

**Approval of the Application**  
**by NCEQE - National Center for Education Quality**  
**Enhancement (NCEQE)**  
**for Inclusion on the Register**

Register Committee  
meeting  
18-19 June 2019

Ref. RC24

Ver. 1.0

Date 2019-06-26

Page 1 / 5

<b>Application of:</b>	15/03/2018
<b>Agency registered since:</b>	N/a
<b>External review report of:</b>	25/04/2019
<b>Review coordinated by:</b>	ENQA - European Association for Quality Assurance of Higher Education
<b>Review panel members:</b>	Mark Frederiks (chair), Melita Kovacevic (academic), Jana Moehren (secretary), Gohar Hovhannisyan (student)
<b>Decision of:</b>	19/06/2019
<b>Registration until:</b>	30/04/2024
<b>Absented themselves from decision-making:</b>	N/a
<b>Attachments:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">Confirmation of eligibility, 11/04/2018</a></li> <li>2. <a href="#">External Review Report, 25/04/2019</a></li> <li>3. <a href="#">Request to the Review Panel, 23/05/2019</a></li> <li>4. <a href="#">Applicant's statement &amp; clarification on the report, 06/06/2019</a></li> </ol>

1. The application of 15/03/2018 adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. The Register Committee confirmed eligibility of the application on 11/04/2018.
3. The Register Committee considered the external review report of 25/04/2019 on the compliance of NCEQE with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015 version).
4. The Register Committee sought and received clarification from NCEQE.

## Analysis:

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

- *Authorization (and re-authorization) of higher education institutions.*
- *Accreditation of educational programmes.*

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

7. With regard to the specific European Standards and Guidelines, the Register Committee considered the following:

Register Committee  
meeting  
18-19 June 2019

Ref. RC24

Ver. 1.0

Date 2019-06-26

Page 2 / 5

### ESG 2.3. Implementing processes

8. The review panel found that the agency's monitoring processes - the follow-up and case-based monitoring procedure - were not fully clear, and in particular on how these processes would be complementing each other. The Register Committee therefore asked the agency for further clarification.

9. The agency explained (see letter of 06/06/2019) that higher education institutions complete a mandatory follow-up process which takes place once every three years, where HEIs provide a self-evaluation on the progress made following its previous institutional evaluation.

10. In addition, the agency may carry out a site-visit to review progress at the requested of the Authorization or Accreditation Councils following a review of the institution's compliance with the authorisation/accreditation standards.

11. The agency further described its case based monitoring procedure that is initiated in case a substantiated complaint is received about an institution. If the concern remains unresolved, NCEQE assembles a group of experts to investigate the complaint, which may include a site visit at the institution.

**12. Having considered the agency's clarifications, the Register Committee found the follow-up processes well defined and reasonable. The Committee therefore could follow the panel's conclusion that NCEQE complies with ESG 2.3.**

### ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts

13. The review panel learned that in cases where expert panels are employed for follow-up and case-based monitoring procedures their composition is not clearly defined. The Register Committee therefore asked the agency for further clarifications.

14. The agency explained (see letter of 06/06/2019)) that its guidebook on follow-up procedures define the composition of panels for both follow-up and case-based monitoring procedures. The agency stated that it ensured that a student representative is included in the composition of the expert panel for both procedures.

17. The Register Committee therefore concurred with the panel's judgment that NCEQE is compliant with ESG 2.4.

### ESG 2.7 Complaints and Appeals

18. The Register Committee noted that the agency's Appeal Council is composed of 11 members nominated by the Minister. While the panel was satisfied with the process the panel also commented that the short term of their mandate might not be helpful for members to gain a broad overview of the decisions made. The Register Committee further noted that the nomination of the Appeal Council's members is problematic in terms of agency's independence from the Ministry (see also under ESG 3.3)

19. According to the panel's analysis NCEQE's complaints process are rather vague, and the panel was not convinced that higher education institutions would be aware of the opportunity to complain about a procedural concern. In its letter to EQAR (of 6 June 2019) the agency stated that it has developed a user-friendly booklet on complaints procedure and that institutions may now issue complaints online, via its website.

20. **While the Register Committee welcomed the agency's improvement to its complaints processes, the Committee could not verify the agency's statements, as this would require a review by an expert panel. The Register Committee further underlined its concerns regarding the composition of the agency's Appeals' Council.**

21. **Considering the above-mentioned concerns, the Committee was unable to concur with the review panel's judgment of (substantial) compliance, and concluded that NCEQE complies only partially with ESG 2.7.**

### ESG 3.3 Independence

22. The Register Committee noted that the members of NCEQE's Authorisation and Accreditation Council are appointed by the Prime Minister upon recommendations by the Minister of Education and Science. The panel commented that the ability of the Ministry to appoint and dismiss the Council members does not support organisational independence and that the agency should take more ownership on how council members are nominated.

23. In its letter to EQAR (of 6 June 2019) the agency stated that NCEQE is currently working on initiating legislative changes that will allow the agency to shift the mandate in the appointment and dismissal of the NCEQE's Director and Council members to its main Coordinating Council. The agency added that discussions are also under way to increase the role of the Coordinating Council in the selection process of the Authorization and Accreditation Council members.

24. While the Register Committee welcomed the agency's initiative to increase its independence from the Ministry, the Committee underlined the panel's concerns that the new rules for the selection of Council members do

Register Committee  
meeting  
18-19 June 2019

Ref. RC24

Ver. 1.0

Date 2019-06-26

Page 3 / 5

not fully alleviate the concern regarding the agency's independence as the Council itself is set up at the recommendation of the Ministry.

25. **The Register Committee underlined the panel's recommendation that the agency should be ensured that there is a structural independence from the government and that the agency should take ownership of how council members are appointed under the new rules.**

26. **While considering that the failure to fully meet the requirement of the standard concern both the organisational and operational independence, the Register Committee nevertheless noted the agency has put forward legislative changes that would increase its independence, and therefore could follow the panel conclusion that NCEQE complies partially with ESG 3.3.**

**Register Committee meeting**  
18-19 June 2019

Ref. RC24

Ver. 1.0

Date 2019-06-26

Page 4 / 5

### ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis

27. In its analysis the panel considered that while NCEQE produced a form of thematic analysis in its annual report, the panel commented that the activity was not yet systematically carried out.

28. In its letter to EQAR, the agency reported that as part of its Twinning Project (starting in 2019) a methodology is developed for carrying out analytical and research activities in a more consistent and streamlined manner. The agency added it has also received support via other projects that will help the agency assess the results of implementation of the revised QA system and further improve its QA procedures.

29. **While the Register Committee welcomed the steps taken by NCEQE, it was not yet possible to conclude whether thematic analyses are produced regularly. The Committee therefore concluded that NCEQE complies only partially with ESG 3.4.**

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

### Conclusion:

30. 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	Review panel conclusion	Register Committee conclusion
2.1	Full compliance	Compliance
2.2	Substantial compliance	Compliance
2.3	Substantial compliance	Compliance
2.4	Substantial compliance	Compliance
2.5	Substantial compliance	Compliance
2.6	Full compliance	Compliance

2.7	Substantial compliance	Partial compliance
3.1	Substantial compliance	Compliance
3.2	Full compliance	Compliance
3.3	Partial compliance	Partial compliance
3.4	Substantial compliance	Partial compliance
3.5	Full compliance	Compliance
3.6	Full compliance	Compliance
3.7	(not expected)	Compliance (by virtue of applying)

**Register Committee meeting**  
18-19 June 2019

Ref. RC24

Ver. 1.0

Date 2019-06-26

Page 5 / 5

31. The Register Committee considered that NCEQE only achieved partial compliance with some standards. In its holistic judgement, the Register Committee concluded that these are specific and limited issues, but that NCEQE complies substantially with the ESG as a whole.

32. The Register Committee therefore approved the application for inclusion on the Register. NCEQE's inclusion shall be valid until 30/04/2024<sup>1</sup>.

33. The Register Committee further underlined that NCEQE is expected to address the issues mentioned appropriately and to resolve them at the earliest opportunity as well as to inform EQAR through Substantive Change Reports once substantive changes have been introduced i.e. organisational changes concerning the role of the Coordinating Council etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Inclusion is valid for five years from the date of the external review report, see §4.1 of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.

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National Center for Education Quality Enhancement (NCEQE)

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Tamar Sanikidze, Director

0193Tbilisi

Georgia

Brussels, 11 April 2018

## Confirmation of Eligibility: Application for Inclusion on the Register

Application no. A70 of 15/03/2018

Dear Tamar,

We hereby confirm that the application by NCEQE for inclusion on the Register is eligible.

Based on the information and draft terms of reference provided, the external review coordinated by ENQA - European Association for Quality Assurance of Higher Education fulfils the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.

We confirm that the following activities of NCEQE are within the scope of the ESG:

- *Authorization (and re-authorization) of higher education institutions.*
- *Accreditation of educational programmes.*

Furthermore, the self-evaluation report and external review report should also address the arrangements for the recognition of the external quality assurance activities carried out by other quality assurance agencies and how NCEQE ensures ESG compliance in cases the agency is not EQAR-registered.

Please ensure that NCEQE's self-evaluation report covers all the aforementioned activities.

We further confirm that the following activities are not within the scope of the ESG:

- *authorization of vocational and general education institution*
- *validation of credentials issued in Georgia;*
- *development of sector benchmarks and occupational standards;*
- *governance and management of qualifications;*

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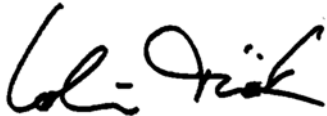
- *maintaining the registry of educational institutions.*

While these activities are not relevant to your application, it is NCEQE's choice – in agreement with the review coordinator – whether those activities should be commented upon by the review panel.

We will forward this letter to ENQA in its capacity of the coordinator of the external review. At the same time we underline that it is NCEQE's responsibility to ensure that the coordinator and review panel take account of the present confirmation, so as to ensure that all activities mentioned are analysed by the panel.

This confirmation is made according to the relevant provisions of the EQAR Procedures for Applications. NCEQE has the right to appeal this decision in accordance with the Appeals Procedure; any appeal must reach EQAR within 90 days from receipt of this decision.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colin Tück'.

Colin Tück  
(Director)

Cc: ENQA (coordinator)

Brussels, 23 May 2019

## Application by NCEQE for inclusion of registration on EQAR

Dear George,

The EQAR Register Committee's rapporteurs have been considering NCEQE's application for inclusion on the Register, based on the external review report of 25/04/2019.

We kindly ask you to clarify the following matters that will inform the Register Committee's consideration and decision-making:

1. In its review report the panel stated that monitoring process remained unclear, as it was not evident to which extent they would complement or supplement the mandatory follow-up processes. We further noted that at the time of the review the follow-up processes of NCEQE were not fully defined.

Could you please clarify if the agency has since fully defined the follow-up processes? Could you further elaborate on the distinctions between case-based monitoring and follow-up procedures?

2. We further noted that in cases where expert panels are employed for follow-up and case-based monitoring procedures their composition is not clearly defined.

Could you please also clarify the composition of such panels?

3. The panel reported that the student representative seat in the Accreditation Council has not been filled for a long time (ESG 3.1).

Could you please specify the last time the seat in the agency's Accreditation Council was filled in by a student and how often that seat is vacant?

4. At the time of the review the agency was in the process of setting up a new Coordinating Council.

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Could you please clarify if the new Council is operational now and if so, could you specify if there was any change in the intended composition of the Council? (ESG 3.1)

5. The panel reported that the information collected from NCEQE's external quality assurance activities is not done consistently or in a clear manner, but that the agency's current implementation of the Twinning Project (starting in 2019) addresses this issue.

Could you please provide more information on the development stage of your thematic analysis methodology and clarify how the agency intends to ensure its systematic implementation?

We would be grateful if it was possible for you to respond by 06/06/2018, and we would appreciate if you get in contact with us should that not be feasible.

Please note that EQAR will publish this request and your response together with the final decision on NCEQE's application. We, however, kindly ask you to keep information related to the application confidential until the final decision has been published.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colin Tück'.

Colin Tück  
(Director)

Dear Dr. Tück,

On behalf of the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement of Georgia (the NCEQE), I would like to express our thanks for the opportunity for providing further information in support of our application for inclusion of registration on the EQAR. Since 2015 the NCEQE's team has consistently tried to develop and implement common set of principles for quality assurance, in compliance with ESG-2015, as adopted by the 48 member countries of the EHEA. One of our responsibilities is to guarantee quality assurance mechanisms' compliance with the ESG-2015 for gaining credibility, which means valuable contributions to protecting students' interest and advancement of quality of higher education provision in general, within Georgia.

The NCEQE views inclusion of registration on the EQAR as an opportunity for contributing to further development of the European Higher Education Area, by increasing transparency of quality assurance in higher education, and enhancing trust and confidence towards higher education provision in Georgia, as of a member state of the EHEA. We have responded to the questions raised in your letter dated by May 23, 2019 and hereby, we attach the NCEQE's detailed response to clarify specific matters raised in your letter (See Annex 1). And thanks again for the opportunity to clarify the matters of your interest in relation to ENQA report.

We are aware that the Register Committee bases its decision on the factors prevailing when the external review by ENQA was undertaken. Nevertheless, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the NCEQE has already started responding to the recommendations raised in ENQA report, and these responses are reflected in the clarifications that we are submitting with this letter.

We hope that the Registry Committee will find these clarifications useful in its decision-making. Should you require further information, including evidences, please do not hesitate to contact us. We look forward to hearing from you following your considerations on NCEQE's response.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

George Vashakidze

## **Annex 1**

### **The NCEQE's clarifications to EQAR queries**

#### **Question 1**

In its review report the panel stated that monitoring process remained unclear, as it was not evident to which extent they would complement or supplement the mandatory follow-up processes. We further noted that at the time of the review the follow-up processes of NCEQE were not fully defined. Could you please clarify if the agency has since fully defined the follow-up processes? Could you further elaborate on the distinctions between case-based monitoring and follow-up procedures?

#### **The NCEQE's response:**

The NCEQE uses two types of follow-up procedures for higher educational institutions.

The first is obligatory for every higher educational institution (HEI) and takes place once in three years. The purpose of this obligatory 3-years cycle follow-up is to provide better developmental support to higher educational institutions and monitor their progress. For this type of follow-up HEIs submit a self-evaluation report (SER). This encourages institutions to make self-reflection on the progress made and the impact of the previous institutional evaluation in relation to all authorization standards. The SER is reviewed by the Authorization Council which approves the progress reflected in SER. However, if HEI fails to demonstrate sufficient progress the Authorization Council requests the NCEQE to carry out a monitoring visit at the institution. The costs of this follow-up procedure are included in the Authorization fee, so the institutions are not charged extra fees for this particular follow-up procedure.

The second type of follow-up procedure are the ones requested by the Authorization/Accreditation Councils. Considering the compliance level of the institution in relation to the authorization/accreditation standards, the Authorization/Accreditation Council may request the HEI to provide either progress report in one year, or request the NCEQE to review the progress of the institution in two years by carrying out the site-visit to evaluate the progress made by the institution.

The rules and procedures for the follow-up activities are defined in bylaws. Also, currently additional guidance documents on follow-up procedures are being prepared for the institutions.

Unlike follow-up procedures the case-based monitoring takes place if the NCEQE receives a complaint against HEI from a student or his/her representative or the employee of this institution. Before carrying out a case-based monitoring the NCEQE first requests evidence supporting the complaint from the individual submitting the complaint. NCEQE also requests documents related to the complaint from the institution concerned. The institution is usually informed about the nature of the complaint and is required to submit a written report on their feedback in relation to the case, and where appropriate, is also requested to take a course of action for resolving the matter. If the matter still remains unsolved the NCEQE assembles a group of experts to investigate the complaint, which may include a monitoring visit at the institution. In the case-based monitoring the experts' panel assesses the evidences of whether the authorization standards are met by the institution and produce a monitoring report, which is discussed by the Authorization Council.

In order to enable better transparency of the case-based monitoring and of the complaints' procedure in general, the NCEQE has developed a user-friendly booklet on complaints' procedure and has made submission of complaints possible online through the NCEQE's web-site.

## **Question 2**

We further noted that in cases where expert panels are employed for follow-up and case-based monitoring procedures their composition is not clearly defined. Could you please also clarify the composition of such panels?

### **NCEQE's response:**

The composition of the expert panel in case-based monitoring depends on the nature of the complaint. For example, if the complaint relates to the employment relations, it would be obligatory to include expert in the expert panel who has expertise in human resources management and possibly in labour law. The NCEQE makes sure that in both follow-up and case-based monitoring there is a student representative. The composition of the experts' panels for both types of monitoring are clearly defined in a guidebook on follow-up procedures and are accessible to stakeholders.

## **Question 3**

The panel reported that the student representative seat in the Accreditation Council has not been filled for a long time (ESG 3.1). Could you please specify the last time the seat in the agency's Accreditation Council was filled in by a student and how often that seat is vacant?

### **NCEQE's response:**

Last time this seat was filled on December 25, 2018 and has never been vacant since then. It has happened only once that the seat was vacant. Currently, there are student representatives in both Accreditation and Authorization Councils. Additionally, in response to ENQA's suggestion the NCEQE considers involving international experts in the Authorization and Accreditation Council for greater acceptance of the decisions made and trust in the processes. Since the working language of the Councils is Georgian, involvement of Georgian experts working internationally is being considered.

## **Question 4**

At the time of the review the agency was in the process of setting up a new Coordinating Council. Could you please clarify if the new Council is operational now and if so, could you specify if there was any change in the intended composition of the Council? (ESG 3.1)

### **NCEQE's response:**

The Coordinating Council is already operational. As a follow-up for the ENQA's recommendation related to the composition of the Coordinating Council, the NCEQE has ensured involvement of a student in its composition; the Council is an advisory body of the NCEQE contributing to the management and seeking to ensure the best interest of stakeholders in all types of management decisions.

Further, reflecting on ENQA's recommendation in relation to independence of the agency, the NCEQE is currently working on initiating the legislative changes that is going to shift the mandate of appointment and dismissal of the NCEQE's Director from the Minister and Education, Science, Culture and Sports to the

Coordinating Council based on transparent procedures. Discussions are also under way with the Coordinating Council to increase the role of the Council in the selection process of the Authorization and Accreditation Council members, together with the NCEQE. We are confident that these changes will be contributing to the enhancement of the independence of the NCEQE as well as improving governance of the agency.

#### **Question 5**

The panel reported that the information collected from NCEQE's external quality assurance activities is not done consistently or in a clear manner, but that the agency's current implementation of the Twinning Project (starting in 2019) addresses this issue.

Could you please provide more information on the development stage of your thematic analysis methodology and clarify how the agency intends to ensure its systematic implementation?

#### **NCEQE's response:**

The EU Twinning Project – 'Strengthening capacities for quality assurance and governance of qualifications' has already been launched. The project will be implemented by the NCEQE in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany (represented by DAAD) and Estonian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA). One of the activities of the project is supporting the development of the methodology for carrying out analytical and research activities by the NCEQE in a more consistent and streamlined manner. The methodology will include conducting thematic analysis, writing comprehensive reports on these and their dissemination procedure. Additionally, with the support of the Erasmus+ Georgia National Office a research project aiming to assess the results of implementation of the revised QA system we will enable us to further improve the QA procedures within the framework of the Twinning project.

Besides, the NCEQE as a member of the Bologna Follow-up Group has received EACEA funding for two projects within the framework of Erasmus+ Programme: Key Action 3 – Support to the implementation of EHEA reforms. Both projects aim at improving application of EAHEA tools on enhancing quality, supporting mobility and internationalization of the accreditation agencies. Through these projects NCEQE will be benefiting from transnational peer support activities like peer learning, to address ENQA recommendations in relation to ensuring consistent implementation of quality assurance activities and development of thematic analysis methodology.

The NCEQE has also secured funding for implementing 'Study in Georgia' Project. One of the sub-programmes of the project on 'Higher Education Quality Assurance and Internationalization' involves funding of the Quality School. The Quality School is a newly-established unit at the NCEQE which aims to enhance capacities of all parties (including experts) involved in the quality assurance processes, as well as for coherent implementation of QA mechanisms. The Quality School as a structural unit will provide leadership, best practices, and thematic analysis on systems level, research as well as support for the NCEQE's institutional development.

We believe that abovementioned activities and the projects will contribute to the consistent collection of information from the NCEQE's external quality assurance mechanisms and improving our practices in general.