- Measured drawing of the building (presented in printed version)
- Corresponding internal space of the measured drawing of the building (presented in printed version)
- Documentation confirming the ownership of movable property (presented in printed version)
- Documentation confirming safety in educational/scientific research laboratories (presented electronically)
- Receipts confirming payment for electricity, water, and natural gas (or payment confirmation document/bank statement, if available, for at least the last 3 months) (presented electronically) (presented electronically)
- Document confirming compliance with sanitary norms) (presented electronically)
- Documentation confirming the procurement of resources (presented electronically with selected resources)
- Fire-fighting inventory with detailed instructions for its use and approved evacuation plans by a competent body, LEPL - 112, or another state-accredited body/certified independent person (presented electronically)
- Document confirming the approval of evacuation plans (presented in printed version)
- Documentation confirming the ownership of fire-fighting and medical inventory, security cameras (relevant contract/acceptance-delivery acts/inventory materials, along with the need for their visual inspection). Conclusions from relevant structures (accredited bodies/certified person) (presented electronically)
- Adapted environment and/or development plan (presented electronically)
- Safety certificate for a small vessel (inspection date 15.12.2023) issued by Georgian Veritas, according to the "Rules for Technical Inspection of Small Floating Technical Means," and valid until 15.12.2024

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview with stakeholders
<p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
<p>Suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is suggested to specify the maximum/minimum number of students the partner institution can receive (internships, clinical practice) in all memoranda.
<p>Best Practices (if applicable): None</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>
<p>7.2. Library Resources</p>
<p>Library environment, resources and service support effective implementation of educational and research activities, and HEI constantly works for its improvement.</p>
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>This can be said that the library environment, resources and service support effective implementation of educational and research activities at the ISU, and the institution constantly works for its improvement.</p> <p>Iliia State University’s mission is to create, disseminate, and utilize knowledge for scientific advancement and societal development at both local and international levels. In line with this mission, the university places significant effort into stimulating scientific research and securing essential resources for this process. Since 2018, the university has funded 322 research projects through international and local donors, and in the same period, 230 projects have been funded by the university and state under the scientific research support program.</p> <p>The budget allocated for research and scientific activities amounts to 24,862,723 GEL, which is almost a quarter of the university's total budget. To enhance the quality of research and teaching, Iliia State University is focused on developing library resources such as reading rooms, book collections, an electronic catalog, an electronic library, and library services. The university library serves not only the university community but also anyone interested. There is open access to the electronic and digital learning resources produced by the university.</p> <p>In 2019, the budget allocated for the operation and development of the library was 1,000,000 GEL, and by 2024 it increased to 1,250,000 GEL, which is nearly 1.3% of the total university budget. The combined indicator of searches conducted in international scientific library databases by the university (2019-2024) is 977,861.</p>

Strategic Goal #3: Raising the Standard of Teaching and Learning is one of the university's significant strategic goals, which supports the fulfillment of the university's mission. The university space accumulates knowledge, experience, and human resources, giving the university the potential to become one of the educational institutions with the highest standards of teaching and learning in Georgia. Among the tasks defined to achieve this are the promotion of the quality of teaching and learning, which, among other activities, includes:

- Developing library resources (both print and electronic book collections) to ensure the use and accessibility of modern professional literature in the teaching and learning process.
- Increasing the use of scientific electronic databases.
- Translating foreign language literature with the help of various donor organizations and co-funding from the university.

To achieve the third strategic goal, the institution has allocated 22,371,567 GEL for 2024, 23,471,445 GEL for 2025, and 23,993,485 GEL for 2026.

To determine compliance with authorization standards in this component, the expert group requested additional documents: documentation confirming the possession of the book collection (presented electronically), documentation confirming the possession of the equipment in the library, and informational instructions (presented electronically). As additional information, the institution provided library usage rules, equipment reception-transfer acts, a search guide for the electronic catalog, rules for replacing library units lost by the reader and determining relevant literature, procurement rules for library resources, information about trainings conducted by the library, and statistics on the use of electronic library databases from 2019-2023, with which they have contracts. E-libraries can be accessed from anywhere, not limited to just the university premises These include:

- Discovery Service - Ebsco
- ScienceDirect
- Scopus
- Funding Institutional
- Clarivate Analytics (Web of Science)
- Journal Citation Report
- ProQuest Research Library
- Taylor and Francis Online
- ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global
- Sage Publishing
- LexisNexis
- Humanity Source - Ebsco
- Political Science Complete - Ebsco
- JStore
- BioOne
- Hinari
- IMF eLibrary
- Royal Society Publishing
- Britannica
- Edward Elgar Publishing
- Cambridge Journals
- The New England Journal of Medicine
- Caucasus Survey

- Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders
- International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders
- Financial Times
- Economist

The annex of the self-evaluation report includes agreements signed with digital library databases by year, including Britannica, Clarivate Analytics, EBSCO, JSTOR, LexisNexis, ProQuest, Taylor and Francis, and the library association. The university website features the library's electronic catalog, services, collections, electronic library, and literature search system. Additionally, the library page includes search areas for readers, e-books, video lectures, photo archives, audiobooks, repositories, records, and information about the university's films. In the news section, the library provides readers with information about training, new books, and the rules for using scientific databases.

These Bases are accessible from all locations outside the University using corporate email. The rate of use of the bases was 199 278 in 2023.

To determine the compliance of the book collection with the primary literature specified in the educational programs, the expert group requested several primary teaching materials through random selection. Most were found in material form in the library, while some were presented electronically with full access links from international databases.

It is noteworthy that the institution has informational instructions and a well-equipped reading room, including internet-connected computers, printers, copiers, and scanners. The library is provided with wireless internet.

The ISU's library serves its users with 8 reading rooms and 2 computer rooms. The library includes the following spaces: book storage, reading rooms, group workspaces, 2 copying centers, workspace for library staff, meeting space, and a corner equipped with multimedia resources. The books in the library are processed according to library rules.

The university library collaborates with faculties and schools in the direction of acquiring updated literature for educational program syllabi. Research institutes are also involved in the process of identifying the need for and sourcing modern literature.

Readers are prepared based on the book collection, which is available both electronically and in printed form. The preparation of readers is carried out at the request of a professor or course leader, with full copyright protection.

Ilia State University has a longstanding practice of utilizing the electronic learning platform (E-learning/Moodle) (in use since 2007). Prior to the pandemic, this platform was employed in training courses that followed a blended learning method.

From 2020 to 2023, Ilia State University implemented the Erasmus Plus institutional development project titled "Learning Optimization and Academic Inclusion via Equitativa Distance Teaching and Learning" (LOVEDISTANCE). The project aimed to exchange European experiences in distance learning practices. Since 2015, Ilia State University has been using the plagiarism detection program (Turnitin), which is built within the same platform.

The library staff has the appropriate competence in library work, including the use of international electronic library databases. The library staff provides information to students and

staff about library resources and services. Orientation meetings and consultations are regularly held at the beginning of the academic year. Librarians help students find literature and other resources. Periodic training is planned for academic and invited staff as well as students on the use of library capabilities.

According to a survey of students and academic staff, library resources and services are highly rated.

Evidence/indicators

- Library Website
- Library halls, their location and working hours are posted on the library website
- The rules for utilizing the library and other normative documents are published on the website
- The electronic catalog of the library to explore and search the print fund as well as other library resources
- Information about new books is posted on the website
- "Readers" are cataloged and stored on a dedicated portal
- Electronic library website
- International academic databases, libraries, journals, etc.
- Documentation verifying participation in the international library networks and databases (accessible within the library)
- Academic repository of the university
- E-learning portal
- Training sessions offered by the library
- Library's social media page
- Library Staff Capacity Building Trainings Database
- Electronic/digital library database usage statistics 2019-2023
- Budget allocation for the provision and development of library resources over the past five years: 2019 - 1,000,000.00; 2020 - 1,000,000.00; 2021 - 1,155,000.00; 2022 - 1,180,000.00; 2023 - 1,250,000.00 (GEL)
- Digital; Library Access Agreements
- Documentation certifying possession of books/inventory records (documentation is available at the university)
- Library Resources and Service Development and Maintenance Mechanisms
- Surveys of students and academic staff
- Interview with stakeholders

Recommendations:

None

Suggestions:

None

Best Practices (if applicable):

None

Evaluation

- Complies with requirements
- Substantially complies with requirements
- Partially complies with requirements
- Does not comply with requirements

7.3 Information Resources

- HEI has created infrastructure for information technologies and its administration and accessibility are ensured
- Electronic services and electronic management systems are implemented and mechanisms for their constant improvement are in place
- HEI ensures business continuity
- HEI has a functional web-page in Georgian and English languages.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

According to the strategic vision of Ilia State University, "By 2030, Ilia State University will be a leading research university in Georgia and the region, aligned with Western standards. It will lay the foundations for scientific-technological development, high-quality educational processes, and public welfare through innovative approaches. The university will contribute to solving global, regional, and national challenges and will promote sustainable development and European integration of Georgia through the development and implementation of a knowledge economy."

Strategic Goal #2 of the 2024-2030 Strategic Plan - Organizational Development - includes the sub-goal of implementing modern management systems, which outlines the following tasks:

- Continuing the implementation of the organizational resource management system (ERP), which includes fully implementing the human resources management module, integrating ARGUS with the ERP system, and developing a future vision for ERP development.
- Continuing the development of the ARGUS program.
- Developing a vision for the implementation of a Knowledge and Information Management system, which involves classifying important knowledge and information, developing processes for their collection and archiving, defining and institutionalizing the scheme for their delivery to beneficiaries.
- Developing and implementing the concept of Institutional Research (IR), which will enable university management to make data-driven and analytical decisions.
- Standardizing and implementing the system for recording students' academic performance (GPA).

The achievement of this goal #2 is detailed in the 2024-2026 action plan, with a total allocation of 4 240 000 GEL in 2024, 4 844 750 GEL in 2025 and 5 485 588 GEL in 2026.

In accordance with its regulations, the Information Technology Service ensures the support of educational, scientific-research activities, and university administration with appropriate software, computer equipment, and internet. The service studies the needs of the information systems used for educational and scientific-research activities and administrative purposes of the university, plans and implements activities for their further development.

Based on the self-assessment report for authorization and the accompanying documents, the expert group requested the following types of documents to complete the information provided by the institution:

- Documents for the purchase of licenses for technological programs, permits (presented electronically);
- IT strategy document, which will be in line with the university's strategic goals and will define the organization's goals regarding IT (presented in printed version);
- Information technology infrastructure (presented in printed version);
- Administration, responsibility, and accountability rules; (the rules should reflect how processes are planned and organized in the university → acquisition and implementation → delivery and support → monitoring and evaluation (presented in printed version);
- Documents confirming the existence of the internet. (contract with the internet provider, as well as a document reflecting the quality of the internet and payment receipts) (presented electronically);
- Management electronic systems (presented in printed version);
- Mechanisms for the development of electronic services and management electronic systems (presented in printed version);
- Business continuity action plan (presented in printed version);
- Domain, hosting, certificate (document confirming the ownership of these: contract and others) (presented electronically);
- Certificate of Cisco Systems Inc. for the score Design, Development, Manufacturing Operations, Customer Experience Services and Support for Networking, Data Venter, Communications, Video, Collaboration and Security Products, Solutions and Services. The Quality Management System operate based on ISO 9001:2015. This Certificate is valid from February 28, 2024, and February 15, 2027, with the re-issue date on N/A (presented in printed version);
- Division of Information Technology Systems: Policies and procedures that regulate the successful and proper use of the university's information technology resources (presented in printed version);
- Ilia State University Information Technology Strategy Plan 2024-2030 (presented in printed version).

To ensure component evaluation, interviews were conducted with target groups, and the participation of the Information Technology Service in educational, research, and administrative processes was observed and studied. Ilia State University operates under the "Information Technology Services Management Policy and Procedure Rule." This rule applies to all users who utilize the university's information resources. The document states that all information stored on devices owned by the university belongs to the university, ensuring its protection from unauthorized use. The IT service must ensure the proper functioning of technology. Additionally, it must create a productive work environment for students and teachers with special needs.

The internal audit policy of the IT service includes a "stress test" conducted by the audit team. This rule defines the policy for safe data storage, telecommunication policy, technical equipment configuration policy, guest/visitor access and equipment use policy, information sensitivity policy, password policy, personal identification policy, and more.

Daily, at 3:00 PM, information is saved/backed up automatically. Daily configurations from network devices are transferred to backup storage. Besides system backups within the

university buildings' disk arrays, the IT service periodically stores backup copies of key systems and services in Google's cloud storage.

Upon appointment, administrative and academic staff at Ilia State University are provided with the necessary equipment and software required for their roles, including items such as computers and relevant programs tailored to their specific needs. The service ensures that lecture halls, faculties/schools are equipped with modern computer technology and internet based on their educational program needs. All lecture halls are equipped with personal computers, projectors or LCD screens (two or three screens depending on the size of the hall), internet provision through physical cables as well as a modern wireless system that covers both indoor and outdoor areas without dead spots. Ilia State University offers computer labs for free use in buildings A and E, serviced by the library. It can be noted that the institution ensures the creation of appropriate conditions for employees.

To ensure the updating and administration of information technology, as well as the security of business processes, the IT service of Ilia State University operates the following working groups: software group, network and systems monitoring group, statistics group, and network infrastructure group.

The principles of business process continuity in the direction of information technology include automated server support with continuous power supply for a reasonable period; involving technical personnel if necessary; providing additional power supplies for servers and network-connected personal computers; ensuring disk storage, etc. The server room is equipped with uninterruptible power supplies, which are also insured by a diesel generator. All servers and network devices that play a critical role in the university's activities have alternative connection points with another provider in case of damage to the channel between the university and the internet provider, and the switch to it is fully automated. To ensure the continuous and proper functioning of the key and peripheral components of the university's server and network infrastructure, the IT service constantly monitors the system. Various software solutions are used for monitoring, which detect faults and notify the administrator team in real-time via email and special bots about any issues found in the system. The personnel working in the university's IT service undergo regular training within their field of activity.

Ilia State University has a rule that protects personal data from being disclosed by individuals employed at the university. This ensures the protection of personal data. The IT service's operational documents outline the mechanism for protecting access to personal information. There is a rule for defining the procedures and deadlines necessary for requesting and receiving personal data, which establishes the conditions under which personal data can be transferred to third parties.

The information technology infrastructure (computer equipment, software, internet) intended for the services of USD is consistently and stably available to students and staff. Although a survey conducted to evaluate university services in 2023 indicated that some respondents were dissatisfied with the quality of the internet, this issue was not raised during interviews with target group representatives during the authorization visit. During the interview with the administration, it was noted that the university purchased additional internet transmission devices, ensuring internet provision in the university's open spaces as well.

Electronic services and electronic management systems are implemented and mechanisms for their constant improvement are in place. They include:

- Argus – At Ilia State University, the electronic system Argus is used for managing the educational process. It ensures the management and administration of the educational process at the university. The system involves students, teachers, administrators, chief administrators, faculty administrators, system viewers, registrars, and schedule administrators. Through Argus, students enrolled at Ilia State University can register for courses, access course information, schedules, evaluations, syllabi, study materials, academic cards, notifications, financial debts, borrowed books from the library, frequently asked questions, privacy policies, cookie rules, etc. Teachers can communicate with students registered in their courses through Argus. They can create attendance sheets based on the syllabus, assess students, share study materials, send notifications, use the discussion module, etc. The main administrator of the Argus system reflects and edits various types of information, processes different types of statistics upon request, which is built into the system and also configured through the Data Warehouse platform. The registrar registers and reflects the personal information of students admitted through the Unified National Examinations into the system using Argus. The schedule administrator manages the schedule board in Argus, reflecting the lecture schedules by days and hours. There is a mobile application for both students and teachers on Android and iOS platforms for the Argus system. With the advent of modern technological changes and innovations, the old version of Argus has been updated, a completely new design of Argus has been prepared, and navigation within the system has been simplified. An electronic registration system for master's candidates has been introduced, allowing them to register electronically and upload all necessary documentation into the system. The Argus system facilitates conducting surveys among students, academic, and invited staff. It can generate questionnaires in Georgian and English, allowing simultaneous surveys of local and international students. Notably, since the spring semester of 2022, it has been possible to diversify questionnaires based on different types of courses in the system. With the integration of the Data Warehouse platform, it has become possible to generate unified databases related to students' academic performance and course satisfaction surveys conducted every semester, contributing to the internal quality assurance system of the programs.

- "Billing" – Ilia State University uses an electronic system for accounting student tuition fees, which allows the university to account for the amounts paid and due by students, analyze the income from tuition fee payments, and other financial activities. The billing system actively interacts with the "Argus" API, ensuring the smooth operation of business processes overall. A Data Warehouse is also set up for billing, simplifying the extraction and processing of financial statistics.

- Organization Resource Management and Planning System – Ilia State University has started working on an internal process management system ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning). The system aims to facilitate the management of internal university processes, make the work process much more efficient, and enable real-time viewing of current information and the collection and analysis of various statistics through the program. The procurement module is integrated and fully operational in the program. The process of online signing of labor contracts for invited teachers in the HR module is being tested, which will simplify the formalization of the hiring process. Simultaneously, "conditional appointment submission" is being prepared for the test mode, which involves making invitations to all types of positions with the help of the ERP program. The employee's personal page and appointment part are completed, which includes the electronic existence of information about all employed persons. Gradually, the integration of budgeting and financial analysis, financial accounting and reporting, and warehouse management is planned. Integration of the Data Warehouse platform is also planned, which will

simplify data access and monitoring. The procurement module is completed, and a corresponding document outlining the usage instructions is created.

Ilia State University provides corporate email accounts for all employees and students, which are used for system authorization and access to various electronic resources and databases. The Student Affairs Department sends daily emails with updates, including important information, events, and vacancies, to students at all academic levels. Emails are segmented based on academic level and semester, and specific notifications are sent as needed

- Electronic Document Management System – Ilia State University has implemented an electronic document management system called eDocument, which allows for the electronic circulation of official documents. The system facilitates the monitoring process of tasks, their responses, and other organizational issues effortlessly.

Electronic Services:

- Institutional Repository Eprints - An electronic service has been implemented at Ilia State University. Eprints is an institutional repository where the academic portfolio/profile of academic staff is created, which involves various types of publications and research materials that have already been published or are being prepared for publication, all placed in one space.
- E-learning Platform - The E-learning platform functions with 37,380 registered users and 2,528 created courses.

Mechanisms to Facilitate the Development of Electronic Services

The basis for the development of electronic management systems is the needs identified as a result of research on university services, the need for technological updates, needs related to the ongoing teaching/learning processes at the university, and requirements dictated by internal and external regulations.

The IT Department reviews and agrees on the technical assignment for electronic services with faculties, schools, and administrative units, after which, with the agreement of the head of the administration, the software development group of the IT Department completes the assignment. In addition to planned assignments, electronic services management is carried out according to needs, an example of which is the measures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic: detailed instructions were created, a hotline was launched, and media center support was offered for recording lectures. The IT Department created a detailed guide for lecturers on how to use Zoom. Technical support was provided almost 24/7 to ensure that the educational process was not disrupted.

At the ISU, business continuity mechanisms are ensured. During the authorization visit, to evaluate the mechanisms based on the business continuity plan at Ilia State University, the expert group requested the institution's business continuity plan. The institution presented the business continuity plan for 2023 and changes to the business continuity plan (December 28, 2023, Order N3543-02). The business continuity plan includes principles for the continuity of business processes in information technology, material resources, records management, security and safety, and human resources. The principles for business process continuity in information technology were discussed during the analysis of this component. The principles for business process continuity in material resources include the uninterrupted power supply system, the procedure for uninterrupted water supply, which involves informing the relevant

company to receive water by alternative means, and making individual decisions based on the specifics of the crisis to ensure an uninterrupted educational process. The principles for business process continuity in records management are related to transitioning to an alternative records management mode in case of a crisis, which involves the circulation of correspondence in material form (on paper). Security and safety business processes are ensured with 24-hour security and safety throughout the year in the university space. When risk levels increase, patrol police are called in for management. In extreme cases, the educational process is moved to another space. Business process continuity in human resources is related to constant communication with employees, support measures, remote work, data backup, employee retraining, and other issues.

The ISU has a functional webpage in Georgian and English languages. Ilia State University ensures the functionality of the website (<https://iliauni.edu.ge/en>). The university's website is bilingual. The Georgian-language website contains more informational material and is the main source of information, while the English-language site is supplementary. Overall, the Georgian-language website meets modern requirements in terms of both technical and content aspects, providing access to updated, accurate, and objective information. Ilia State University operates a web portal, which is the main website of the university. The domain is registered in the name of Ilia State University. The hosting of the site is provided by the company "Cloud Nine" on its servers. The website operates with a secure protocol https, and the security certificate is issued by COMODO RSA Domain Validation Secure Server CA. At the end of 2022, the university decided to change the existing web portal engine and move it to WordPress. The project work started in 2023. The work defined the structure of the updated web portal, mechanisms for information exchange between sites, and changed the existing design and fonts. Data from the existing site were distributed to various separate sites. The updated university web portal includes all the news and important information needed by professors, students, researchers, and any interested person. The portal consists of over a hundred sites where information is distributed according to the university's structural units and content division. During interviews conducted during the authorization visit, it was confirmed that these works are still ongoing. Due to this change, complete information is not presented in various blocks/modules on the university website. For example, minutes/decisions of academic and representative council meetings, a significant part of the information on the English-language website, and others are not posted. It is advisable for the institution to strengthen its efforts to expedite the provision of relevant information on the English-language website, which will eliminate potential information problems for foreign students. Also, it is advisable to reflect tasks and activities related to the perfection of the new web portal in the university's strategic and action plan.

In addition to the portal, the university operates several dozen additional websites. All of them are subdomains of the main domain, and they host the university's projects and services. The technical maintenance of the portal is carried out by the IT Department of Ilia State University.

- **Evidences/indicators**

- The Information Technologies Office Bylaws
- Official university website
- Responsible person for website administration, administration procedure, and job description
- University strategic development plan 2024-2030 and action plan 2024-2026
- Guide for using Argus

- "Instruction - Creating Conditional Submissions in the Purchasing Module of the ERP System and the Subject of Purchase."
- Internet provider agreement
- Order N02-323, dated 28 March 2013, "On Protection of Personal Data of Other Individuals Employed at Ilia State University" by the Head of Administration
- Order N1056-02, dated 25 May 2016, on approval of "Rules for Determining Procedures and Deadlines for Requesting and Receiving Personal Data at Ilia State University" by the Rector
- Electronic systems: ELearning, ePrints, eDoc.
- Agreements for the purchase of website domain, and hosting certificate
- On approval of "Rules of Operation for the Electronic Management System, Argus" by the Head of Administration
- Order N335-02, dated 19 February 2018, on approval of " Management Policy and Procedures for the Information Technologies Office" by the Head of Administration
- Ilia University Learning and Teaching Management System (LMS)
- Erasmus+ project LOVE.DISTANCE agreement
- IT Management and Policy, Procedures, IT Infrastructure, E-Systems and services and their development mechanisms
- Documents for the purchase of licenses for technological programs, permits (presented electronically)
- IT strategy document, which will be in line with the university's strategic goals and will define the organization's goals regarding IT (presented in printed version)
- Information technology infrastructure (presented in printed version)
- Administration, responsibility, and accountability rules; (the rules should reflect how processes are planned and organized in the university → acquisition and implementation → delivery and support → monitoring and evaluation (presented in printed version);
- Documents confirming the existence of the internet. (contract with the internet provider, as well as a document reflecting the quality of the internet and payment receipts) (presented electronically)
- Management electronic systems (presented in printed version)
- Mechanisms for the development of electronic services and management electronic systems (presented in printed version)
- Business continuity action plan (presented in printed version)
- Domain, hosting, certificate (document confirming the ownership of these: contract and others) (presented electronically)
- Certificate of Cisco Systems Inc. for the score Design, Development, Manufacturing Operations, Customer Experience Services and Support for Networking, Data Venter, Communications, Video, Collaboration and Security Products, Solutions and Services. The Quality Management System operates based on ISO 9001:2015. This Certificate is valid from February 28, 2024, and February 15, 2027, with the re-issue date on N/A (presented in printed version)

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Recommendations:

None

<p>Suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It is suggested to strengthen the efforts to expedite the provision of relevant information on the English-language website, which will eliminate potential information problems for foreign students. ● It is suggested to reflect tasks and activities related to the creation of the new web portal in the university's strategic and action plan. ● It is suggested to ensure the dissemination of a reasonable amount and volume of information in process of emailing.
<p>Best Practices (if applicable): None</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fully complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>
<p>7.4 Financial Resources</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allocation of financial resources described in the budget of HEI is economically achievable ○ Financial standing of HEI ensures performance of activities described in strategic and mid-term action plans ○ HEI financial resources are focused on effective implementation of core activities of the institution ○ HEI budget provides funding for scientific research and library functioning and development ○ HEI has an effective system of accountability, financial management and control
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>The strategic goal #2 for the years 2020-2030 (organizational development) includes the strategic task of ensuring financial sustainability. Implementing this strategic task will enable the university's management team to set priorities in the long term and ensure the sustainability of the action plan's implementation. Financial sustainability will also allow the university to gradually establish higher minimum competency thresholds for those wishing to study at Ilia State University and to improve the quality of education from the starting point. To ensure financial sustainability, the following activities will be carried out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increasing the share of international students in the overall student body (1,500 international students within 7 years). ● Strengthening cooperation with international donor organizations to attract funding for educational program internationalization, research, infrastructural, and institutional development projects. <p>The revenue portion of Ilia State University's budget is formed from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Income from economic activities, allocations from the state budget, and targeted grants. ● Income from economic activities includes tuition fees from higher education programs, income from centers and certification programs within the university, and other additional economic activities permitted by legislation.

- Allocations from the state budget are provided to fund the main activities of research institutes. Additionally, targeted expenses, such as university infrastructure development, scholarships for undergraduate students, and other programmatic funding, are financed within state programs.
- Targeted grants include projects funded by local and international funds.

The distribution of income/revenues received from the listed sources is carried out according to the country's existing legislation and the internal normative act approved by the university within this legislation (the rule of compiling, amending, and monitoring the budget of Ilia State University). In 2023, 79% of the consolidated budget was formed from economic activities, 16% from state budget allocations, and 5% from targeted grants. The consolidated budget for 2023 amounted to 99,116,000 GEL, of which 33,758,621 was the balance at the beginning of the year and 63,357,379 GEL was the current year's income. The expenses of the 2023 budget are 62,617,000 GEL, of which 19,070,000 are for labor remuneration, 36,687,400 GEL for goods and services, 750,000 for grants, and 5,859,600 for other expenses. The operational balance is 36,489,000 GEL. The change in non-financial assets (fixed assets and material assets) amounted to 6,299,000 GEL. The institution has no financial liabilities. The balance amounted to 30,200,000 GEL. The budget is in surplus, indicating the institution's financial stability.

To determine the institution's financial stability and compliance with the relevant authorization standard, the expert group requested additional documentation.

- Funding sources - documented information confirming the existence of funding sources (presented in printed version);
- Financial reports confirming the accuracy, fairness, and completeness of financial information (presented in printed version);
- Document evaluating the functionality of the financial management and control system (presented in printed version - original).

Based on the analysis of the self-assessment report, attached and additional documents, and information obtained during interviews conducted during the authorization visit, it has emerged that due to the activities implemented by the university's relevant departments in the direction of revenue diversification, the volume of funding attracted from additional sources is increasing annually. Funds attracted from various donors provide the university with the opportunity to finance educational and research as well as institutional activities. This makes it possible to ensure financial stability with the freed-up resources in their own revenue portion and to implement significant projects for the university's development. The fulfillment of the tasks set for strategic development is also driven by the university's financial sustainability. The implementation of activities outlined in the strategic development and action plan is based on financial analysis of previous years and revenue forecasts projected over the years.

Financial standing of the ISU ensures performance of activities described in strategic and mid-term action plans. It is noteworthy that over the years, the institution has been implementing significant activities in the direction of revenue diversification, including within the portion of revenue generated from the university's core economic activities. To ensure the growth of revenue from tuition fees, various English-language educational programs have been introduced at the university. International student recruitment campaigns have been conducted. As a result, the number of international programs and international students has

increased. For the fall semester of the 2023-2024 academic year, the number of foreign students is approximately 700, which, under the condition of maintaining the same number of students, ensures an increase in the university's revenues. In 2023, the revenue from foreign students in the form of tuition fees exceeded 20.7% of the university's total tuition revenue.

To diversify revenue streams and bolster educational and research initiatives, it's essential for the university to increase the proportion of targeted grants from international and local donor organizations within its overall budget. This approach would reduce reliance on traditional funding sources and provide greater financial support for academic and research endeavors.

Additional grant projects for scientific-research and institutional development, attracted from local and international sources, make it possible to finance many significant projects, purchase and update technical equipment necessary for educational and scientific purposes. The university's academic and administrative staff have the opportunity to participate in international conferences and share experiences with international partners. Students have the opportunity to engage in research activities, which contributes to the improvement of education quality and the fulfillment of the tasks set for strategic development

The ISU's financial resources are focused on effective implementation of core activities of the institution. Over the years, the activities implemented by the university aimed at maintaining financial stability and sustaining the growth dynamics of the consolidated budget ensure the financial sustainability of the university. According to the university administration, since 2014, through revenue growth and expense optimization, it has been possible to achieve a stable increase in the year-start balance. This has allowed the university to overcome the challenges caused by the pandemic and, despite the difficult economic situation in the country, to carry out its core activities without interruption. During the post-pandemic period, in the face of a deteriorated economic situation, increased prices, and inflation, the university had to resume projects that were halted during the pandemic. As a result, it was not possible to maintain the growth trend of the balance in 2022, and the university had to use part of the accumulated balance. Despite this, the situation stabilized again in 2023 through revenue growth and expense optimization, and as a result, in 2023, the expenses in the economic activities section did not exceed the revenues. According to the presented information, the university's consolidated budget has been characterized by a growth trend since 2018 up to the reporting period.

The activities outlined in the university's budget are planned in such a way that, in addition to the main educational expenses, the implementation of activities provided by the strategies and action plans is ensured.

The ISU's budget provides funding for scientific research and library functioning and development. According to the approved budget of the university, in addition to the development of educational and research programs, appropriate funds are allocated for the library, university development, promotion, student activities, creative and other types of activities, as well as for the development and renewal of the university's material-technical base. To deepen scientific-research activities, a significant portion of the consolidated budget (including funding received from local and international funds) is directed towards the activities of research institutes, participation of students, academic and scientific staff in conferences, publication of articles in international journals, and other activities necessary for scientific work.

The expenses in the university's approved budget are grouped according to the budget classification items operating in Georgia.

During the interviews conducted as part of the authorization visit, it was noted that the work on the budget project begins at the end of September. The deans of the faculties submit their needs for the upcoming year to the university's financial and economic services. Based on the submitted information, the university budget project is developed and submitted for review to the faculty councils. If the councils agree with the project, it is submitted for approval to the Academic Council and the Senate. During the interview process, it was noted that communication with the university administration regarding the financial and economic needs of the faculties and schools is ensured by the deans.

The ISU has an effective system of accountability, financial management and control. To ensure financial management, the university has implemented an effective system of accountability, financial management, and control. For the efficiency of financial management and control, the university operates under a rule for compiling, amending, and monitoring the budget. This rule outlines the procedures for budget compilation and management and establishes mechanisms for accountability and control. The budget project is approved by the university's academic and representative councils, while amendments are made as necessary through individual administrative-legal acts of the representative council or the head of administration. The university has presented minutes of the academic and representative council meetings regarding the review and approval of the 2023 budget execution and the 2024 budget approval reports.

To control the approved budget, the university has implemented a financial management system that enables effective management of the university's financial resources. The control of expenses by the university is carried out as follows: initially, the planned expenses' compliance with the budget is determined, and then any incurred expense, based on the relevant documents, is reflected in the corresponding item of the budget's economic classification according to the funding source and expenditure category. As a result, information about the available resources is accessible at any specific point in the current period, and future expenses can be controlled.

To enhance the efficiency of financial management and control, the university is in the process of implementing an electronic resource management system. This system aims to systematize expenses in various directions (procurement, human resources, etc.), ensure orderly accounting, and develop additional monitoring and control mechanisms.

To regularly monitor planned and incurred expenses, the following mechanism is in place: at the end of each quarter, the head of the budgeting and financial analysis department conducts an analysis and prepares a report on the compliance of planned and incurred expenses with the budget for that quarter. This information is submitted to the head of administration for review. Additionally, at the end of each calendar year, the university's budgeting and financial analysis department, in agreement with the head of administration, presents the university's budget execution report for the previous year to the representative council.

The university operates an internal audit service, which periodically controls the effectiveness of the university's financial management system within its competence. Additionally, in accordance with legislation, the university submits financial reports to the Ministry of Education,

Science and Youth of Georgia and the State Audit Office upon request. These reports are public. It is noteworthy that the State Audit Office is currently conducting an evaluation.

For the purposes of transparency and public accessibility, the university's approved budget is posted on the university's website and is available to all interested parties.

Evidence/indicators

1. The ISU 's budget
2. Self-evaluation report
3. Financial reports of the current and/or previous reporting periods
4. Financial management and control system introduction document
5. Signed agreements and memoranda with economic agents/partners (2018-2023)
6. Funding sources - documented information confirming the existence of funding sources (presented in printed version)
7. Financial reports confirming the accuracy, fairness, and completeness of financial information (presented in printed version)
8. Document evaluating the functionality of the financial management and control system (presented in printed version – original)
9. Ilia State University's individual financial statements (for the year ending December 30, 2023), including accounting policies and other explanatory notes
10. Ilia State University's adjusted budget project for 2024, textual descriptions of changes, and a detailed analysis of the execution of the 2023 budget with attachments, for discussion at the Representative Council meeting
11. Accounting manual developed at Ilia State University
12. Decisions made at the Ilia State University N3 meeting on May 1, 2024, regarding the performance report of the 2021-2023 action plan and the evaluation report on the implementation of the 2024-2028 strategy
13. Interview with administration
14. University web: <https://iliauni.edu.ge/ge/iliauni/budget>

Recommendations:

None

Suggestions:

None

Best Practices (if applicable):

None

Evaluation

- Complies with requirements
- Substantially complies with requirements
- Partially complies with requirements
- Does not comply with requirements



10/10/2024

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Decision on
Authorization of LEPL Ilia State University

Based on review, evaluation and consolidation of the information presented by the institution in the self-evaluation report, the argumentative position presented by the institution on the draft report of the experts' panel of the authorization of higher educational institutions, as well as based the report of the experts' panel of the authorization of higher educational institutions, and the position expressed by the stakeholder at the session of the Council of the Authorization of Higher Education Institutions, according to Article 11(2)(a), paragraph 1¹ of the same Article, Article 12, and Article 32⁷(1) of the Law of Georgia on Education Quality Improvement, Article 56²(3)(a) and Article 56³ of law of Georgia "On Higher Education", Article 77(1)(a), paragraph 4 of the same article, paragraphs 1, 3, 4 and 5(b) of Article 79, and Article 88(2) of Authorization Regulations for Educational Institutions approved by the Order N99/N of October 1, 2010 of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia,

The Council decided:

1. To grant the authorization for the period of 6 years to LEPL Ilia State University (ID/Code 204861970) and to determine the student quota as 17 770 including the student quota of 800 for the One-level English Language Educational Programme of Medical Doctor (MD);
2. LEPL- Ilia State University shall be granted with the authority to implement the higher education programmes stipulated in the appendix.
3. The decision shall enter into force on 26 September 2024.
4. Part No. 1 of the minutes of the session No. 1311986 of October 10, 2024, of the Authorization Council of the Higher Education Institutions and the report of the Expert Panel of the Authorization of Higher Education Institutions on LEPL-Ilia State University shall be declared as integral parts of the decision.
5. It is possible to appeal the decision of the Authorization Council of Higher Education Institutions in accordance with the law, within one month after its introduction, by submitting an appeal to the Appeal Council at the following address: Tbilisi, M. Aleksidze, second turn N2 or by filing a complaint to the Administrative Cases Panel of the Tbilisi City Court at the following address: N64 David Agmashenebeli Alley, Tbilisi.

Leshkashvili Davit
Secretary of the Council
Authorisation Council of the Higher Education Institutions

Orjonikidze Zurab
Deputy Chair
Authorisation Council of the Higher Education
Institutions