ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AUTHORIZATION MECHANISM FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Analysis of Development and Implementation of the Authorization Mechanism for Higher Education Institutions

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Contents

Abbreviations

AA – Association Agreement

BA –Bachelor's Programme

EHEA – European Higher Education Area

ENQA – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EQAR – European Quality Assurance Register

ESG – Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area

EU – European Union

GEL – Georgian Gel

HEI – Higher Education Institution

IQA – Internal Quality Assurance

MA – Master's Programme

MD – Medical Doctor's Programme

NCEA –National Center for Educational Accreditation

NCEQE – National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement

PDCA – Plan, Do, Check, Act

PhD – Doctoral Programme

QA – Quality Assurance

SER – Self-Evaluation Report

WFME – World Federation of Medical Education

Executive Summary

In December 2015 the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia initiated and in February 2016 the Parliament of Georgia approved the legislative changes supporting the further transformation of the quality assurance system for higher education. In 2017 the new system of higher education quality assurance (standards and procedures for external institutional evaluation - authorization) has been introduced and piloted. Along with the key findings observed during the pilot phase, adjustments were made to the new quality assurance mechanisms and approved in 2018. Compliance analysis of standards and procedures for authorization of higher education institutions (HEIs) performed by international experts funded by Council of Europe and later, external evaluation performed by European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) showed that the new quality assurance mechanisms were compatible with Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015)[1], thus met the EHEA and Georgia-EU Association Agreement (AA) requirements towards Higher Education. The system changes were carried out in line with the reform agenda defined by the National Strategy on Education and Science 2017-2021 approved by the Georgian Government (PM Act 533).

This research is designed to evaluate the process of implementing the new system of external quality assurance (QA) of higher education institutions in Georgia and the impact of implementation at national and international levels. The study discusses the QA systems development and transformation starting from 2004 and provides the detailed analysis of the QA reform on institutional level (authorization of HEI) implemented during 2015-2018. The study explores the 4 key dimensions - policy and legislative base supporting the QA system; expectations and preparation of stakeholders; implementation process including outcomes of self-assessment conducted by the HEIs, authorization experts' evaluation reports, attitude of the various stakeholders, decisions-making process by the authorization council and their consistency; main outcomes of the higher education QA system reforms and challenges.

The research analysis includes the main developments that the HEIs have made during the authorization process, changes in the practices of authorization evaluation process, analysis of the decision-making by the authorization council and related key statistical data. The reflection of the stakeholders to what extent their expectations towards the system change were met and their attitude towards the sustainability of the system is also discussed in the research paper.

The research was conducted by the team of Higher Education Reform Experts under the funding of Erasmus + office in Georgia during the December 2018 - June 2019. The desk study for evaluation of legislative base, self-evaluation reports of 20 HEIs and experts' evaluation reports of 27 HEIs has been conducted. Along with the desk research the interview results with policy decision-makers (Minister of Education and Science, directors of the National Center for Education Quality Enhancement-NCEQE) and the rectors of HEIs, focus groups with expert pool members, HEI QA office representatives, NCEQE authorization division and authorization council representative have been used for the analysis (6 focus groups and 10 in-depth interviews conducted).

The current report is structured in a way to present the analysis, key findings and respective recommendations for each key dimension that shall be applicable to different stakeholders.

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[1] The ESG is a set of standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance in European Higher Education area, which is adopted by the Ministers responsible for higher education.

Policy and legislative base supporting the QA system

Stakeholders participating in the research including rectors of HEIs agree that the new system, authorization standards and procedures met their expectations as they comply with the requirements of the Bologna process and ESG 2015, are comprehensive and most importantly, relevant. HEIs do not suggest changes in the legislation governing the authorization process. Instead, they suggested changes that relate to the legislation governing state procurement, state funding for HEIs, property management and taxation, arguing that those changes will make them more flexible and thus responsive to the requirements of the new standards.

Other changes in the legal acts discussed and suggested during the research by the stakeholders were related to the extension of the 6 months evaluation process timeline to a minimum 1 year, development of a separate approach for authorization of new HEIs, and development of a separate legal act that includes more specified requirements regarding the affiliation of the academic staff. HEI representatives, authorization experts and council members also discussed the issue of different interpretations of the standards and procedures by different parties involved in the process. However, no specific legislative changes were proposed for narrowing the room for multiple interpretation. Instead, the need for a well-designed authorization guidebook and more capacity building for experts and HEIs were suggested.

All stakeholders agree that inconsistency in the attitude of policy decision-makers towards the reform is damaging. As the leadership of NCEQE and the Ministers of Education have changed three times during the reform, incoherence of the main messages and attitudes of policymakers in the reform making process has been noted. Particularly, stakeholders refer to the developments that took place in 2018 when the new system was fully operational and application for ENQA membership filed and processed. The message made by the Minister during public speeches regarding the need for system change and attempt from the Parliament of Georgia to stop the ongoing evaluation process of HEIs were assessed as inconsistent and destructive from the research respondents. The HEI representatives and other stakeholders strongly suggest that reform shall be politically supported in order to reach its goals and guarantee the equal and fair attitude to the institutions.

Expectations and preparation of stakeholders

From the HEI perspective the main purposes of the reform are ensuring the compliance of the system with the European requirements and shifting it to the development-oriented approach. It was underlined by all stakeholders that participation of foreign experts in the authorization process is a significant step forwards to fix the issue with independent and unbiased evaluation. Although the system became more flexible and development oriented, considering the increased requirements, stakeholders underlined that the preparation for the evaluation was time consuming, intensive and costly process and expected that this would result in decreased number of HEIs and/or programmes. Considering the past experience, when preparation for evaluation was the sole responsibility of the QA office, making a joint effort towards meeting the new authorization requirements was a real challenge for the HEIs' leaderships. Overall, HEIs admit that working on self-evaluation for the authorization was a good stocktaking exercise with a high level of participation that increased the internal accountability between various structural units and "people started to work together". This in turn facilitated the establishment of "Quality Culture".

To summarize, the main practices and activities carried out by the HEIs during the preparation and self-evaluation process, were development of the self-evaluation teams, arranging the documentations, improving the internal regulations and informing the HEI community about them, clarification of the functions and responsibilities of various structural units, decreased number of education programmes, provision of new services, such as student services, career development offices, improvement of library resources, etc. The preparation process to the NCEQE's end mostly related to developing various templates, instructions, guidelines, provision of training and capacity building activities for newly selected evaluation experts, HEIs representatives and authorization council members. Challenging exercise for the HEIs during preparation phase was related to the provision of the data in the retrospect for estimation of various rates, ratios and benchmarks for the past authorization period. Lack of methodological knowledge and experience to provide the data such as employment rates of graduates, student drop-out rates, staff retention rate, actual and target performance benchmarks was also revealed. Taking into consideration the time and financial resource constraints, the most difficult area for the HEIs to prepare and comply with the requirements was related to the physical infrastructure (building, labs, equipment, etc.), while the difficulties in the evaluation of the research components referred to the lack of experience of science management and evaluation existing in the country in general.

Implementation process

The evaluation process was analyzed from different stakeholders' point of views. The feedback was both, positive and negative that was important for generating a realistic big picture. The common challenges observed in the implementation process were related to limited timeline allocated to the evaluation process including time for preparation for HEIs, the late provision of guideline for self-evaluation, existing limited human resources of the division at NCEQE, quality of translation of the documents in English, the "small country syndrome" generating doubts about the objectivity of evaluations and decisions, decision-making process with emphasis on changes made HEIs' compliance levels and certain technical issues such as delayed implementation of the Quality Management System.

All stakeholders agree that involvement of international experts in the evaluation that has significantly increased the trust towards the process and competence of international experts to lead and handle the evaluation process was notable. The parties state that the qualification of Georgian experts has been notably increased and the expert panels' overall performance during the site visit was very professional. However, in a few cases HEIs have complained about the attitude of experts' panels that resulted in creating a tense atmosphere. The different levels of experts' preparedness was also noted that emphasizes the need for better planning and continuous capacity building of the experts including international ones.

The new setup of the evaluation process of HEI by the experts' panel, which includes desk study of the HEI's documents prior to the site-visit and site visit focusing on meeting and interviewing HEI's stakeholders is considered to be a good combination of evaluation procedure that allows triangulation of the information and development of evaluation report.

Overall, the process and results of evaluations showed that according to the compliance levels defined by the authorization experts, the most challenging standards to comply with fully or substantially were: (2) Organizational structure and management; (4) Staff management; (6) Research, development and/or other creative activities; (7)

Material, information and financial resources. Some of the most challenging standard components to fully comply with requirements were (2.1) Organizational structure and management, (3.2) Structure and content of educational programmes, (4.1) Staff management, (6.1) Research Activities, (6.2) Research support and internationalisation and all the four components of the standard 7 – Material, information and financial resources.

Main outcomes of the higher education QA system reforms and challenges

Research respondents, particularly HEIs, state that the authorization process met their expectations, but not the outcomes of the evaluations. Significance of the strong and continuous support from different stakeholders, including the political support has been stressed for consistent and rigorous implementation of the QA mechanisms, to eventually translate it into enhancement of higher education quality in the country.

Considered that the PDCA cycle in most of the HEIs was not closed and the results were not sufficiently addressed, the first cycle of authorization evaluated the planned strategies, resources, processes etc., thus demonstrated a baseline picture of HEIs' performance. It is essential that the follow up mechanisms are also implemented in a rigorous and consistent manner.

Outcomes can be viewed at institutional, as well as at system levels. The research results show that the preparation for the authorization process has been an important trigger to initiate various changes at HEIs. It is important to note that according to the HEIs representatives the preparation for authorization required material revisions on strategic and operational levels. One of the most notable changes across all the HEIs has been development of student services, improving the performance or creating new units for students' support, career development and student counselling. Increasing the internal research budget, developing internal research funding mechanisms and creating research support units and thus improving the research performance is also a positive outcome of the implementation of the new QA system.

One of the visible examples of the changes implemented by HEIs through maintaining QA mechanisms is the reduced number of educational programmes. 27 HEIs that were authorized during 2018 cancelled 253 programmes prior to authorization. After establishing the new authorization mechanism, the number of HEIs has also decreased by 12.

System level changes were based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in EHEA (ESG 2015). With the changes implemented at the system level, Georgia moved towards harmonization of the QA system with the European requirements. As a result of the system level changes, NCEQE has gained the recognition of the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME), has become a member of ENQA and registered in European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), thus has addressed the commitments towards the EHEA and Georgia-EU Association Agreement.

1. Introduction

In line with the key commitments of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the National Strategy for Education and Science, Georgia has initiated a higher education quality assurance system reform in 2015 and finalized its full-scale implementation in 2018. Thus, this study explores the transformation of the higher education quality assurance system in Georgia, consistency of its implementation and main outcomes on institutional, national and international level. The main purposes of the reform can be formulated as following: (1) Enhancing the educational quality at Georgian higher education institutions and promoting student-centeredness; (2) Strengthening the development-oriented and outcome-based function of QA; (3) ensuring the compatibility of the Georgian higher education quality assurance system with the requirements of the ESG 2015 and thus meeting the EHEA and Georgia-EU Association Agreement requirements.

Initially, as part of the major higher education system reform, Georgia started to establish a higher education quality assurance system in 2005, when the institutional accreditation mechanism has defined the basic quantitative, input-based parameters that HEI had to conform to be allowed to operate as a HEI and to issue the state recognized diploma. The system has been revised in 2010 and as a result, two external quality assurance mechanisms: Authorization of Educational Institutions and Accreditation of Educational Programmes were proposed. The revised QA mechanism was designed to evaluate institutional performance of a HEI and each individual programme in more depth. However, the system still focused on the assessment of input rather than outcome, was limited in terms of the scope of assessment of institutional or programme performance and the rigidity of the decision-making procedure did not support the developmental function of the quality assessment. At the reform preparation phase, since the national quality assurance agency - National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement has conducted several system evaluations with the participation of international experts, which created a ground for system change. The main focus of the higher education quality assurance reform was development and implementation of the QA standards and procedures that would allow comprehensive evaluation of resources, processes and outcomes of the HEIs, transform the system to outcome-based and development-oriented approach in line with the ESG 2015.

In this regard, NCEQE, as an implementer of the higher education QA system in the country, designed and developed new standards and procedures of external quality assurance in accordance with the related legislative amendments approved by the Parliament of Georgia in February 2016. Further legal amendments supporting the implementation of the new QA system, including provision of additional period for preparation and transition to a new system, was initiated by NCEQE in the "Law on Higher Education" and in the "Law on Educational Quality Enhancement"; The evaluation report on the compatibility of new standards and procedures for external institutional and programme evaluation with ESG 2015 and final recommendations were produced by the Council of Europe experts. NCEQE provided HEIs with various capacity building activities; conducted an open competition to recruit and train evaluation experts, which along with the higher education professionals also included students, employers and international experts. Approval of new standards and procedures (2017) was followed by the pilot external institutional and programme evaluations organized by NCEQE and supported by the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia. The results of the pilot evaluations have been used to final refinement of QA standards and procedures prior to full scale implementation of the reformed system in 2018. During the first year of its implementation 27 HEIs have been evaluated for authorization purposes. Thus, this study examines the implementation of the revised authorization mechanism based on the practice of evaluation of those 27 HEIs.

2. History of the Higher Education Quality Assurance System in Georgia

Enhancement of the higher education quality at European higher education institutions and promotion of compatibility of higher education systems across the European countries has been one of the main purposes of the Bologna Process and creation of the European Higher Education Area. As a result of the major reforms of higher education system that started in 2004, Georgia joined the Bologna process in 2005. As part of the reform, the new law on higher education was adopted, which took into account the major Bologna process requirements. Specifically, a three-cycle structure of higher education, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, and the higher education quality assurance system were introduced. Institutional accreditation has been developed and established as a mandatory QA procedure to define the status of a HEI. The National Center for Educational Accreditation (NCEA) was established as a national body to carry out the institutional accreditation. The introduction of institutional accreditation as an external quality assurance mechanism was part of the country's policy agenda to modernize national higher education system. For this purpose the basic quantitative, input-based parameters were determined that HEI had to conform with to be allowed to operate as a HEI and to issue the state recognized diploma (NCEQE, 2018a) After the finalization of the first cycle of institutional accreditation the number of HEIs has decreased from up to 300 HEIs operating in 2004 to 64 by the end of 2010.

In 2010 the existing QA system has been revised and the new law on Educational Quality Enhancement was adopted. The Law on Educational Quality Enhancement established the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement as a legal successor of the NCEA. According to the new law the institutional accreditation has been replaced by the authorization of HEIs, which was introduced as a mandatory institutional evaluation procedure for all HEIs to be allowed to operate in the country and issue the state recognized Diploma. At the same time, accreditation of the educational programmes has been introduced as the mandatory programme evaluation procedure of the Doctoral programmes and the programmes of regulated professions (Medicine, Law, Teacher Education, Veterinary, and Maritime). Authorization of educational institutions was conducted against three standards: (1) Educational Programmes; (2) Material Resources and (3) Human Resources. As for the programme accreditation standards they addressed the following areas: (1) Educational programme objectives, learning outcomes, and their compliance with the program; (2) Teaching methodology and organization, adequate evaluation of mastering the programme; (3) Student achievements and individual work with them; (4) Providing teaching resources, (5) Teaching quality enhancement opportunities. Although the accreditation is not mandatory for all programmes, due to the policy that the voucher state funding follows only to the students that enroll on accredited educational programmes, most of the programmes are accredited (between 90-98 % at different times) (NCEQE, 2018a).

The revised QA mechanisms were designed to evaluate the educational quality provided by higher education institutions and each individual programme in more depth. However, the standards and evaluation procedure were input-based and the scope of the standards did not cover all the criteria indicated in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in EHEA (ESG 2015). Moreover, the rigidity of the decision-making process that allowed only binary decision of granting and denying accreditation and authorization did not support the developmental function of the quality assessment (NCEQE, 2018a).

Main purposes of the higher education quality assurance system reform

NCEQE planned and initiated the reform of the QA system in 2015 aiming to start the next cycle of quality assessment with the revised standards and procedures. The main purposes of the higher education quality assurance system reform can be identified as following:

(1) Enhancing the quality of education at Georgian higher education institutions – although Georgian higher education system has been reforming since 2004, the teaching and learning process and resources need significant modernization to meet the challenges of social, economic and technological developments. The labour market representatives complain about the mismatch of the education and skills provided by HEIs and changing and innovative labour market (WorldBank, 2013), while the 30% of all unemployed have higher education degree (Geostat, 2018). Thus, enhancing the educational quality, its compliance with labour market requirements, and promoting student-centered teaching and learning have been one of the main priorities of the reform.

(2) Strengthening the development-oriented and outcome-based function of external quality assurance mechanisms – Georgia has been implementing the higher education quality assurance system since 2006. At the initial stage, the first cycle of quality assessment significantly improved the higher education landscape, however, implementation of the QA mechanisms has been characterized with various malfunctions. Specifically, the standards were focusing on assessment of input, prone to multiple and inconsistent interpretations, decision-making procedure was rigid, ambiguous and the scope of the authorization standards did not cover all institutional aspects of HEIs. Thus, the system could no longer stimulate institutional development of HEIs and enhancement of educational quality (Darchia, 2014). Hence, revision of QA standards and procedure and promoting its developmental function has been one of the cornerstones of the reform.

(3) Ensuring the compliance of the Georgian higher education quality assurance system with the requirements of Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) and thus meeting the EHEA and Georgia-EU Association Agreement requirements. Article 16 of the AA and its sections 358 and 359 state the requirement for modernization of higher education system as per Bologna recommendations and promotion of implementation of lifelong learning principles. Medium term goals of the Association Agenda between the European Union and Georgia 2017-2020 underlines Georgia's integration in European higher education area in the context of its membership of the Bologna process, including through strengthening the independent, development-oriented quality assurance system. In this regard, harmonization of the quality assurance mechanisms with the ESG 2015 and becoming a member of the ENQA has been one of the goals of the reform.

In response to the above-mentioned goals, NCEQE initiated revision of standards and procedures of authorization of HEIs. The revision was based on the results of the previous system analysis and made reference on ESG 2015. The revision process was conducted by wide participation of HEI representatives, national and international experts. Specifically, seven main institutional evaluation standards were outlined: 1) Mission and strategic development of higher educational institution; 2) Organizational structure and management of the higher educational institution; 3) Educational programmes; 4) Personnel of the higher educational institution; 5) Students and their support activities; 6) Research, development and/or other creative activities; 7) Material, Information and Financial resources. For each of them relevant evaluation criteria and indicators have been developed. Before the full-scale implementation of the revised authorization mechanism, NCEQE conducted the pilot evaluations of HEIs, provided capacity building activities for HEIs and experts. Transition period has been defined by the relevant national legislation and the authorization term of the HEIs has been extended to one year. New pool of experts has been developed, which

included higher education professionals, students, employer representatives and international experts. Participation of the international expert as the chair of the expert panel has become mandatory. The time allocated for the evaluation procedure has been extended from 3 to 6 months. The format of the evaluation process and site-visits have been modified and along with the document analysis, the results and evidences gained through the meetings and interviews with HEI stakeholders have been emphasized as the evidence for making the judgments of HEIs compliance with the QA standards. The binary evaluation (compliance/non-compliance) and decision-making (granting or refusal of authorization) system, has been replaced with the four level evaluation scheme and the flexible decision-making procedure, as the three additional options for authorization decisions have been established: authorization with a submission of the one year progress report, authorization with the mandatory monitoring and authorization with the limitation of the student enrollment. The experts' evaluation reports have become publicly available. As a result of the finalization of the regulatory framework of the revised system the NCEQE has started full scale implementation of the authorization procedure at Georgian HEIs from February 2018 and submitted the application for ENQA membership.

3. Research Methodology

The study explores 4 key dimensions of the implementation of the higher education authorization mechanism in Georgia. Specifically, it reviews the following areas:

1. **Policy and legislative changes related to the QA system** - in this regard the legislative changes, revised and newly developed sub-legal acts have been analyzed.

2. **Expectations and preparation of stakeholders** – To analyze the expectations of various stakeholders towards the higher education QA system reform and to examine the preparation stage of the reform implementation from the side of the NCEQE and higher education institutions, interviews have been conducted with the directors of the NCEQE (at different times of the reform initiation and implementation) and rectors of the HEIs, focus groups have been conducted with the representatives of the higher education authorization division of NCEQE, representatives of the QA offices and the staff coordinating the self-assessment process at HEIs, members of the authorization expert pool. To analyze the attitudes of policy makers towards the purpose and implementation of the higher education quality assurance system reform, in-depth interviews with three previous ministers of education were planned, however only one (Mikheil Batiashvili) of them agreed to participate in the research. Thus, the public announcements made by the ministers related to the higher education quality assurance reform have been analyzed.

3. Analysis of the implementation process consists of four elements:

   o **It explores the outcomes of self-assessment conducted by the HEIs according to the new authorization standards**. For this purpose, the self-evaluation reports (SER) of the HEIs have been analyzed. All HEIs that went through the authorization process in 2018 were asked for permission to use their SERs for the analysis. Out of the 27 institutions 20 have agreed (Annex 1), thus, overall 20 SER have been analyzed. Based on the predefined rubrics (Annex 2), the quality of SERs, whether they are self-reflective, analytical and provide valid quantitative data and benchmarks was observed.

Based on the content analysis of the SERs most challenging standards in terms of their comprehension and provision of the sufficient and relevant information have been observed. **SER analysis also discusses the main compliance and challenging areas of HEIs based on the analysis of the "Strengths" and "Areas for improvement" related to each standard identified by the HEIs in their SERs**. The analysis of the quantitative data and benchmarks indicated in the SERs has also been made.

o Based on the analysis of the authorization experts' evaluation reports, the study explores **the main areas that the HEIs could comply with, the main areas where the recommendations and suggestions were made.** Cross-cutting analysis of the self-evaluation and evaluation experts' reports analysis has been made to identify similarities and differences of internal and external assessment results. Moreover, the interview results with the rectors and focus group representatives were used to analyze whether the recommendations and suggestions made by experts' panel were useful and adequate and reflected institutions' main challenges and strengths. It also reviews the outcomes of the experts' evaluations, based on the analysis of the compliance levels of HEIs with each standard component, as they have been indicated in the expert's evaluation reports.

o The study also analyzes the **implementation of the authorization process,** which includes the attitude of the various stakeholders towards application process, evaluation procedure and format, preparation and composition of the experts' panels, coordination and organization of the process by the NCEQE, authorization standards, the evaluation scheme and understanding of the "fitness to the purpose" evaluation principle. The analysis is based on the in-depth interviews and focus groups conducted with the HEI, NCEQE authorization division, authorization experts and authorization council representatives.

o The research team observed the **decision-making process by the authorization council and their consistency.** The analysis is based on the outcomes of the authorization council's decision and the interviews and focus groups with the HEI, NCEQE authorization division, authorization experts and authorization council representatives.

4. The research team also analyzed **the main outcomes of the higher education QA system reform at the national and international level.** The analysis includes the main developments that the HEIs have made during the preparations for the authorization process, the main changes in the practices of authorization evaluation process, analysis of the decision-making by the authorization council, related key statistical data and progress made towards meeting the EHEA and AA commitments.

5. At the end, **the reflection of the stakeholders on extent of meeting their expectations towards the system change was analyzed**. The team examined their attitude towards the sustainability of the system implementation and its further development. For the analysis the interview results with NCEQE directors, the rectors of HEIs, focus groups with expert pool members, HEI QA office representatives, NCEQE authorization division representatives and authorization council representatives have been used.

The HEI (that went through the authorization process during 2018) representatives participating in the interviews and focus groups were selected to ensure the representation of the public, private and regional HEIs. It should be noted that representatives of the HEIs that lost authorization did not participate in the interviews and focus groups,

thus their experience is not reflected in this paper. All the representatives of the authorization division and authorization council members were invited to the focus groups, however not all of them were available to participate (List of participants of the interviews and the focus groups are indicated in Annex 3). The interviews and focus groups have been conducted during the April-June 2019.

4. Overview of the Implemented Amendments to the Legislative and Sub-legislative Acts

Initial changes supporting the QA system reform were initiated in the Law of Georgia on Higher Education and Law of Georgia on Educational Quality Enhancement in late 2015 and approved in February 2016. Legislation changes were followed by developing the relevant sub-legislative acts and implementation of pilot institutional evaluations in 2017. System-wide implementation of the revised quality assurance standards and procedures at Georgian HEIs took place in 2018.

Three standards for external institutional evaluation of the higher education institutions (Human Resources, Material Resources and Educational Programmes) have been replaced by the following seven standards:

a) Mission and Strategic Development of Higher Educational Institution; b) Organizational Structure and Management of the Higher Educational Institution; c) Educational Programmes; d) Personnel of the Higher Educational Institution; e) Students and their Support Services; f) Research, Development and/or Other Creative Activities; g) Material, Information and Financial Resources (Law on Educational Quality Enhancement, 2010, amendment 2016, Chapter 2, Article 7; Law on Higher Education, 2004, amendment 2016, Chapter 8, Article 56).

The detailed description, evaluation criteria and indicators of authorization standards have been determined by the Charter of Authorization. The revised standards considered standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance of the ESG 2015 (Part 1). As a result, the revised standards, evaluation criteria and indicators, in addition to the assessment of the relevant resources, required demonstration of the performance and outcomes of the HEIs.

The legal arrangements provided the transitional period for implementing the changes. Specifically, the term of authorization was extended from 5 to 6 years (Law on Higher Education, 2004, amendment 2016, Chapter 8, Article 56). To implement new standards the higher education institutions, the authorization decision of which was made in 2011-2015, were given a one-year extension to the 5-year authorization term. Accordingly, before January 01, 2018, the examination of the implementation of authorization conditions by the HEIs were conducted according to the old standards. Starting from January 01, 2018, the monitoring in the HEIs have been conducted according to the new standards.

Changes to the main laws described above created the grounds for developing relevant bylaws and instructions including new standards for institutional evaluation, procedures, scheme for making decisions on authorization, service fees, etc. Guiding documents for new system implementation, such as a Guidebook of Authorization of HEIs, Rule of Authorization and Accreditation Experts' Selection and Activities and Termination of Membership of Experts' Pool, Self-Evaluation Report (SER) template for authorization of HEIs, Experts' Evaluation forms have also been developed.

4.1 Authorization Charter

For the first time the national legislation on higher education quality assurance makes a reference on specific international documents that represents the basis for changes implemented in the QA system. According to the Charter of Authorization of Educational Institutions (Charter of Authorization of Educational Institutions, 2010, amendment 2017, Article 2, section 5[1]), the higher education institution's authorization process considers the European Union "Higher Education Modernization Agenda" and recommendations elaborated in the scope of Bologna process, including requirements of Quality Assurance Standards and Guidelines for European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015). Thus, the core of the system changes was to improve the quality of higher education by responding to obligations taken by the country under international agreements specified above. The amendments in the Charter also specified the purpose of the authorization mechanism as following "The purpose of authorization is an institutional assessment of the institution and to determine compliance with the authorization standards. The authorization assessment is conducted by the authorization experts' team and is based on the analysis of the information received from the institution's self-assessment and authorization visit". The Charter also emphasizes that the authorization process shall be reliable, consistent and the evaluation results should be published. To bring the national higher education QA system in compliance with the ESG 2015 and meet the above-mentioned purpose the amendments of the Authorization Charter significantly modified the QA standards and procedures.

4.1.1 Overview of the Key Issues Indicated in the Authorization Standards

The introduction of the authorization standards underlines that the standards aim to evaluate the institution's performance in a comprehensive manner, including its resources, regulations, carried out, current and planned activities, results achieved and feasibility to achieve intended goals (Charter of Authorization of Educational Institutions, 2010, amendment 2017, Annex 3). The main areas of authorization standards and standard components consider the requirements of the Standards and Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance of the ESG 2015 (Part 1) and national specifications of the system.

Authorization Standards	Standard components
1. **Mission and strategic development of HEI**	1.1 Mission of HEI
	1.2 Strategic development
2. **Organisational structure and management of HEI**	2.1 Organisational structure and management
	2.2 Internal quality assurance mechanisms
	2.3 Observing principles of ethics and integrity
3. **Educational Programmes**	3.1 Design and development of educational programmes
	3.2 Structure and content of educational programmes
	3.3 Assessment of learning outcomes
4. **Staff of the HEI**	4.1 Staff management
	4.2 Academic/Scientific and invited staff workload
5. **Students and their support services**	5.1 The Rule for obtaining and changing student status, the recognition of education, and student rights
	5.2 Student support services

6. Research, development and/or other creative work	6.1 Research activities
	6.2 Research support and internationalisation
	6.3 Evaluation of research activities
7. Material, information and financial resources	7.1 Material resources
	7.2 Library resources
	7.3 Information resources
	7.4 Financial resources

The revised Authorization Charter defines the detailed descriptions, evaluation criteria and indicators/evidences for each authorization standard and standard component. While the description section of each standard component gives a general concept of the standard requirement, the evaluation criteria specifies how this requirement shall be performed and the section of indicators/evidence specifies how the outcomes shall be demonstrated.

According to the ESG 2015, responding to the institutional mission is the key principle of assessing the quality of higher education and that the institutional performance should be fit with its purpose (ENQA, 2015, p. 7). This principle is underlined in the various sections of the ESG 2015 (Scope and concepts, ESG 2015, Standards 1.2; 1.4; 1.6; 1.7; 1.9; 2.2). Thus, the definition and consideration of the mission statement (authorization standard component 1.1) has become one of the key components of the authorization evaluation.

The first and second standards of authorization underscore the institutional arrangements and mechanisms, such as strategic planning, organizational management, internal quality assurance and safeguarding academic integrity, which aim to assess organizational performance of HEIs. According to the Charter as a result of the authorization process the quota of students that the institution can enroll during the authorization term is defined as a result of the authorization evaluation. In this regard, the standard component for internal quality assurance (2.2) requires the HEIs to consider their organizational, material and human resources and elaboration of the mechanism to define the number of students and enrollment plan for the authorization term.

The introduction of the authorization standards states that its goal is to promote student-centered learning environment. This approach in terms of students' engagement in the learning process is best reflected in the components of Standard 3 (Educational Programmes). The standard components emphasize students' role and feedback in designing and development of educational programmes. Programme structure and content should ensure achievement of learning outcomes for which relevant teaching and learning methods should be used. The standard component 3.2 puts emphasis on offering Individualized education programmes with appropriate formats and conditions of teaching-learning and assessment. Component 3.3 requires that a HEI should have legally compliant, transparent and fair system of learning outcomes assessment, which promotes the improvement of students' academic performance. Furthermore, a HEI should have an appeal mechanism in place. The information regarding the programmes should be publicly accessible on HEI's website. The standard component 5.2 underlines that a HEI should provide relevant consultation for students to support them plan their educational process and improve their academic performance. Besides, all standard components require consideration of students' interests and opinions in provision of the teaching and learning environment.

Separate standard (Standard 4 of Annex 3 of the Authorization Charter) is dedicated to the evaluation of the HEI's staff management. Taking into consideration that the HEI's personnel plays a key role in determining the fitness of the institution with the standards of authorization, it is essential to have complete and accurate information on the

personnel. The authorization standard on "Staff of HEI" has defined the requirement for affiliation of the academic staff. As it is described in Annex 3 (Authorization Standards) of the Authorization Charter, affiliation of academic staff implies formal written agreement between the HEI and each academic staff, where each academic staff member defines his/her affiliation with one HEI only. Moreover, affiliation implies that affiliated academic staff participate in social development and knowledge distribution processes under the name of this HEI. Affiliated staff is considered to be the institution's core academic staff as they perform major educational, research/scientific/creative/performing activities at this HEI, and activity results are credited to the affiliated HEI. Affiliated staff shall participate in the decision-making processes at HEI, advise students and supervise their research/scientific/creative/performing activities.

It is important to note that a new database for tracking the HEIs' staff has been developed by NCEQE and Education Management Information System (EMIS) and users of the database are NCEQE and HEIs, with HEI inputting the personnel data and NCEQE preserving and monitoring the database. The database for the personnel became part of the official registry of HEIs. Compared with the information in the old database the new data for personnel requires provision of complete and accurate information on HEI staff (academic, administrative, scientific), occupation, level of effort and affiliation.

Evaluation of the research, development and/or creative work goes beyond the scope of the European Standards and Guidelines of Internal Quality Assurance (Part 1). However, according to the Georgian legislation, the type of the status of HEI, whether it is a university, a teaching university or a college, depends on the scope of the research activities implemented by the HEIs. Thus, authorization also evaluates the fitness of the research activities of HEIs towards their status and the mission. The standard mainly focuses on provision of the mechanisms that support development of the research activities at the HEIs and monitoring and evaluation of the research performance. In certain areas, the description and evaluation criteria of standard components specifies the requirements that are only applicable for universities. For example, internationalisation of research, development and creative activities are only required for university, while it is considered to be a good practice for teaching universities or colleges.

The seventh standard on material, information and financial resources defined the main requirements related to the infrastructure and the resources that ensure appropriate teaching and learning environment. The standards specified the requirements related to the safety of the HEI. Separate standard component (7.2) has been defined to describe the requirements for the library resources that would not only focus on the available literature and resources at the library, but also the service provided by the library.

It is important to highlight the new requirement of the standards of authorization related to the institution's system of accountability, financial management and control (Charter of Authorization of Educational Institutions, 2010, amendment 2017, Annex 3, standard 7, component 7.4). Fulfillment of this requirement contributes to increasing institution's transparency and reliability in terms of financial management. Making audited financial statements public is a real step forward in terms of accountability to the society.

The implementation of the authorization standards and attitudes of various stakeholders is further discussed in Section 6 of this paper.

4.1.2 Overview of the Main Amendments in the Authorization Procedure

The stages of authorization process are defined by the Charter as following (Charter of Authorization of Educational Institutions, 2010, Amendment 2017, Annex 2):

- Submission of self-evaluation report by HEI (application)
- Recognition of institution as applicant for authorization
- Creation of expert panel
- Desk study of application
- Site visit (conducted according to the predefined and agreed agenda)
- Elaboration of draft report
- Submission of feedback by the institution on factual errors in draft report
- Elaboration of the final version of the report by the experts and submission to NCEQE
- Submission of application, expert evaluation report and the argumentative position submitted by the HEI, to the respective Authorization Council meeting with oral hearing of applicant institution and decision making
- Publication of decision and report on NCEQE website.

According to the amendments, the timeline for the authorization procedure has been extended from 90 to 180 calendar days from the date of status seeker recognition (Charter of Authorization of Educational Institutions, 2010, amendment 2017, Article 11). Timeline of different activities of the proceeding stages is defined by the Authorization Charter.

Self-evaluation and initiation of the authorization process

To initiate the authorization process the HEI prepares its self-evaluation report and with the enclosed annexes submits it to the NCEQE. The Self-Evaluation Report Templates are approved by the administrative legal acts of the director of the NCEQE and are published on the NCEQE's website[2.] The templates give the directions to the HEIs on how they should be completed. The templates also indicate the list of the information/documents that should be submitted as the annexes with the self-evaluation report. The purpose of offering the templates is to facilitate the HEI's self-assessment process and encourage them to reflect on their performance and be more analytical rather than descriptive.

After submission of the application, NCEQE checks the self-evaluation report and the enclosed documents to make sure that they are submitted in the accurate way. In case the self-evaluation form is not filled out completely and/or the documents are not submitted in full, the NCEQE informs the HEI about the existing gaps in the application. The NCEQE has the 3 business days to check the application. In case the application misses certain information, HEI is given from 5 to 15 business days to correct them. If HEI does not submit the revised application to the NCEQE within the timeframe defined, the relevant Order on the termination of the administrative proceeding will be issued.

Changing the format of evaluation process

The revised procedure of authorization has entirely changed the evaluation format. Before the changes the expert panel mainly focused on document analysis during the site visit and conducted brief meetings with the HEI representatives. According to the new procedure, experts are required to do the document analysis before the site

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[2]Self-Evaluation Report template for HEIs: https://eqe.ge/geo/static/461/HE-QA//

visit, while the site visit is entirely devoted to the meeting and interviews with all the stakeholders of the HEI, where the information received from the document analysis is triangulated.

At the end of the site-visit, the expert panel is expected to make a brief presentation related to the key findings of the evaluation. This intervention increases the transparency of the whole evaluation process and contributes to increasing the level of accountability of the stakeholders of the institution as well as parties of the evaluation process. This is a participatory process as a large audience of the institution receives the basic information obtained as a result of the evaluation process.

Composition of the expert's panel and ethical issues

New regulations impacted the composition of experts' panels. Administrative / academic staff and a **student** from other higher education institutions, an **international expert**, **employers** and persons with relevant qualification can also be included in the panels (Charter of Authorization of Educational Institutions, 2010, amendment 2017, Article 19). International experts participate in the evaluations as the chairs of the expert panels, or in case the HEI also implements the medical educational programmes, the expert's panel has international chair and a co-chair. The co-chair of the panel leads the evaluations of the institutional resources and arrangements related to the implementation of the medical programmes. Other than the Charter, the experts' conduct is regulated by the rules on experts' selection and activities, and termination of the membership of the expert pool (NCEQE, 2018b). This rule underscores the ethical issues of the expert's work that has been a prominent issue in the system and states:

- The expert is not authorized to provide consultation on behalf of the center on authorization and accreditation issues without the consent of NCEQE.

- The expert is not authorized to establish labor relationship with respective educational institution within a 1-year period after the completion of proceedings.

Participation of International experts in evaluation in turn required the bilingual procedure of evaluation to be conducted. Specific articles (Article 15) of Authorization Charter regulates the issues of translation. The NCEQE carries out the translation and bears the costs of translation while the HEI conducts quality control of the translation services and is authorized to inform the center regarding motivated remarks related to the translation within 10 calendar days after the receipt of the documentation.

Development of the experts' evaluation report

Stages such as elaboration of the draft report and submission of institutional feedback on it are completely new and aim at improving the transparency and enabling the parties engaged in the evaluation to clarify any arguable issues. This approach also reduces the risk of omitting the important pieces of information by the experts during the visit. In order the arguments and clarifications of the institution to be taken into consideration, such arguments shall be fact based and constitute factual errors. It is important to note that the institution's feedback and the final report delivered by the experts' panel shall be both discussed by the authorization council.

The evaluation reports are based on the scrutiny and evaluation of the HEI's self-evaluation report and enclosed documents, information and data collected during the site visit. In order to ensure consistency and clarity of the reports, NCEQE has developed and approved the authorization report template. According to the structure of the report, they should include a general overview of the educational institution, site visit and the quality of SER and the compliance of HEIs with the standards.

The core structure of the report should include analysis of compliance of the HEI with each standard component requirements, the evidence/indicators on which the analysis is based on, recommendations, suggestions, the best practices and selection of the relevant compliance level. The report templates give detailed instruction for completing each of these sections. It emphasizes the difference between the recommendations and suggestions, stating that the recommendations are the proposals that should be considered by the HEI to comply with the requirements, while the suggestions are non-binding statements for further development.

The expert's guidelines define the technical requirements for the evaluation reports, which imply that they should be comprehensive, clear and concise, fair, based on arguments and evidence, and the use of language should be appropriate for the intended reader. After receiving the draft evaluation report, NCEQE reviews it to ensure compliance of the report with the technical requirements and if there is a need for improvement, sends it back to the expert panel for revision. To ensure that the report does not include any factual error, HEIs are asked to give their feedback on the draft evaluation report.

Publishing the evaluation report and decision

The significant change that increased transparency and accountability of the authorization mechanism is that all the evaluation reports along with the decision and the council minutes are published on the NCEQE website (Charter of Authorization of Educational Institutions, 2010, amendment 2017, Article 24)[3].

Grading system for evaluation

In order to make external evaluation decisions development-oriented, a grading system of evaluation has been introduced. The four-level scale defined in the Charter enables the expert panel to determine whether the institution "Complies with the standard requirements," "substantially complies with the standard requirements", "Partially complies with the standard requirements," or "does not comply with the standard requirements". Meaning of each level is also defined in the Authorization Charter (Article 20[1]).

Decisions and follow up activities

Evaluation results in grading system is linked with decisions made by the authorization council and serves as a ground for the follow up actions to be carried out by HEIs as well as NCEQE.

According to the Authorization Charter (Article 25), the Authorization Council makes one of the three decisions:

- on granting the authorization
- on refusal of the authorization (for new HEIs)
- on cancellation of the authorization (for existing HEIs)

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[3] NCEQE has been registered in the EQAR in April 2019. This entails that the experts' evaluation reports of Georgian HEIs are also published on EQAR website: https://www.eqar.eu/register/agencies/agency/?id=59. This approach increases the accountability of national QA agencies and educational institutions towards relevant European institutions and partners.

Type of decision on granting the authorization can be made on the condition of restriction of enrollment of students to the higher education institutions. Maximum term of restriction determined by the Authorization Charter is 3 years.

As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, the revised QA system has introduced a more flexible and development-oriented approach of decision-making, rather than only positive or negative decisions, and it is mainly based on the compliance levels of HEI defined by the expert panel in the evaluation report. The rationale of possible authorization decision as it is defined in the Authorization Charter is the following:

Decisions and relevant follow-up procedures	Criteria for decision-making
The HEI is granted authorization	If all standards are compliant with the requirements and no more than one standard is substantially compliant with the requirements
The HEI is granted authorization, however the HEI shall submit the progress report to the NCEQE and the Authorization Council after 1 year	If more than one standard is substantially compliant with the requirements and all the other standards are found as compliant with requirements, or if no more than one of the standards (except standard 3 - educational programmes and standard 4 -staff of HEI) is found to be partially compliant with the requirements and none of the standards - as non-compliant with the requirements
The HEI is granted the authorization, however NCEQE shall carry out mandatory monitoring (including the expert's site-visit) in 2 years period to evaluate whether the recommendations indicated in the report have been considered	If more than one standard is partially compliant with the requirements except standard 3 - educational programmes and standard 4 -staff of HEI) and none of the standards are found as non-compliant with the requirements
The HEI is granted the authorization, however is not allowed to enroll students until the recommendations of the experts team are appropriately addressed	It no more than one component of a standard (except standard 3 - educational programmes and standard 4 -staff of HEI) is found as non-compliant with the requirements or if the standard 3 and/or 4 are partially compliant with the requirements
The HEI is denied to receive the authorization	If one of the components of standard 3 and 4 are non-compliance with the requirements or if more than one component of other standards is non-compliant with the requirements

(NCEQE, 2018a)

As a general follow up procedure, all HEIs are expected to submit the interim SER after three years from receiving the authorization.

To ensure the continuous development of education quality and the consideration of the external evaluation results by the HEIs, the NCEQE carries out follow-up monitoring procedure for educational institutions. The basis for the monitoring can be the decisions of the authorization councils and the recommendations indicated in the evaluation reports as they are described in the tables above.

<u>Pre-authorization visit</u>

New Charter of Authorization (Article 2) permits HEI status seeker request the preparatory visit not less than 3 months earlier before the submission of the authorization application. The preparatory visit is consultative in nature and concerns: planning and implementation of the self-assessment process, the authorization visit and explanation of authorization standards and procedures.

The institution is obliged to facilitate the implementation of the preparatory visit and preparation of the relevant protocol; it shall also assign the authorized person to sign the authorization process preparatory visit protocol on behalf of the institution.

<u>Fee of authorization</u>

The previous costing system provided fixed fees for external review services with differentiation between the university, teaching university and college and were GEL 12 000, GEL 20000 and GEL 25000 respectively. There was no estimation and explanation of arriving at above costs.

The revision of the authorization charter also addressed the costing system (Article 13) and the amount of authorization fee is calculated according to the expert team workload - man/days (minimum 20 and maximum 42 man/days). The number of man/days is determined by the criteria having relevant share in the overall assessment (100%) and set according to the content/quantity.

If a regulated academic higher educational programme in Medicine is indicated in the authorization application the salary and business trip (If necessary) costs of authorization experts with relevant qualifications will be added to the authorization fee - obtained by man/days multiplied by relevant coefficient.

If vocational educational programmes are indicated in the authorization application, the cost of obtaining the right to implement a vocational educational programme is added to the authorization fee. The fee amount is calculated based on the workload of the expert team - the number of man/days.

Other amounts to be considered in authorization fee calculation relates to the fee for adding an educational programme and fee for increased quota, where the fee amount is calculated based on the workload of the expert team the number of man/days, which is determined according to the number of programmes and student quotas requested.

5. Expectations and Preparation of Stakeholders towards the Higher Education QA System Reform

NCEQE started planning and preparation for revision of the higher education quality assurance system in 2014 with the analysis of the existing challenges of the system and discussions of the various models of higher education quality assurance. In this process both, international and local experts were participating and relevant system evaluation reports have been elaborated. The first official step towards the reform was made in late 2015 when relevant changes in national legislation were initiated. In February 2016 the parliament of Georgia approved the changes. Accordingly, the three main areas of authorization standards (Material resources, Educational programmes, Human resources), has been changed with the seven: 1. Mission and strategic development; 2. Organizational structure and management, 3.

Educational programmes; 4. Staff, 5. Students and their support activities, 6. Research, development and/or other creative activities, 7. Material, Information and Financial resources). After these changes, discussion and preparation of the reform went into active phase. Based on the official presentations and conferences[4] carried out by NCEQE during 2015-2017 it was declared that the main purpose of the reform was to transform the system from input based into outcome-based and development oriented approach, enhance the quality of higher education and ensure the compliance of the national QA system with the ESG 2015.

During the interviews and focus groups with the representatives of the NCEQE or the HEIs the following challenges of the previous QA system could be identified:

- Reputation of the NCEQE – on the one hand, the authorization has been perceived as the state control mechanism, rather than the developmental instrument, while on the other hand, there was a lack of trust and transparency towards the implementation of the evaluation processes and qualification of authorization experts.

- Malfunction of the authorization mechanism – the standards were ambiguous, prone to multiple interpretations and were focusing on complying basic formal requirements. Thus, the actual performance of the HEIs could not be evaluated.

As the leadership of the of NCEQE and the Ministers of Education have changed three times during the reform, it is important to observe the coherence of the main messages of policymakers in the reform making process. The main messages made by the Minister Alexander Jejelava (2016-2017) were focusing on the importance of compliance of the national QA system with the European standards, while the national specification of the system should have been considered in the reform. Minister Jejelava also highlighted that the new system would promote development of the educational quality at HEIs[5]. The Minister of Education Mikheil Chkhenkeli (2017-2018), in his speeches at the parliamentary committee in December, 2017 has named the enhancement of educational quality and its compliance with the European requirements as a priority area for the Ministry of Education and Science and noted that the institutions who could not comply with the new requirement of authorization would not be able to enroll students[6]. He has also mentioned that the state should tell the truth to all stakeholders regarding the quality of education provided at Georgian HEIs.

It is noteworthy that the legal amendments related to the higher education QA standards and procedures has been finalized in May 2017 and evaluation of higher education institutions using the new QA standards and procedures has begun in February 2018 in line with the requirements of the European Standards and Guidelines. NCEQE has applied to the ENQA to start the membership application process in March 2018. However, the Minister of Education Mikheil Batiashvili, while presenting the strategic direction of education in September 2018 has announced that it was planned to change the higher education quality assurance system and synchronize it with the European

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[4] Presentations used for the NCEQE's annual conferences in 2016, 2017, 2018 are accessible on the following links, respectively: https://eqe.ge/geo/news/show/351/1515, https://eqe.ge/geo/news/show/351/1514, https://eqe.ge/geo/news/show/351/1885

[5] ალექსანდრე ჯეჯელავა - მე მინდა, ჩვენი ხარისხის მართვის ახალ სისტემას მოყვებოდეს ორმაგი გარანტია. (2016, December 6). Retrieved September 1, 2019, from https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/409493-aleksandre-jejelava-me-minda-chveni-xarisxis-martvis-axal-sistemas-moqvebodes-ormagi-garantia/.

[6] მიხეილ ჩხენკელი- განათლების სისტემაში დაგეგმილი სიახლეები - მომავალი TV. (2017, December 20). Retrieved September 1, 2019, from https://www.myvideo.ge/v/3474755.

requirements. Minister Batiashvili also announced that the changes would have been implemented in the system during the next one and half year and the system should become more supportive to HEIs rather than controlling them[7]. However, later during the interview conducted by the research team under the current research, the Minister declared that the changes to standards and procedures of QA mechanisms were not planned. It should be mentioned, that in Autumn of 2018 several members of the Parliament of Georgia initiated the amendments to the legislation to stop implementation of new authorization standards. This legislative initiative was critically accepted by the part of the academic society and by the educational experts. For example, the Higher Education Reforms Experts (HEREs) of Erasmus+ National Office addressed an open letter[8] to the Parliament and MES of Georgia explaining the expected risks related to the NCEQE's application process for the ENQA membership, registration in EQAR and violation of the AA commitments, thus, the negative impact this legislative initiative would have had on the reputation of the Georgian higher education system, on trust and recognition of Georgian diplomas, etc. The criticism and the protest of the academic society and the experts achieved the goal: the Chair and some of the members of the Parliament personally and openly criticized the above-mentioned legislative initiative and it was rejected by the Parliament of Georgia.

Thus, at the key stage of reform implementation the inconsistent announcements from the policy makers could be observed. This issue has also been identified by the various parties involved in this process, which will be discussed later in Section 8.

The main goals identified by the NCEQE representatives and its former and current leadership were consistent to the initially declared reform goals and it was mentioned that the reform aimed to support enhancement of quality of higher education, ensure the compliance of the QA system with the ESG 2015 and increase the competitiveness of the system internationally.

From the HEI perspective the main purposes of the reform to ensure the compliance of the system with the European requirements and shift it to development-oriented approach were identified. It was also noted that, although it was declared that the system would have become more flexible and development oriented, considering the increased requirements of the standards HEIs realized that it would require intensive work from them to meet the new standards. It was also expected that the evaluation would have been carried out in a rigorous manner and it was anticipated that the number of HEIs would not be able to meet the new requirements.

It was also noted that the public HEIs were less sensitive towards the new QA requirements than the private ones, and it was challenging for the leadership of the public HEIs to convince their staff that without making a joint effort towards meeting the new authorization requirements the results would not have been positive. However, there were

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[7] Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia (2018, September 14). მიხეილ ბატიაშვილმა იყალთოს სამონასტრო კომპლექსში განათლების რეფორმის პრეზენტაცია წარადგინა. Retrieved September 1, 2019, from
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMZn2pPOtZo.

[8] Open letter of the HEREs of Erasmus+ national office, which was also officially sent to the chair of the Georgian Parliament
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GPGR7s9CV_b6H7ghnAJ98BK0Zvvx_u_B/view?fbclid=IwAR2LQJntignik6aa8WYfBzTfB-LIVKRIWHU9qc9ZcU2dQH2gAaPezDgzZUc

few exceptions mentioning that the institutions were planning the changes regardless of the authorization requirements, thus the process has been agreed among the university stakeholders and carried out smoothly.

In order to ensure participation of various stakeholders in the development of the new authorization mechanism, NCEQE has shared the initial draft of the authorization standards to all HEIs for their feedback. However, NCEQE representatives have noted that very few institutions used this opportunity to initiate the discussion and clarify certain issues. Most of the feedback received from the HEIs were supportive to the authorization system reform and welcomed the first draft of the authorization standards. For further discussion and development of the standards and procedures NCEQE invited international experts to review the documents. International conference was organized, where the international experts presented review results and their recommendations. Before the full-scale implementation of the revised authorization mechanism, NCEQE conducted the pilot evaluations of HEIs. The main outcomes of the pilot evaluations were clarification of authorization standards, modification of 3-level compliance (compliance, partial compliance, non-compliance) to 4-level evaluation scheme (compliance, substantial compliance, partial compliance and non-compliance), and the capacity building of authorization experts and HEIs.

During the interviews and focus groups the HEI representatives expressed that they had an opportunity to be fully involved in the QA mechanism revision process and could receive sufficient information and recommendations from the NCEQE. However, they have been noting that the Guidebook of Authorization of Higher Education has not been provided on time, thus it was more challenging for them to work on the Self-Evaluation Report without the written guidelines, especially while working on the section of the SER that requires definition of the institutional benchmarks. The time given to the HEIs for preparation for authorization has been identified as one of the most challenging issues in the authorization process.

All the representatives of HEIs have remarked that their preparation process for authorization was drastically different from the previous practices. Before, the authorization and accreditation processes were perceived as solely the responsibility of QA offices by the academic communities. However, as the authorization standards were very comprehensive and assessed not only the documents, but the performance and the outcomes of the institution, it required from HEIs to make everyone involved in the preparation and self-evaluation process. The process increases the internal accountability between various structural units and "people started to work together". HEI representatives underlined that although authorization is an external evaluation, it gave a good opportunity to HEIs to reflect on their performance and observe their own challenges and achievements. Thus, working on the self-evaluation report for the authorization was a good stocktaking exercise for the HEIs.

The main practices and activities carried out by the HEIs during the preparation and self-evaluation process, were development of the self-evaluation teams, arranging the documentations, improving the internal regulations and informing the HEI community about them, clarification of the functions and responsibilities of various structural units, decrease number of education programmes, provision of new services, such as student services, career development offices, improvement of library resources, etc.

One of the key elements of preparation for the implementation of the authorization mechanism was development of the authorization experts' pool and their capacity building. In this regard, NCEQE has announced the public call to recruit expert pool members, including students, employers and international experts. The initial training for experts has been conducted by the international experts. As the format of evaluation has been significantly changed, the main focus of the training was made on the simulation of the experts' site visit and conducting the interview with the various stakeholders of the HEIs. The following experts' training and preparatory meeting were conducted by the

authorization division of NCEQE. During the focus groups, the expert pool members noted that this has been a very new and different experience for them to participate in the revised QA evaluations. Although the training equipped them with certain knowledge about the purpose and process of evaluation, at the initial stage with the lack of experience and examples, it was still challenging to evaluate certain areas in a coherent manner.

6. Analysis of the Self-Evaluations of HEIs and Implementation of Authorization Process

This section discusses the implementation and main outcomes of the authorization process. Specifically this section reviews the self-evaluation process conducted by the HEIs according to the new authorization standards, analyses the quality of the SERs and the strong and challenging areas of HEIs identified in their SERs; Discusses the main areas that the HEIs could comply with as a result of the experts' evaluations, the main areas where the recommendations and suggestions were made; Furthermore the implementation of the evaluation process and attitudes of various stakeholders including the results of the expert's evaluations and authorization council decisions are discussed.

6.1 Challenges and Outcomes of the Self-Evaluation of HEIs

Self-evaluation conducted by the HEIs is a critical part of the authorization process as the institutions are reflecting on their performance, their standing towards the authorization standards, explain their peculiarities and produce the Self-Evaluation Reports. The HEIs are expected to carry out the self-evaluation and produce the report in accordance to the self-evaluation report template elaborated and approved by the NCEQE. The SER template requires submission of the key quantitative data related to the HEI's performance and description and assessment of HEIs performance against the requirements of each standard component. Self-Evaluation report is the basis for the authorization experts to carry out the evaluation, thus it is essential that the information provided in the SER is accurate and self-reflective.

During the interviews and focus groups, the HEI representatives highlighted that for responding to the new requirements of the authorization standards and for preparation for the authorization process it has become a pivotal factor that all members of the HEI community are involved in the process of self-evaluation, revision and development of internal regulations, processes and strategies. This trend has significantly increased the sense of "Quality Culture" at HEIs. Rector of one of the HEIs noted that:

> *"During the self-evaluation process, the staff even changed their ways of communication and terminology. This was like a test for everyone and it required participation of the entire academic community. In this process we have discovered "new faces" within the institution that were not noticeable before".*

However, as this was a new practice for HEIs, it has been associated with various challenges and ambiguities. According to the HEI representatives, one of the most challenging parts of working on the SER was provision of the required data in retrospect, as most of the institutions did not have any mechanism for systemic data collection and analysis. While reviewing the SERs it was observed that most of HEIs could provide data for more than 3 years, however as it was discussed during the focus groups, while working on the self-evaluation report the HEIs tried to retrieve the data

from previous years and it has been especially challenging to provide the valid data for the SER fields that required estimation of various rates, ratios and benchmarks for the past authorization period. In addition to the lack of data collection in the previous years, the HEIs have also experienced lack of methodological knowledge and experience to provide the data such as employment rates of graduates, student drop-out rates, staff retention rate, actual and target performance benchmarks. It was also noted that the self-evaluation has been a good exercise to define the baseline data and to understand the importance of data collection and analysis. The quantitative data indicated in SER reports in some cases were not indicated in an appropriate format or their trustworthiness were questionable. For example, for the programme completion rate absolute values were indicated instead of ratio/percentage; employment rate of graduates has been calculated using different methodologies; different types of costs have been considered as part of the research budget by different HEIs.

6.1.1 Analysis of the key quantitative data and benchmarks

This survey analyzes the key quantitative data indicated in the SER, however, the accuracy and validity of the data are the limitation, as in some cases different methodologies are used to estimate the various ratios, or the invalid numbers are given. The analysis is based on the review of the key quantitative data and benchmarks indicated by the HEIs (20 HEs) in their Self-Evaluation Reports. 16 out of 20 HEIs are universities, 3 are teaching universities and one is a college. Also, 12 HEIs are public and 8 are private (full list of the HEIs is indicated in annex 2).

Chart 1 demonstrates the average programme graduation rate by the programme cycle during the last authorization period (2012-2017). The average programme graduation rate is the lowest for doctoral programmes (23%), while for other programmes (Bachelor's, Masters and One-Cycle Medical Education Programmes) the average graduation rate is 56%. Also, in terms of graduation rates the public HEIs have a better indicator for Bachelors, Doctoral and One-Cycle Medical Education Programmes compared to the indicator of the private ones. The HEIs located in the regions also have higher graduation rates compared to the ones that are located in Tbilisi.
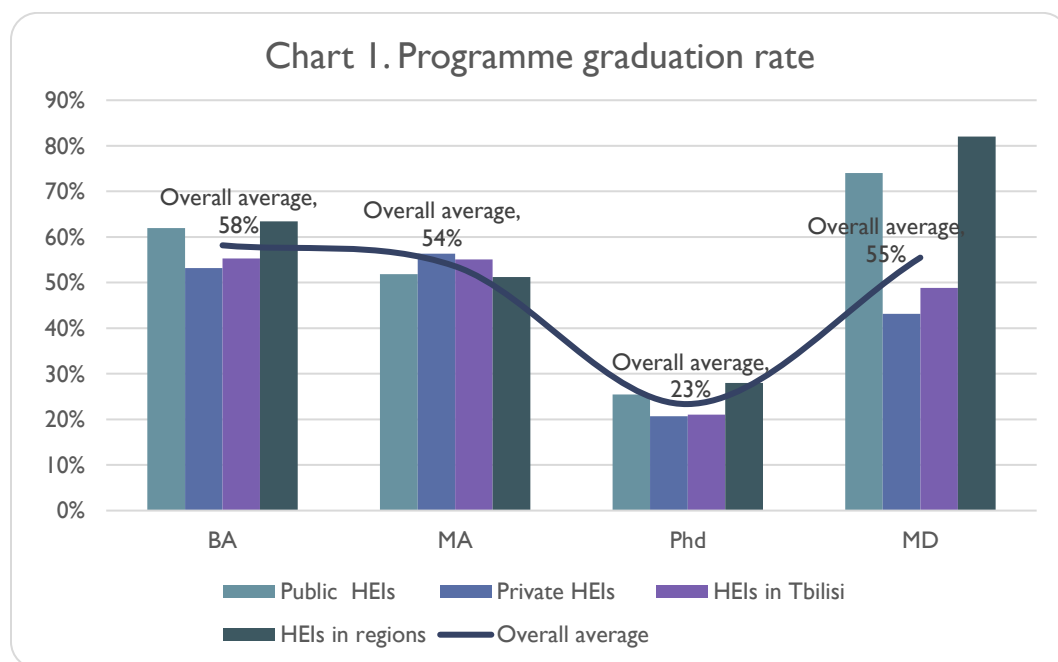

Chart 1. Programme graduation rate

Chart 2 indicates that according to the data given in the SERs private HEIs have better graduate employment rate than public HEIs, and the HEIs located in Tbilisi also have a better indicator than the ones that are based in the regions. There is a 12% difference between the overall average graduate employment rate (71%) and the average graduate employment rate with the received qualification (59%).

Chart 2. Graduate employment rate
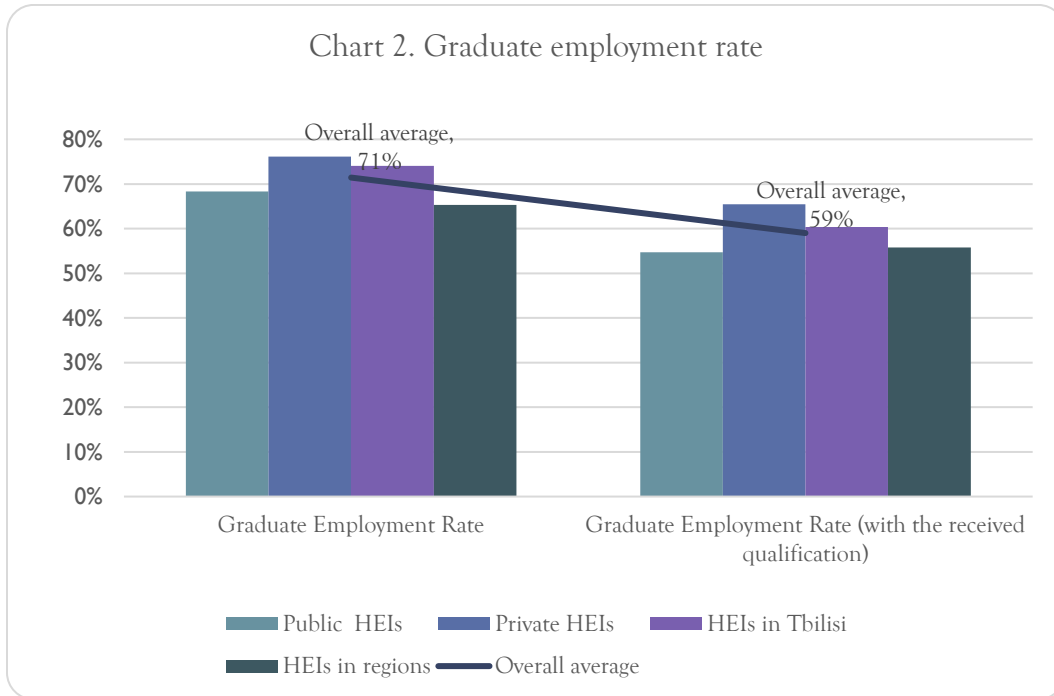
One of the indicators used in the authorization process to assess HEI's performance is the student-to-academic staff ratio. As the new authorization standards introduced the concept of affiliate academic staff, the analysis gives the data for students-to-academic and invited staff (teaching staff) and the data for students and affiliate academic staff ratios separately. The analysis has shown that the overall average number of students per teaching staff (16) is more than twice less than the average number of students per affiliated academic staff (7). There is not a significant difference between the number of students per overall academic and invited staff in terms of the location, type (university, teaching university and college) or the legal status (private, public) of the HEI. However, significant difference can be observed in terms of the student and affiliated academic staff ratios. There are 26 students per affiliated academic staff at private HEIs, while this indicator is 13 on average at the public ones. Also, this indicator is significantly better at universities (15) compared to teaching universities and colleges (28).

Chart 3. Number of Students per Academic Staff (2018)
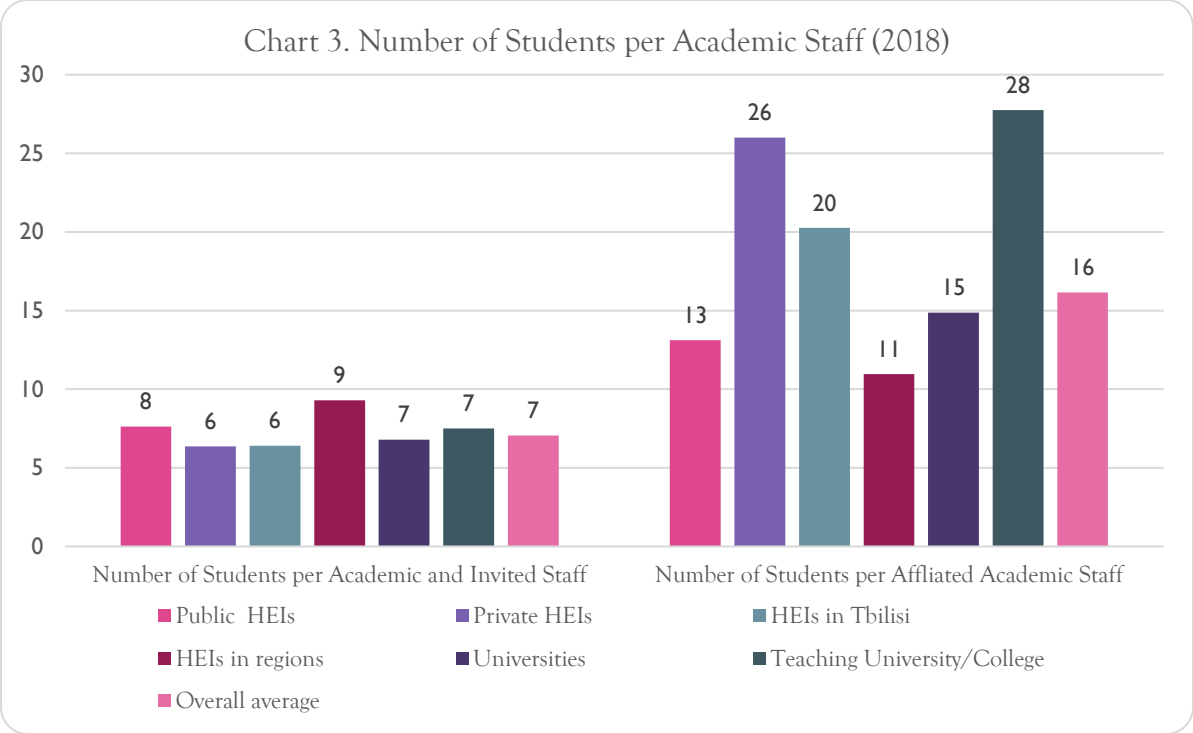
In total, on average 36% of the teaching staff is affiliated, this indicator is relatively higher in regions (43%) compared to the HEIs that are located in Tbilisi (33%), which can be explained by the fact that 70% of HEIs are located in Tbilisi, thus the distribution of the academic workload between the HEIs is a more frequent phenomenon. It is also noteworthy, that the percentage of the affiliated staff at private HEIs (25%) is significantly lower than the one at public HEIs (38%).

Chart 4. Affiliated academic staff to overall teaching staff (academic and invited staff) ratio (2018)
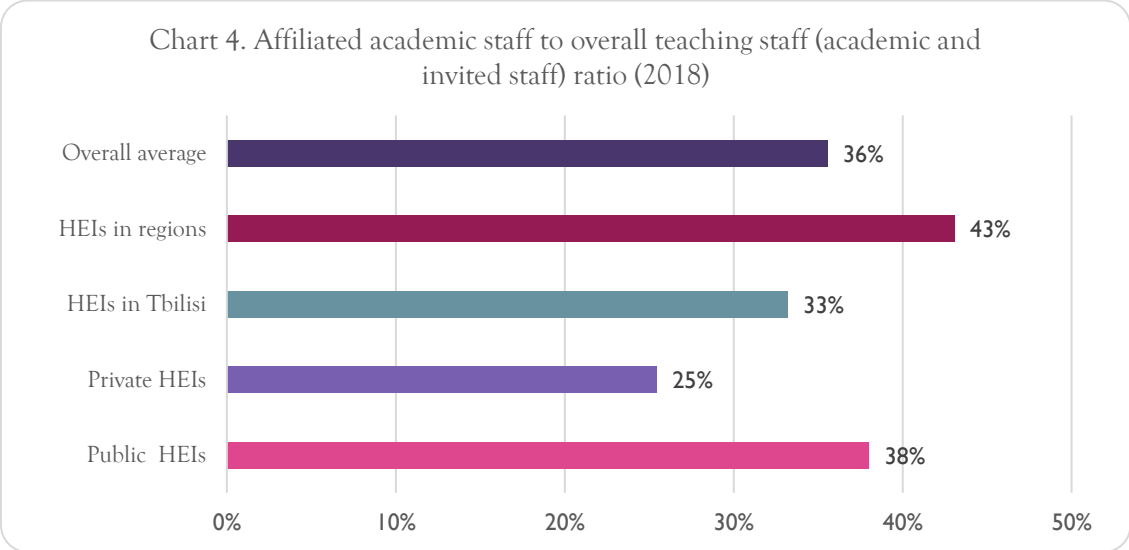
Although the average percentage of the affiliated academic staff is higher at public HEIs, if we look at the data on programme level the number of the affiliated academic staff per each academic programme is higher at private HEIs (12) than at public ones (5) (Chart 5). It should be noted that this analysis does not take into account the average

workload of the affiliated academic staff at public and private HEIs. At private HEIs 63% and at public HEIs 56% of teaching staff (academic and invited staff) are invited lecturers.

Chart 5. Average number of teaching staff per academic programme (2018)
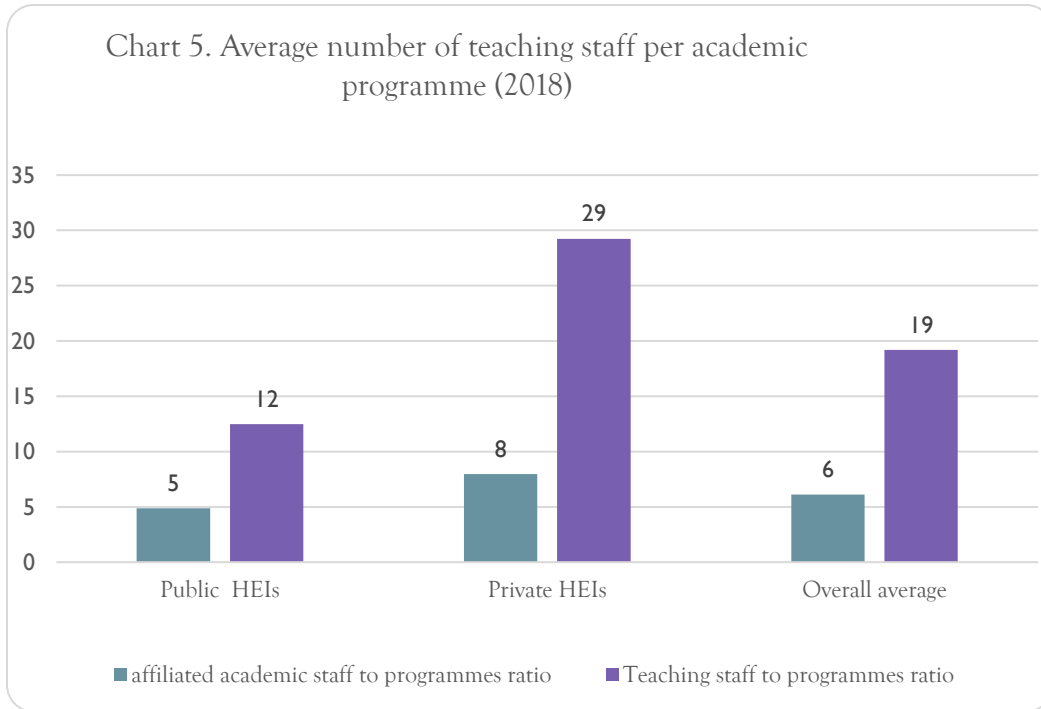
The authorization process is also looking at the distribution of the institutional budget. Based on the SER analysis of 20 HEIs (12-public, 8 private), on average the annual budget of a public HEI in Georgia is 29.2 mil. Georgian Lari (GEL) and the average annual budget of private HEI is 4.6 mil. GEL (Chart 6). It should be also noted that while the average annual budget of a public HEI is 6 times higher than the average annual budget of a private HEI, the average budget per student at public HEIs (4,774 GEL) is only 1.3 times higher than this indicator at private HEIs (3,610 GEL).

Chart 6. Average Annual Budget of HEIs in Georgia (GEL) (2018)
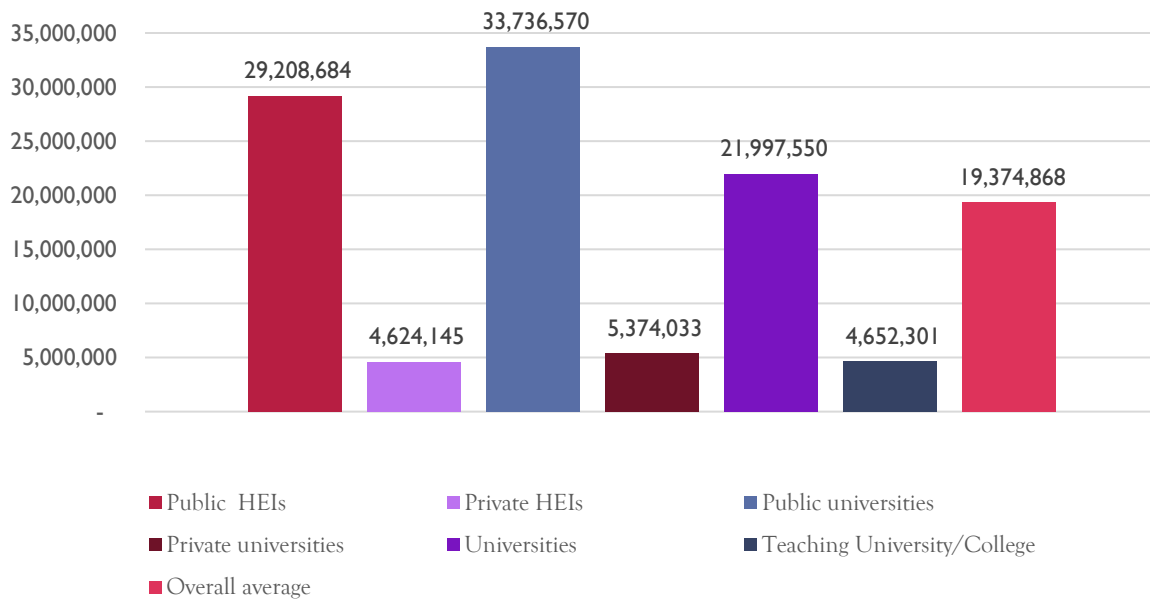
On average 34% of HEI's annual expenditure is allocated for administrative expenses. This indicator is higher for public HEIs, where the administrative expenditure is 37% of the total budget. It was also noted that the percentage of administrative expenditure of teaching HEIs (59%) is significantly higher compared to the overall average or the average annual administrative costs for universities (29%) (Chart 7).

Chart 7. Ratio of the administrative expenditure to the HEI's total budget (2018)
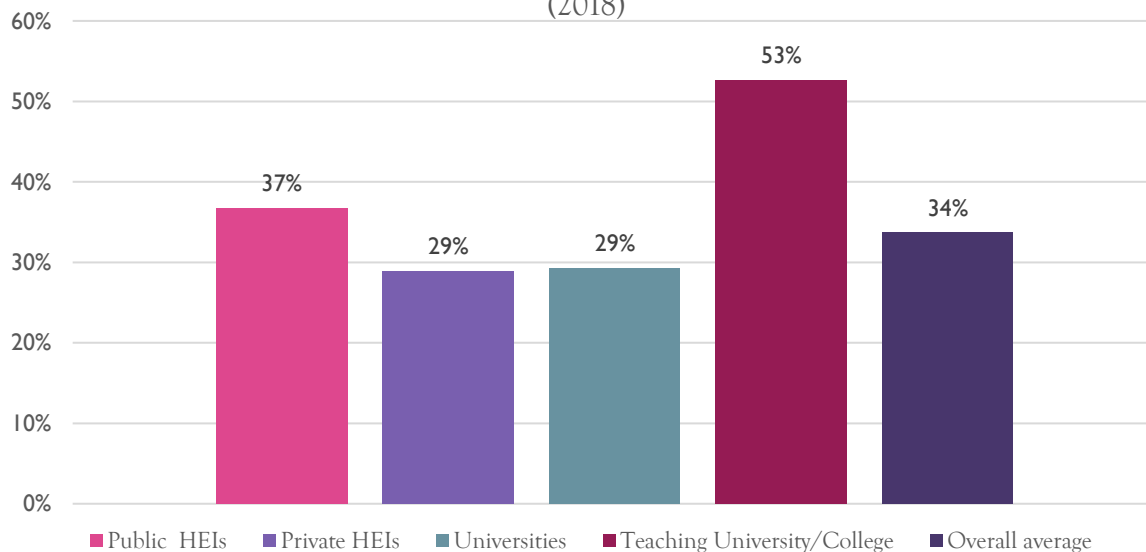
On average public universities allocated 7.2 million GEL annually for research activities. This amount is about 38 times more than the amount of research budget allocated by private HEIs. Also, there is a significant difference

between the average annual research budget allocated by universities compared to the research budget of teaching universities/college (Chart 8).

Chart 8. Average budget allocated for research activities (in Gel, 2018)

- Public HEIs: 6,560,385
- Private HEIs: 189,990
- Public universities: 7,215,423
- Private universities: 188,372
- Universities: 4,332,185
- Teaching University/College: 147,016
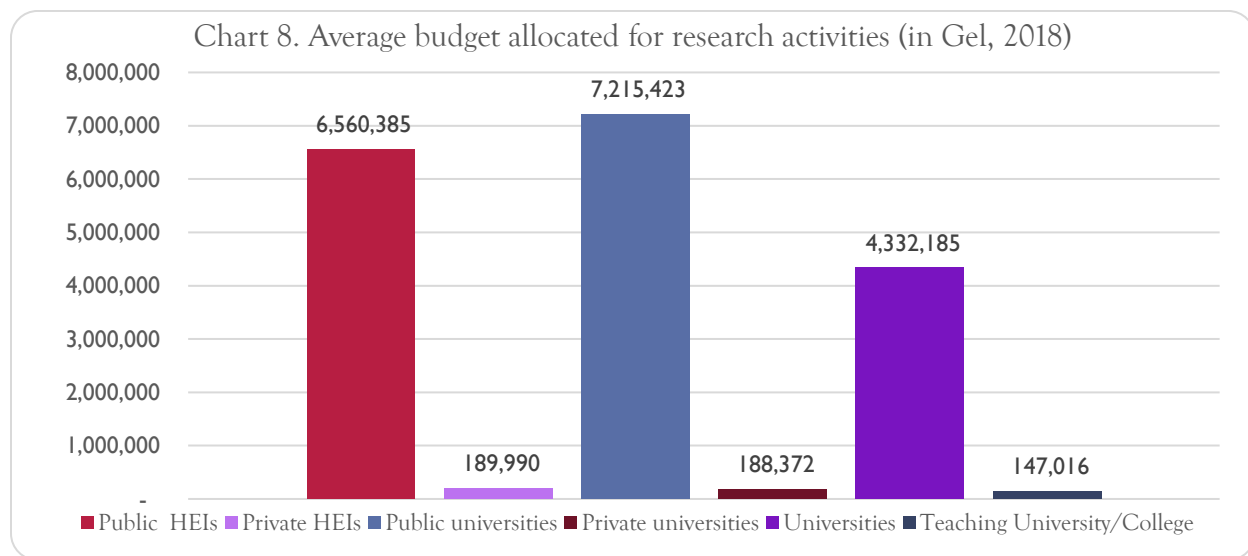
As the total annual budget of public HEIs, is significantly higher than the budget of private ones, looking at the ratio of research budget to the total budget of the HEI can give a better picture in terms of the scale of the HEIs research activities in relation to its other activities. As it is shown on chart 9, on average 8% of the total budget is allocated to carry out research activities at Georgian HEIs. This indicator is significantly higher in case of the public universities (13%) compared to the private ones (3%). It is also notable that the average research budget allocated at public universities is 1% less than the percentage of the research budget allocated at teaching universities.

Chart 9. Ratio of the budget allocated for research activities to the total HEI budget

- Public HEIs: 11%
- Private HEIs: 4%
- Public universities: 13%
- Private universities: 3%
- Universities: 9%
- Teaching University/College: 4%
- Overall average: 8%
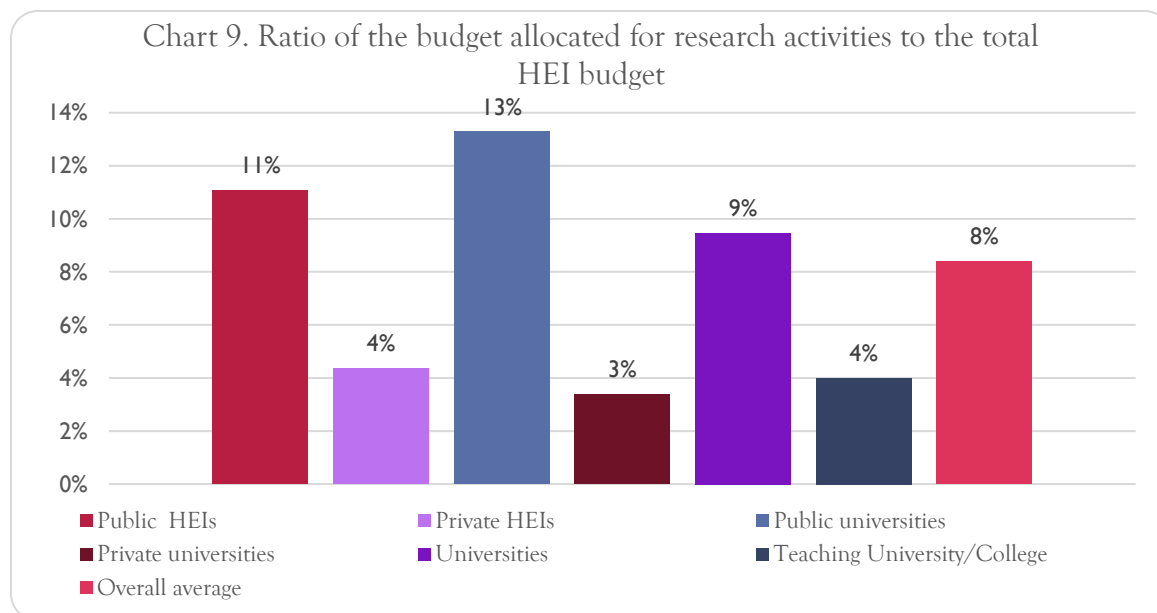
The summary of the key data and benchmarks analyzed for the survey is indicated in annex 4.

6.1.2 Analysis of the Quality of the Self-Evaluation Reports

Based on the predefined rubrics (Annex 2) describing the four-grade scale (4-high to 1-poor) quality of SERs of whether they are self-reflective, analytical and provide valid quantitative data and benchmarks was observed.

Based on the analysis of 20 SER only 2 were evaluated with the highest score (4), which implies that the SERs are analytical, review the strengths and areas for improvement of HEIs past performance in a comprehensive manner, the analysis is based on the results of the internal surveys, quantitative data and relevant evidences, and specific steps for HEI's further development are defined. 4 SERs were assessed with a score "3", which means that compared to the SERs assessed with a score "4" these SERs give more general rather than specific overview of the strengths and areas for improvement of the HEIs past performance, the analysis is mostly based on the internal survey results, quantitative data and evidences, and general areas for HEIs further development are given. The majority of the SERs have been evaluated with score "2" and "1". This result implies that SERs are mostly descriptive, repeat the internal regulations of HEIs and in some cases the description repeats the evaluation criteria of standard components and states that the HEI is in compliance with requirements, give superficial overview on their strengths and areas for improvement, the analysis lack the evidences such as survey results, quantitative data or references to other sources and superficially reviews the plans for HEI's further development. As a result of the review of SERs the research team found several replications of the same text in the reports of different HEIs.

The survey also identified the standard areas in which the HEIs had more comprehensively and accurately described their performance, and the ones in which description was lacking or was not relevant to the standard requirements. The SER sections on authorization standards related to programmes, including all three standard components (3.1 Design and development of educational programmes, 3.2 Structure and content of educational programmes, 3.3 Assessment of learning outcomes) and the standard component related to the internal quality assurance (2.2) were found to be written in a more coherent and comprehensive manner, whereas the section on standards of staff management (4) and research activities (6) were most challenging, especially the sections that were related to assessment of staff performance (4.1) and assessment of research activities (6.3).

Despite the fact that the instruction given at the SER template requires that "the information presented in the self-evaluation report shall directly refer to the requirements of the description and evaluation criteria of particular standard's components" one of the common challenges that has been observed in the reports is that certain areas of the standard component requirements are not addressed at all, while several of them were extensively explained. For example, in the section describing the HEIs performance against the standard component 2.1 on Organizational Structure and Management, the main emphasis is laid only on internationalisation; in the section dedicated to the self-evaluation of university's research activities (6.1) the requirements related to the doctoral studies were not addressed at all, in the section related to staff management (4.1) requirements related to the staff professional development opportunities were not addressed. Based on the interview with the HEI representatives and review of the expert's evaluation report, this observation can be explained with two major reasons. On the one hand, some of the requirements indicated in the description of standard components and evaluation criteria where not understandable for HEIs, on the other hand, the institutions skipped the description and analysis of the areas that were poorly or not implemented at all at the HEIs. Thus, instead of articulating the existing challenges and elaborating on related planned activities in the SER (as it is suggested by the SER guidelines) HEIs chose "not to take a risk" and do not elaborate on those issues at all or give a very brief description.

Defining the strengths and areas for improvement of HEIs, required by the SER template at the end of self-evaluation of each standard, is another challenging part of the self-evaluation. In several cases the strengths and areas for improvements were not logically linked to the narrative of the self-evaluation or the issues were not related to the specific standard requirements. In certain cases, regular performance of an institution has been considered as a strength, for example, having a code of conduct, having teaching process regulations, staff recruitment according to the Georgian legislation. While explaining the planned activities for further development, the analytical part does not mention the problems related to the current activities. For example, the planned activities indicate "improvement of the staff evaluation system" or "improve strategic plan monitoring system", but in the analytical part it is not mentioned how their systems are working and to what extent those activities require improvement. In some cases, the strengths and areas for improvements indicate exactly the same issues with the same formulations, for example, stakeholders' involvement in the programme development is indicated in both sections.

This issue is either related to the lack of methodological knowledge of defining the strengths and areas for improvements or HEI's choice to make up some strengths and not emphasize on actual challenges in the self-evaluation report.

It was also noteworthy that although the SER requires listing the areas for improvement of HEIs for each standard, the formulation of the text was responding more to listing the "weaknesses", rather than areas for improvement. For example, the text indicates "poor employment rate of graduates", rather than "enhancement of employment rate of graduates".

These results demonstrate that although the preparation process for authorization has been significantly changed, it became more participatory and HEIs started to analyze their performance more holistically, the quality of the reports is still a challenge. On the one hand, the reason is that the institutions have not been collecting and analyzing IQA results or the basic data, thus they had to start this process right prior to the authorization process. Thus, the data that could be used to elaborate analytical narrative in the SER was not available. Although the guidelines indicate the methodological instruction for required quantitative data and ratios, the lack of skills and experience for data tracking and analysis has also been a challenging issue. Besides, the perception of HEIs in terms of the risk of demonstrating their actual challenges prevented the narrative of the SERs to be more analytical and self-critical.

6.1.2 Compliance of HEIs with the Authorization Standards: Analysis of HEIs' Self-Evaluations and Experts' Evaluation reports

The analysis explores main compliant and challenging areas of HEIs based on the analysis of the "Strengths" and "Areas for improvement" related to each standard identified by the HEIs in their SERs. At the same time, experts' recommendations made for each authorization standard in the evaluation reports are discussed.

Mission and Strategic Development of HEI

Highlights of HEIs' self-evaluations

Regarding the first authorization standard – Mission and Strategic Development of HEIs, the main reflection from the HEIs concerned the development process of the mission statement and strategic development plan. Large majority of HEIs identified the participatory strategic development process as their strength, and that this process led to more comprehensive strategic development plan and increased commitment from HEI community towards its

implementation. In terms of the Mission Statement, public HEIs highly emphasized their impact on society, while the regional HEIs have been emphasizing on the regional peculiarities and HEIs role in the regional context.

Monitoring and evaluation plan for strategic plan implementation has been identified as one of the most prominent challenges, as the HEIs had no prior experience in this area. Another issue that has been identified by public HEIs as areas for improvement was supporting the implementation of lifelong learning concept.

Highlights of experts' evaluations

According to the expert evaluation reports, in most cases, the mission statements responded the authorization standard requirements and specified the HEIs main values, profiles and ambitions. Regional HEIs were commended for specifying their role and contribution in the regional context. HEIs, were also praised for making the mission development a participatory process and that the mission statements were shared and understood by the stakeholders of the HEI. In relation to the mission statement expert panels most frequently recommended that the HEIs should underline the distinctive role of the HEI that gives society and all stakeholders a clear notion of what the HEI stands for. Moreover, it was recommended that the formulation of mission statement should guide and have stronger nexus to the HEIs strategic activities, at the same time, HEIs should ensure that the institutional performance responds to its mission statement and all members of HEI's community are committed to fulfill its mission.

As for the recommendations related to the strategic planning and the strategic development plan, experts recommended that HEIs should develop a more detailed action plan that clearly describes the measurable outcomes, responsible units or staff members, and timeline and resource allocation. This approach would also support the development of effective monitoring mechanism with clear reporting channels. It was also noted that in many cases strategic development plans have too many tasks and goals planned to take place simultaneously, which seemed unrealistic. Thus, it was recommended that the HEIs prioritize the strategic goals and related activities.

HEIs lack the experience of monitoring the implementation of the strategic plans, thus while elaborating a new strategy results of previous plan implementation have been hardly available. Experts have recommended that the strategic planning methodology shall consider the analysis of the HEIs previous performance and data and identification of its challenges and strategic priorities considering the previous results.

The table (1) below shows the statistics of the compliance levels for Standard 1 defined by the authorization experts' panels.

Table 1	Compliant	Substantially compliant	Partially Compliant	Non-Compliant
1. Mission and Strategic Development	15	9	2	1
1.1 Mission	14	10	2	1
1.2 Strategic Development	8	11	6	2

Organizational Structure and Management

Highlights of HEIs' self-evaluations

HEIs have identified transparent election system of the administrative staff and governing bodies and its alignment with the Georgian legislations as a strength of organizational management. Sound management and coordination between various units, highly qualified administrative staff, experience of implementation of quality assurance mechanisms and consideration of the QA results, structured internal regulations, the existence of code of ethics, electronic system of document flow have also been among the most frequently indicated strengths of HEIs.

Increasing internationalisation has been identified as one of the positive trends at HEIs, and at the same time strong intention of HEIs to intensify their efforts in this direction has been indicated in the areas for improvements, including development of foreign student recruitment procedures, outgoing and incoming student and staff mobility, development of joint programmes and participation in international research projects.

As for the other areas for improvement related to the organizational structure and management, HEIs highlighted the need for performance assessment of various administrative and academic units and an institution as a whole. HEIs were discussing revision of QA mechanisms and the above-mentioned assessment system as means of developing a quality culture. It was also pointed out that, although HEIs have well-structured internal regulations, there was a need to increase their awareness among all members of the HEIs. Emphasis has been made on the regulations related to the academic integrity, such as code of ethics and regulations related to plagiarism.

Highlights of experts' evaluations

In evaluation reports experts confirmed the statements made by the HEI's self-evaluations that they have transparent and equitable procedures for election and appointment of the management bodies and the process is carried out in line with the legislation. Main tools of quality assurance, such as staff and student surveys, are used in QA process. In terms of safeguarding the principles of academic integrity, HEIs have developed relevant regulations, a few of them have implemented the anti-plagiarism software systems, and several HEIs have mentioned that they were on an initial stage to start its development and implementation by the support of the Erasmus+ capacity building project.

Main recommendations related to the organizational structure and management concerned the efficiency of HEIs management and administrative units. The recommendations were somewhat different for public and private HEIs. In case of the public HEIs, experts' recommendations stressed on the need for optimization of the organizational structures and human resources, specifically on rationalization of human resources according to the volume of the work performed, re-defining functions and responsibilities of the structural units to avoid overlap of competences and responsibilities and duplication of effort, moving towards a leaner bureaucracy that could allow more room, time and budget for the university's primary processes of education and research. The evaluation reports also encouraged governing bodies', such as academic, representative and faculty councils to commit their work towards the mission and strategic goals of HEIs.

While the experts recommended to public HEIs to optimize the organizational structure and human resources, in case of the private HEIs, the need for more administrative staff and clear division of their responsibilities and more structured approach towards administrative tasks were recommended. This recommendation was especially considerable in case of the increased student enrollment.

Expert recommendations also underlined the role of students' involvement in governing bodies and encouraged HEIs to ensure their participation in all governing, strategic, consultative bodies and quality assurance processes. At the same time, the need for representation of student body in HEI governance, such as international students, students with special needs, minority students, etc. has been emphasized.

In terms of internationalisation, evaluation reports pointed out that the international cooperation mostly were established based on personal contacts. The institutional internationalisation strategy and approach was lacking and the understanding of internationalisation was limited to student mobility and exchange programmes. The recommendations underlined on significance of clear understanding of the scope of internationalisation of HEI's activities, development of the internationalisation strategy and building the capacity of the academic and administrative staff, including enhancement of staff language skills.

Regarding the QA mechanism, the evaluation reports emphasized the need for development of system that collects valid data and generates results that feed with decision making and programme revision processes. HEIs are expected to ensure that the quality cycle is completed, and all relevant staff and units address the finding of internal quality assurance results. Development of the IQA capacity in terms of the staff and technologies has also been pointed out as key issues for efficient operation of the internal quality assurance system.

Experts also pointed out to the methodology for planning a student body and recommended that as the requirement is new, HEIs should review the mechanism over time, consider the results of the quality assessments and benchmarks of similar national/international HEIs and modify the student enrollment strategy accordingly.

In terms of academic integrity, the recommendations mainly concerned the issue of awareness of related regulations and plagiarism. It was recommended that the HEIs should train staff and students and ensure that they are well informed about avoidance of plagiarism and the staff is well informed and instructed about how to detect and deter plagiarism.

Considering the experts' evaluations and recommendations, organizational structure and management can be viewed as one of the most challenging standards. There have been several discrepancies observed between the HEIs and Experts evaluations, for example, while HEIs consider organizational management and administration as their strengths, experts have observed that in many cases organizational structures need to be optimized and there should be clear distribution of responsibilities between different units. Moreover, despite having the QA mechanisms in place, outlined as a strength by HEIs, experts considered that the PDCA cycle in most cases is not closed and the results are not sufficiently addressed, while the HEIs have identified consideration of QA results as their strength.

The table (table 2) below shows the statistics of the compliance levels for Standard 2 defined by the authorization experts' panels.

Table 2	Compliant	Substantially Compliant	Partially Compliant	Non-Compliant
2 Organizational Structure and Management	7	13	6	1
2.1 Organizational Structure and Management	4	17	5	1
2.2 Internal Quality Assurance Mechanisms	6	13	6	2
2.3 Ethics and Academic Integrity	13	5	8	1

Educational Programmes

Highlights of HEIs' self-evaluations

Regarding the development and implementation of the academic programmes, HEIs most frequently have mentioned highly qualified academic and invited staff as their main strength. Also, ა new methodology of development and revision of the academic programmes has been underlined with the main emphasis on the consideration of the labour market needs. It has been a new trendy practice of HEIs to established field specific programme committees and involve labour market representatives in them aiming at revision and incorporating modern needs of fields in the academic programmes. Some of the HEIs indicated implementation of the exclusive educational programmes in Georgia as their advantage. High graduate employment rate and fair and transparent student assessment systems were among the list of the most common strengths indicated in SERs.

While HEIs underlined having highly qualified staff involved in the teaching process, one of the most frequently mentioned and indicated first in the list of areas for improvement was the need to update teaching and student assessment competencies of academic and invited staff. In spite of the established field programme committees, HEIs consider that participation of stakeholders and especially labour market representatives in the committees is still poor and requires further efforts to advance the process.

Other areas for improvement that were underlined regarding the programmes concerned updating the literature, strengthening the practical component of the curriculum, and the intention to obtain international accreditation.

Highlights of experts' evaluations

Evaluation reports have commended HEIs for having clearly defined structure and learning outcomes of educational programmes that are in line with the national qualifications framework and consider ECTS guidelines. Newly developed methodologies for planning, designing and improving educational programmes and establishment of the programme field committees have also been reflected as positive trends in the evaluation reports. It was also pointed out that in most cases regulations and information regarding the educational programmes are easily accessible; the assessment system of learning outcomes and assessment criteria seem to be transparent. HEIs have established the examination centers, which make the assessment process transparent and well-organized, but highly centralized.

Although HEIs have instruments for programme quality assurance, in most cases the PDCA cycle is not fully followed or completed. Thus, experts' in their recommendetions underlined that HEIs should carefully follow up with the survey results and address them with relevant changes to ensure improvement of programme implementation.

Regarding the content and structure of educational programmes it was noted that although educational programmes are well-structured and there are links between the programme goals, teaching methodology and learning outcomes, academic and invited staff have poor understanding of the learning outcomes indicated in the programmes or even courses that they are teaching. Also, there is a lack of understanding of the role of defining learning outcomes in curriculum development. In addition to this, it is essential to incorporate and strengthen the practical components in educational programmes.

Evaluation reports also indicated recommendations on programme admission preconditions regarding the English language proficiency and noted that proficiency level of foreign language should be ensured in admission preconditions of all programmes, especially for PhD programmes so that students conduct the research without restraints. During the admission process the examination of the English language should be conducted in a rigorous

manner, to ensure that enrolled students satisfy the programme admission preconditions. English language proficiency has also been concerned in relation to the admission and teaching of international students. Although the HEIs have all the regulations required by the Georgian legislation in place, authorization experts have noticed that while recruitment of international students by the recruitment agencies, HEIs do not have any procedure for their selection to determine the relevance of their competencies with the educational programmes, such as specific subject based knowledge or knowledge of English language. In some cases, HEIs have examinations to test the English language proficiency, even though experts have met the international students who could hardly speak English but were enrolled on English language programmes. As the number of international students is increasing at Georgian HEIs, experts have noticed that in some cases the HEIs do not have sufficient number of academic staff with relevant English language competencies, thus it has been recommended that while planning international student enrollment, HEIs should pay close attention to provide the sufficient teaching and academic staff with relevant language competencies.

Evaluations also paid attention to students' high drop-out rates in various programmes. It was recommended that the HEI should track the students' academic progression, identify students-at-risk and the need for individualized learning arrangements or counselling and provide relevant support. This intervention would foster enhancement of students' academic achievement and learning experience.

Although the assessment methodologies are transparent and clearly outlined in programmes and in individual syllabi, assessment components in the majority of syllabi are homogenous, which can be explained by non-reflected utilization of a template provided by the faculty administration. This approach is not compatible with constructive alignment of learning outcomes, learning methods and learning assessment. Moreover, experts have noted that although the examination centers support organization and transparency of assessment, this approach somewhat prohibit giving feedback to students and makes the assessment system too formalized. It was advised to make programme learning outcomes, teaching and learning methodologies and assessment system more pluralistic and manifold in accordance with individual needs of each course. Thus, relevant training and guidelines shall be provided for the teaching staff.

The table (3) below shows the statistics of the compliance levels for Standard 3 defined by the authorization experts' panels.

Table 3	Compliant	Substantially Compliant	Partially Compliant	Non-Compliant
3. Educational Programmes	5	19	1	2
3.1 Design and Development	9	13	5	0
3.2 Structure and Content	5	18	2	2
3.3 Assessment of Learning Outcome	9	12	4	2

Staff of HEI

Highlights of HEIs' self-evaluations

According to the Self-Evaluation Reports almost all HEIs have mentioned highly qualified academic, administrative and invited staff as their strength. Transparent procedures for academic staff election and its compatibility with Georgian legislation, flexible workload schemes, and newly developed HR management policies and regulations were among the most commonly indicated strong sides. High percentage of affiliated academic staff in relation to total number of academic staff was also emphasized as HEIs' strength.

In most of the cases HEIs have developed or renewed HR policies and regulations prior to the authorization application submission. Thus, their implementation has been frequently identified as an area for improvement, with a focus on the implementation of the staff performance assessment system. Although, in the case of academic staff some of the performance evaluation tools have been used, the results have not been followed up with any intervention. The improvement areas also concerned the need for qualification development mechanisms, in case of the academic staff development of their research, teaching and English language competencies were underlined.

In terms of the workload of the academic staff, HEIs have identified lack of human resources as one of the most frequent improvement areas. If we look at the statistics in terms of the academic staff to students or academic staff to programme ratios (Charts 3 and 4) the numbers do not alert on scarcity of academic resources. As the HEIs still identify this issue as one of the most common challenges it is assumed that the workload of the academic staff or the affiliated academic staff and time dedicated to the fulfillment of their academic commitments (e.g. teaching, research, engagement in administrative and decision-making processes, student counselling, etc.) do not meet with the needs of HEIs sufficiently. It was also noted that although the affiliation mechanism is reflected in the HEI's internal regulation and in the contracts with academic staff, there still is not a notable difference between performance and activities of affiliated and non-affiliated academic staff, as the HEIs do not offer appropriate incentives for affiliated academic staff.

Highlights of experts' evaluations

Newly developed HR regulations and policies have also been discussed in the evaluation reports. In most cases, HEIs have relevant regulations in place including staff requirement procedures, job descriptions, qualification requirements and staff performance assessment. In terms of the staff performance assessment, HEIs have been using the student surveys and self-evaluation tools for academic staff performance evaluation. However, the results have not been used for further decision making. The mechanisms related to the administrative staff performance evaluation were newly developed and were not implemented yet.

According to the interviews conducted during the authorization site visits the staff are mainly satisfied with their workplace. Regarding the professional development activities, HEIs offer various training and support participation of academic staff in the conferences. HEIs have developed the workload schemes for academic and invited staff for various activities.

Experts have been emphasizing significance of staff performance evaluation and improvement as this is a key component of creating inclusive teaching, learning and research environment. In this regard, development of a holistic staff evaluation system for all staff categories at the HEI and its implementation in an objective and transparent

manner has been stressed. It is essential that HEIs ensure provision of relevant interventions based on the evaluation results that serves as a basis for continuous improvement in the activity of both academic and administrative staff.

The experts also recommended developing a strategy for the staff's professional development, based on the need analysis and allocate relevant financial resources for this.

In case of public HEIs, it was emphasized that HEIs should gradually work towards age-balanced academic work force to recruit highly qualified young employees on academic and scientific positions.

Although the academic staff-to-students ratio looks promising on institutional level, in several cases the ratio on programme level has to be improved, especially for the medical educational programmes. Experts have also emphasized the necessity to advance the academic staff/invited staff ratio.

The table (4) below shows the statistics of the compliance levels for Standard 4 defined by the authorization experts' panels.

Table 4	Compliant	Substantially Compliant	Partially Compliant	Non-Compliant
4. Staff of the HEI	5	19	1	2
4.1 Staff Management	9	13	5	0
4.2. Academic/Scientific and Invited Staff Workload	5	18	2	2

Students and their Support Services

Highlights of HEIs' self-evaluations

Under the students' services, the HEIs most commonly indicated the operation of the electronic system of study process management, development of career centers, provision of funding for student initiatives, offering flexible tuition payment system, organization of multiple cultural and sport activities. Private HEIs have been frequently emphasizing close communication between students and academic or administrative staff.

In terms of the improvement areas, HEIs reflected that although they have created career development centers, they need to further improve the scope and quality of the services, develop student and alumni employment databases. In some cases, HEIs have created student support units separately, which provides multiple student services, however the awareness of their activities among the students is low. Thus, in order students to benefit from the student services increase of the awareness of the unit's activities should be promoted.

Highlights of experts' evaluations

The regulations related to gaining, suspension and termination of student status, mobility, qualification granting, issuing educational documents as well as recognition of education received during the learning period are well developed in line with Georgian legislation, publicly accessible and implemented in an appropriate manner and ensures the protection of student rights and lawful interests.

To provide counselling for students, academic staff has assigned additional time for consulting which is indicated in the syllabuses of the academic courses. HEIs implement various additional extracurricular activities, such as sports, arts and other student initiatives.

HEIs have established units for student services and/or career development. In this regard, HEIs were recommended to improve the capacity and performance of the student support and career development services and improve communication with students. It was recommended that HEIs diversify and institutionalize (sustain) their services to best serve the students' needs, such as administrative and academic counselling, psychological counselling and consultation regarding international mobility or participation in various projects, services for students with special needs.

In several evaluation reports it was noted that the mission of student self-governance needs to be revised and understood by all stakeholders, to make sure that it serves the interests of students and enhancement of their educational experience, promotes protection of student rights.

Experts pointed out on the poor integration of international students, as the HEIs lack efficient mechanisms or orientations to ensure their inclusion in the university community, governing boards, student organizations.

The table (5) below shows the statistics of the compliance levels for Standard 5 defined by the authorization experts' panels.

Table 5	Compliant	Substantially Compliant	Partially Compliant	Non-Compliant
5.Students and their Support Services	15	9	2	1
5.1 The Rule for Obtaining and Changing Student Status, the Recognition of Education, and Student Rights	16	8	1	2
5.2. Student Support Services	8	13	5	1

Research, Development and/or Other Creative Activities

Highlights of HEIs' self-evaluations

In terms of the strengths related to research activities, public HEIs underlined the internal funding mechanisms of research activities and research grants from external sources, while the private universities mainly rely on external donors in terms of research budget. Public universities that are located in Tbilisi also emphasized on higher research productivity and research experience of their academic and scientific staff. International cooperation in research activities, organization of scientific conferences and publication of university scientific journals were among the most commonly indicated strong points of HEIs.

In some cases, the areas for improvements were quite similar to strengths of HEIs research activities. For example, low publication rate of academic and scientific staff and need for their training to improve research and grant writing skills. Low visibility of research institutes locally and internationally was mentioned as one of the areas for

improvement, at the same time HEIs clear intention to advance international scientific cooperation has been underlined. For these purposes, HEIs considered establishment of research support units or development of the capacity of existing research services/centers.

<u>Highlights of experts' evaluations</u>

In majority of cases HEIs have units to support research activities, however recommendations repeated the HEIs self-reflection that the research support or management units need capacity development to support academic staff and students in their research activities. Public HEIs and in a few cases private ones provide internal funding for research activities and the regulations related to the research funding are transparent and publicly available. Although HEIs have been complaining about the lack of financial resources for the research activities, in several cases it was observed that HEIs could not spend the allocated research budget during the year and academic staff and students were not aware about the research funding opportunities. HEIs should make an effort to encourage their staff and students to participate and initiate scientific research activities. As it was mentioned above, development of research skills and English language competencies have also been underlined in experts' recommendations.

During the authorization site visits experts have randomly selected and inspected the PhD theses. As a result, in several cases experts were concerned about the academic quality of the papers as some of them did not include a description of research methodology at all or included poor or outdated bibliography. It was recommended that HEIs should safeguard the quality of doctoral dissertations, define clear expectations and ensure rigorous evaluation and defense process.

In order to ensure integration of teaching and research and support the development of research skills of students, it was recommended to encourage participation of students at all levels of studies to participate in the research activities.

HEIs have developed basic procedures of evaluating and analyzing the quality of research, however the system in most cases is newly developed, thus its results or performance of the evaluation system could not be evaluated by the expert panels. Regarding the research evaluation system, experts have recommended to include multiple assessment criteria, such as publications, research grants, participation in scientific events, student supervision.

The table (table 6) below shows the statistics of the compliance levels for Standard 6 defined by the authorization experts' panels.

Table 6	Compliant	Substantially Compliant	Partially Compliant	Non-Compliant
6.Research, Development and/or other Creative Activities	4	13	8	2
6.1 Research Activities	4	10	12	1
6.2 Research Support and Internationalisation	5	11	10	1
6.3 Evaluation of Research Activities	6	9	9	3

Material, Information and Financial Resources

Highlights of HEIs' self-evaluations

Continuous improvement of infrastructure, development of electronic system for study process management, library resources and increasing budget were most frequently indicated as the strength of HEIs. A few public HEIs have also indicated student dormitory among their strengths.

In terms of the areas for Improvements, public HEIs were emphasizing on the need to improve and rehabilitate the basic and also research infrastructure. However, in this regard, they largely rely on the state funding. HEIs also indicated adaptation of buildings for the students with special needs, development of fire-protection system, building new facilities, building student dormitories were among the most frequently mentioned areas for improvements related to the HEIs' infrastructure. The need for updating the teaching and scholarly literature and other library resources were also underlined. The HEIs with art profile stressed on insufficient financial support needed for artistic work and research activities.

HEIs also identified improvement of budget planning and optimization process as one of the challenging issues that needs to be improved.

Highlights of experts' evaluations

HEIs in most cases provide the relevant infrastructure to implement educational and research processes. In cases of some public HEIs, facilities require rehabilitation, however, to address this issue HEIs depend on state funding. In terms of adaptation of environment for students with special needs, HEIs mostly provide provisions that ensure movement of students in the HEI buildings and if some areas are not adapted, HEIs allocate the classrooms on the first floor of the building to ensure access of the students with physical disabilities. It should be noted that in spite of the fact that HEIs have basic mechanisms to ensure study process for students with special educational needs, the number of such students is extremely low at Georgian HEIs. This can be explained by the lack of awareness about the available student services and learning environment. Experts recommend that HEIs should advance their efforts to create more attractive and convenient study environment for students with special needs.

HEIs have up to date websites, however, quite frequently some of the information required by the authorization standards are not provided, such as, annual reports, information about the academic and teaching staff, complete information about the academic programmes, in case of the private HEIs - annual budgets and audited financial reports.

Public HEIs have significantly broader access to international scientific library databases compared to the private ones, however, the indicator of their utilization is very low. Experts have noticed that in many cases students and even academic staff are not aware about the accessibility, necessity or instructions of using them. Experts have been recommending to enhance the access to the databases that are most relevant to the fields of studies that are implemented at the HEI, and most importantly provide relevant guidance and training for students and staff to promote access to the international scientific library databases.

Although strategic planning has been a participatory process, this could not be assumed in the case of the budget planning process. Budgeting is mostly a centralized process at HEIs and relies on the trends of previous years. Thus, it was recommended to establish a bottom to the top budgeting process, to make sure that budgeting is in line with the activities indicated in the strategic and action plan, and in the case of the competition between priorities or units,

the decision on allocation of the funding is based on the discussion and mutual agreement. HEIs should consider intensifying their efforts to diversify the income sources, improve financial monitoring and control system and make their audited financial accounts publicly available.

The table (7) below shows the statistics of the compliance levels for Standard 7 defined by the authorization experts' panels.

Table 7	Compliant	Substantially compliant	Partially Compliant	Non-Compliant
7.Material, information and financial resources	3	15	6	3
7.1 Material resources	9	9	7	2
7.2 Library resources	8	12	7	0
7.3 Information resources	13	8	4	2
7.4 Financial resources	8	10	6	3

Looking at the statistics of compliance levels defined by the authorization experts, it can be observed that some of the most challenging standards to comply with fully or substantially were: (2) Organizational structure and management; (4) Staff management; (6) Research, development and/or other creative activities; (7) Material, information and financial resources. Some of the most challenging standard components to fully comply with requirements (the standard components for which the full compliance was defined in less than 20% of cases) were (2.1) organizational structure and management, (3.2) Structure and content of educational programmes, (4.1)Staff management, (6.1) Research Activities, (6.2) Research support and internationalisation and all four components of Standard 7 – material, information and financial resources. Annex 5 shows the statistics of the compliance levels for each standard and standard component as defined by the authorization experts.

Recommendation on Improvement of HEIs' Self-evaluation Process and Common Areas for Improvement

1. Methodological guidance/training should be provided for HEIs on developing and analyzing performance/institutional benchmarks such as employment rate of graduates, student drop-out rates, staff and budget related rations, etc. It is essential that HEIs keep tracking the data (IQA results, performance indicators, etc.,) on a regular basis and use the results for relevant interventions;

2. Considering the initial experience of self-evaluation process, additional guidance should be provided for HEIs to ensure that the self-evaluation report is based on relevant evidences (e.g. results of IQA), is analytical, realistic, self-critical and reflective and suggests appropriate strategies and action for further development;

3. Main recommendation for the HEIs related to the authorization standards could be summarized as following:

   o Prioritize strategic activities and allocating relevant human and financial resources;
   o Optimize and improvement of administrative capacity;
   o Consider the external and internal QA results in decision making;
   o Provide relevant guidance in terms of academic integrity in teaching and research, implementation and application of software to detect plagiarism;
   o Promote better understanding of learning outcomes, update them in line with modern requirements and align relevant teaching material, methodology and assessment methods to ensure their achievement;
   o Fully implement the human resource management and evaluation system, monitor and consider staff evaluation results and provide appropriate professional development opportunities;
   o HEIs should ensure that the workload and performance of the affiliated academic staff meets the needs and expectations of the academic process and provide relevant incentives for the affiliated academic staff;
   o Develop and diversify student services that best serves enhancement of students' learning experience and personal growth;
   o Develop mechanisms to support advancement of research activities, especially support academic staff and students to enhance their research skills, participate in international research projects;
   o Create attractive learning environment and develop facilities to serve the students with special educational needs;
   o Develop library resources and services; and provide relevant instructions for staff and students on the application of electronic library-scientific databases;
   o Diversify financial sources and enhance the efficiency of budget planning and financial management processes.

4. It should be underlined that in many cases HEIs had newly elaborated regulations or policy documents, newly established mechanisms, thus, during the evaluations their outcomes or even performance could not be evaluated. Thus, it is essential that HEIs fully implement the policies and actions as described in the documents and the follow up internal and external evaluations will take into account the progress and the outcomes of HEIs' performance.

6.2 Evaluation of the Implementation of the Authorization process

To analyze the authorization evaluation process and understand the attitudes and experience of various stakeholders involved in the authorization process, interviews and focus groups have been conducted with the HEI, NCEQE authorization division, authorization experts and authorization council representatives. Specifically, this section analyses the attitudes, experience and perceptions of the above-mentioned stakeholders towards the authorization application process, evaluation procedure and format, preparation and composition of the experts' panels, coordination and organization of the process by the NCEQE, authorization standards, the evaluation scheme, understanding of the "fitness to the purpose" evaluation principle, decision making process and decisions made by the Authorization Council.

6.2.1 Preparation and application for authorization

As it was mentioned in Section 4.1.2 application for HEI authorization includes submission of the HEIs self-evaluation report and the related documents and information that are listed in the SER template. Regarding this process the interviews were conducted with the representatives of HEIs and the Authorization Division of HEIs at NCEQE.

The time constraints given for the preparation and implementation of the authorization mechanism has been named as one of the main challenges by all parties. Even though the authorization term of HEIs has been extended to one year, aiming at allowing HEIs additional time to prepare for the authorization, HEIs have emphasized that the new format of self-evaluation, development of the documents and mechanisms required by the authorization standards, collecting and retrieving the data from previous years required extensive work. HEIs underlined that although NCEQE has been offering very intensive consultations and training related to the authorization standards and process, the guidelines for self-evaluation were not provided on time, which also impeded the process as HEIs had to contact to NCEQE or their peers to clarify certain issues.

NCEQE representatives, also pointed out to the technical issues and time constraints. Namely, the existing resources of the division at NCEQE was not sufficient to process multiple applications simultaneously without electronic platform for authorization application processing. NCEQE staff had to work with regular document flow system. The existing system periodically malfunctioned due to the large volume of documents. Besides, because of the Georgian legislation there is very limited time (3 days) given for initial application scanning. Participation of international experts required translation of the documents in English that required more time than planned as the initial translation quality was low and required adjustments.

HEIs have been complaining about the large number of documents required to be submitted with the SER. However, while inquiring this issue during the focus groups and interviews with HEI's management, the complaints were not proved as HEIs did not name the documents that could be removed from the application. During the discussion, HEIs have proposed the approach that HEIs should have all the required documents, but not all of them were submitted with the application. However, this approach was not supported by the stakeholders during discussion as evaluation format requires the expert panel members to do the desk study of the document prior to the site visit. In addition, experts and HEIs themselves have named the risks of not submitting the documents before the site visit, such as drafting or modifying the regulatory documents during the site-visit and showing the documents that is not

used or implemented in practice. In this regard, further discussion should be led to identify the documents that could be withdrawn from the application without carrying risks (e.g. CVs of the HEIs' staff).

HEI representatives also emphasized that they had to draft different documents with the same content just to follow the list of the required documents by the SER template. This issue seems to be a result of misinterpretation as the authorization guideline states that "required documents/information are not required to be submitted separately, but different information could be a part of one document, or the information might be included directly in the SER narrative". Thus, further clarification on this issue should be given to both sides to prevent similar inconvenience. HEIs or the experts did not have any recommendations of proposal regarding the SER template. They pointed out that the document is well structured and easy to follow.

6.2.2 Evaluation Procedure and Format of Authorization Process

The new setup of the evaluation of HEI by the experts' panel, which includes prior desk study of the documents and devoting the site visit to the meetings and interview sessions with HEI stakeholders has been considered as a positive practice by both - the HEIs and by the experts in general. HEI representatives indicated that the interview sessions is an opportunity for HEIs to explain certain issues, the interaction with expert panel members and the presentation of the key findings at the end of the site visits is also good exercise for self-reflection.

Expert panel members have highlighted that the site-visit and the meeting with the HEI representatives gives a holistic picture about HEIs actual performance, that could not have been observed from the documents. One of the authorization experts during the focus group has mentioned:

> *"We see the actual picture about the university during the site-visit. The site visits can completely change the experts' impression gained from the documents in both ways, from positive to negative and from negative to positive".*

Thus, the desk study and the site visit is a good combination of evaluation procedure that allows triangulation of the information and development of evaluation report. However, HEI representatives and experts had a number of concerns that they had experienced during the evaluation process.

Both HEI representatives and experts were concerned about the time given for the evaluation process, both in terms of the desk-study of the documents and the site-visit. Experts have pointed out that the efficiency of the evaluation process depends more on the skills of the expert panel chairs rather than on allocating more days for the site-visit. It was mentioned that in cases, when the expert panel chair distributes the roles between the expert panel members, guides the team during the preparatory meeting and focuses on specific questions related to the standard requirement, the time allocated for the site-visit (3 days in most of cases, with the exceptions of two days in case of new HEIs, or 4-5 days in the case of large public HEIs) was quite sufficient to inquire all necessary information for the development of a comprehensive evaluation report. As for the time given for the desk study, in some cases, experts had to do the desk study in a short notice, which was not sufficient to review all the authorization documents. HEI representative also expressed their doubts that the time allocated for the site-visit is not enough to explore all of the HEIs activities.

Regarding the site visit experiences, HEIs have been complaining that in some cases experts did not allow them to completely respond to questions and were interrupted. This gave the impression to the HEI representatives that they could not fully express themselves and demonstrate a whole picture of the HEI. On the same issue experts were asserting that HEI representatives quite frequently did not respond to the questions but were trying to "tell a

background story", which they had already known from the desk study or was not relevant to the question, thus they had to interrupt the respondents.

Regarding the authorization procedures the authorization experts and representatives of the NCEQE saw the need to separately elaborate a procedure and approach for evaluation of the new HEIs. Although NCEQE gave some direction such as how to modify the agenda (e.g. new HEIs do not have students or alumni) or to focus on planned activities and feasibility of the plans, however, written guidance in this regard would give clear picture to all parties, new HEIs, Experts and the authorization council.

In terms of the organization of the evaluation process some technical difficulties have been highlighted, such as delayed implementation of the Quality Management System which was supposed to be used for online submission platform for authorization application; translation of the documents in terms of the large load of the documents and the quality control within the limited timeline.

6.2.3 Composition, Preparation and Performance of Authorization Expert Panels

According to the new Authorization Charter (Article 19) the evaluations are conducted by the experts' panel, which consists of the administrative or academic staff and a student from other higher education institutions, an employer representative and other persons with relevant qualification. Authorization experts' panel is chaired by the international expert. Experts' panel is independent in its work and the NCEQE representative does not participate in the evaluation and judgement of HEIs' compliance with the authorization standards.

In overall the involvement of an international expert has been considered as a positive factor by all parties participating in the research, such as NCEQE, HEI, authorization council representatives and by Georgian experts as well. Authorization experts have mentioned that participation of international experts has been beneficial for the authorization process due to their extensive experience in similar evaluations and Georgian experts could also learn from their skills and approaches. HEI representatives predominantly pointed out that participation of international experts has significantly increased the trust towards the process and their competence to lead and handle the process was notable. HEI and authorization council representatives have emphasized that the qualification of Georgian experts has been also notably increased and the overall expert panels' performance during the site visit was "very professional". However, in a few cases HEIs have complained that the attitude of expert panels was negative from the beginning of the site visit. One of the rectors has mentioned:

> *"Experts wanted to punish the university and this created a tense atmosphere".*

Besides, HEI representatives have criticized the experts for not being sufficiently prepared for the site-visit and not being aware of the documents that were submitted for authorization. In some cases, regardless of the NCEQE's guidelines, experts were giving the examples and comparing the HEIs' performance to the experience of HEIs where they are working. In some cases, the expert panel members were dominated from the same HEI, this has been considered as risk of subjectivity in evaluations, as the HEIs are also competitors to one another. Additionally, the lack of knowledge of the Georgian higher education system specifics, such as funding model, public procurement procedures was underlined as a point of experts' poor preparation.

In this regard, representatives of the authorization division at the NCEQE have highlighted that it is important to look at the processes objectively and not assume that the authorization process is a punishing mechanism when the evaluation results do not meet the desired outcomes of HEI's leadership.

At the same time the NCEQE coordinators of the authorization processes and even expert representatives agree that in some cases expert panel members are not sufficiently prepared for the site visit and cannot inquire all the necessary information related to the standards under their responsibility, which makes it difficult to write a report on certain sections. They have noted that there are differences between experts' attitudes and competencies to participation in the institutional evaluations. There can also be the case that the expert is highly qualified in her/his field but is not an effective evaluator.

Regarding the performance of international experts, it was highlighted that although they are quite experienced in similar evaluations, their approaches, attitudes and awareness of the local context varies. The cultural differences were also notable during the messages that were delivered during the presentation of the key findings at the end of the site visit. HEI and NCEQE representatives have mentioned that some of the international experts present the key findings of evaluation in a very delicate way and have to guess the implications of the messages, while the tone of the recommendations in the evaluation report is more rigorous and this difference creates doubts and dissatisfaction of HEIs. Thus, it was suggested by the experts that the training for international experts should include a cultural component to make sure that the written and oral communication from experts' panels is explicit and consistent for Georgian stakeholders.

Another critical issue that has been highlighted by the expert representatives is the objectivity of the expert panel members in the evaluation process. Experts pointed out to the "small country syndrome". Both, experts and NCEQE representatives mentioned during interviews that although there is a rule of experts' activities (NCEQE, 2018b) elaborated and the expert panel members sign the declaration on the protection of the code of ethics, in certain cases, it becomes difficult to maintain the desired standard of objectivity. The low salary for local experts has been highlighted by both NCEQE and expert representatives as a problematic issue. They have mentioned that the salary rate and the workload are irrelevant and experts frequently do not agree to participate in the reviews.

NCEQE has the procedure for the evaluation of experts by HEIs, expert panel chair and the authorization process coordinators, however experts have not yet received feedback on their evaluation results so far and also NCEQE has not planned any related follow up activates.

During the interviews HEI representatives were inquired about the performance of the authorization division coordinators. In almost all cases HEIs commended the work of the coordinators of the authorization process from NCEQE and mentioned that they were neutral, effectively coordinated communication between the HEIs and expert panels and supported organization of evaluation process. There was only one occasion where HEI rector expressed the concern during an interview about the aggressive behavior of the NCEQE representative and stated that the coordinator acted as a side in the evaluation process.

6.2.4 Authorization Standards in Practice

The authorization is carried out against the 7 authorization standards (1. Mission and Strategic, Development, 2. Organizational Structure and Management; 3. Educational Programmes; 4. Staff of the HEI; 5. Students and their Support Services; 6. Research, Development or/and Other Creative Activities; 7. Material, Information and Financial Resources). Each standard area has a description, evaluation criteria and related indicators/evidences. Experts and HEI representatives have noted that the standards include quite a wide range of activities and it requires significant effort in terms of time and complexity of the task to consider them while preparing for the authorization process and to address all the requirements during the evaluation process. However, it was also highlighted that the detailed description of requirements gave the HEIs good guidelines to map the strong and challenging areas of their activities and to develop strategic and action plans.

According to the HEIs representatives, at the beginning, some of the requirements were confusing and ambiguous to understand, however, after the internal discussions held in their institutions and consultations with the NCEQE they clarified all the issues. The areas that have been identified as the most difficult to understand were the requirements of business continuity plan, mechanisms to effectiveness of various processes, academic staff affiliation mechanism, mechanisms to evaluate research productivity, requirement on certification documents related to the protection of safety and sanitary norms of HEI buildings and learning environment. Development of the actual and target benchmarks has also been identified as one of the most challenging processes.

Several HEIs stated that despite the detailed descriptions, the standards were difficult to understand and gave a room for interpretations as they do not provide quantitative requirements. NCEQE representatives in their feedback explain that, although several HEIs had these expectations, it is the principal concept of the revised system to allow HEIs to decide their own strategies and allocate relevant resources. On the other hand, in a few cases, HEIs have considered that some of the requirements are still very instructive and it would be better that the system rely more on trust towards HEIs.

Regarding the challenges of evaluations, the authorization experts state that some of the standard requirements were very new for experts and did not have sufficient experience of working on them. Those areas, in most cases, are the same as those that were highlighted by the institutions as "confusing" or "difficult to understand", such as business continuity plan, research productivity mechanisms, technical infrastructural requirements, financial sustainability. It was also mentioned that insufficient emphasis was made on the analysis of HEIs benchmarks, student enrolment planning methodology and staff affiliation during the evaluations. The problem, in this regard, is twofold, the first, that the information from the national register provided by NCEQE in some cases was not complete and the second, experts were not provided with sufficiently clear instructions and training on how these areas should be assessed. Experts and HEI representatives agree that in order to make the academic staff affiliation more effective, it is not enough to regulate it with the authorization standards. Develop of a special regulation tentatively under separate Act of Minister specifying the affiliated academic staff requirements in more details, including quantitative indicators considering the specifics of different fields of study, would be more effective.

Experts and some of the HEI representatives suggested that the NCEQE or the expert panel members should do the pre-evaluation of the HEIs before the site-visit to make sure that the technical requirements are met, such as relevance of educational programmes with 'Classifier of Learning Fields' and qualifications to be awarded, certifications on safety and sanitary norms of buildings, summary of the academic staff affiliation data, etc.

It is worth mentioning that ENQA evaluation confirmed that the authorization standards fully address the ESG 2015 requirements as they are stated in Part 1 (ENQA, 2019. p. 23). HEI representatives and authorization experts have highlighted that standards reflect the issues that are problematic to Georgian higher education institutions. However, in order to foster their implementation in a more coherent manner, NCEQE should intensify its work to train experts based on the actual practices and cases that already exist, provide more detailed guidance on evaluation of the areas that are still ambiguous and support experts in evaluating the technical areas.

6.2.5 Evaluation Reports and Application of Compliance Levels

Evaluation reports are elaborated by the evaluation expert panels in accordance with the report template that is developed by the NCEQE. The evaluation report template has been considered as clear and well-structured document. Compared to the previous version of the SER template, it indicates separate sections for recommendations, suggestions and marks the compliance level for each standard component. Although the sections for recommendations and suggestions define the difference between those two, HEIs still consider it confusing.

HEI representatives and the members of the authorization councils have highlighted that compared to the previous evaluation reports, the quality of the present reports is significantly improved, the content and recommendations became more useful and substantial. However, the different evaluation approaches applied by different expert panel chairs can still be observed in the evaluation reports. Some of them are very detailed and follow the evaluation standard requirements, while the others are more general and give more holistic directions to the HEIs. Council members also noted that, in some cases the evaluation reports do not give sufficient details regarding all standard requirements and they have to look at HEIs SER or other documents to clarify certain issues.

HEIs have predominantly noted that the recommendations that they have received are relevant and useful and they have already started to consider them. One of the rectors has mentioned:

> *"We have issued a special order on consideration of the recommendations made by the authorization experts and assigned staff members responsible for related tasks".*

However, a few HEIs have indicated that addressing the recommendations would not change much of HEIs performance.

Expert representatives have highlighted certain challenges of working on the evaluation report. One of the most problematic one was the time constraint and they noted that 10 days is not sufficient to write a draft evaluation report. This issue was further discussed by the authorization coordinators stating that because experts cannot finish the draft evaluation reports on time and subsequently, it cannot be delivered to HEIs for their feedback in the set timelines this generates doubts from HEIs that their evaluation might be problematic. Instead the simple reason is that experts are busy and cannot provide the report on time.

Experts have mentioned that allocation of one full day for expert panel's preparatory meeting before the site visit to discuss and agree on all areas that should be inquired during the site-visit, and dedicating one full day after the site-visit for the expert panels' meeting to discuss and summarize the findings of the site visit and outlining the key points of evaluation would significantly improve the quality of evaluation process and evaluation reports. However, the problem is that everyone is busy and cannot allocate additional time with such a low salary rate.

Authorization experts and authorization council representatives noted that despite stressing on the principle that entire expert panel is responsible to contribute to all sections of the evaluation report, because of the time constraints and the extensive workload, sometimes participation and contribution of some of the experts is poor which is reflected on the quality of the report and its introduction during the council meetings.

All the stakeholders have noted that the definitions of the compliance levels (compliance, substantial compliance, partial compliance, noncompliance) were clear and understandable, but sometimes they were not applied in a consistent manner. Experts have highlighted that initially the evaluations were more coherent and objective. But the process was hijacked by the interventions of various lobbies and political influences, which loosened the rigor of evaluation process. Besides, as experts participated in more and more evaluations, they also started to compare one HEI to another and the evaluations became more biased. It was also mentioned that experts are especially delicate while defining the compliance level for standards on programmes and human resources, as their evaluation as "partially compliant" is related to the restriction of student enrollment at the HEI.

6.2.6 Decision-making Process and the New Rule for Selecting Authorization Council Members

The major change in the new authorization mechanism in terms of the decision-making process is the introduction of the clear decision-making criteria based on the compliance levels of each authorization standard defined by the authorization experts. At the same time, the authorization decisions have been diversified and authorization with the submission of the progress report, monitoring, restriction of students' enrollment have been introduced. Thus, the decision process has become more flexible.

In practice, the decisions made by the authorization council have been widely discussed, commended or criticized by various stakeholders. One of the key reasons for the severe debates around this topic was the comparison of compliance levels indicated in the evaluation report and decisions made for different HEIs. As it was underlined in Section 4.1.1 the quality assurance evaluation is based on the "fitness to the purpose" principle, which implies that each HEI is assessed against the authorization standards considering the mission of each individual HEIs. Thus, quality assurance outcomes are not meant to be used for ranking purposes. During the interviews it was clear that the "fitness to the purpose" principle was ignored or not appropriately understood by stakeholders. In some cases, experts and council members have mentioned that they were aware of this principle, however, in practice, it was difficult to avoid comparisons. It should be noted that "fitness to the purpose" principle of QA is highlighted in the ESG 2015, however, it is not reflected in the national QA related regulations (e.g. law on Educational Quality Enhancement, Charter of Authorization/Accreditation). It is only underlined in the Guidebook of Authorization of HEIs and is explained by the NCEQE staff during the presentations, meetings, consultations and trainings with HEIs, experts and authorization council members.

Another topic that has been vigorously discussed by the stakeholders was the cases when the authorization council has changed the compliance levels defined by the expert panels. Authorization council upgraded the compliance levels for at least one standard component in case of 10 HEIs (7 were public, 3 private) and downgraded the compliance levels in case of 4 HEIs (2 public, 2 private). This data demonstrates that the authorization council mostly changed the compliance levels in favor of public HEIs. The detailed description of compliance levels defined by the

authorization experts and comparison to the compliance levels changed by the authorization council for each HEI is given in Annex 6.

During the focus groups with authorization council members, it was mentioned that in some cases the evaluation reports did not give sufficient details regarding the HEIs compliance to the standard requirements and during the council meeting they had to additionally inquire from HEI representatives and experts about the details. In many cases experts could not defend their evaluations, while HEIs gave more arguments. This was the main reason for changing the compliance levels. On the other hand, experts have criticized the decision-making process and mentioned that during the council meetings they had to be in a defensive side and "fight" against the HEI, which created a very tense and uncomfortable environment. It was also highlighted that online participation of international experts in the council meeting are more formal and actual discussion begins with Georgian experts after the online call with the panel chair is over. Experts consider it unfair that the council changes the compliance levels based on one-hour discussion during the council meeting, while the experts make their evaluations based on the extensive desk-study of the HEI's documents and the results of the three-day site visit at the HEI. Some of the experts have also pointed out that they have been receiving calls from various acquaintances asking them to be "softer" during the council meeting and to support HEIs.

It was also mentioned that experts and council members interpret the standards and evaluation principles in different ways:

> *"Experts and council members do not speak in the same language, experts and council members have to agree on the same approach and interpretation of standards and evaluations".*

Both, experts and council members have suggested that joint training or workshops to discuss previous evaluations and decisions and based on this create a common understanding of the system.

Representatives of the HEIs emphasized that changing the compliance levels by the authorization council generates concerns and question marks about the fairness and transparency of the evaluation process and outcomes. This issue was also noted by the ENQA review experts in the agency review report (ENQA, 2019, p. 32, 33), underlining that "while it is reasonable that decision-making bodies sometimes amend the experts' proposals, not least to ensure consistency of decisions, the system used by NCEQE could lead to the opposite" and recommending that the NCEQE should review the decision-making methodology to ensure its consistent application.

Regarding the format of decision-making process, higher education institutions are satisfied with it as they consider that open discussion is essential for transparency. However, both council members and authorization experts compared the format of the decision making to the court proceeding and considered that revision of this process might be helpful. It was also suggested that instead of oral discussion during the meeting, HEIs to be allowed to submit their written arguments on expert's evaluation report in addition to the written feedback that they are submitting now on factual errors indicated in the reports.

Authorization council members have also mentioned that as this was the first cycle of evaluation with the new system, it was challenging to maintain consistency. They have suggested that the council members' meetings and discussions of the previous decisions would help them to foster more coherent decision-making process.

During the study, HEI, authorization council and expert representatives were also inquired about the new rule on the selection of the candidates for Authorization Councils' membership (MoES, 2018). To select the members of the

council for the HEI representative quotas, the Ministry of Education and Science requested HEIs to nominate their candidates for the selection procedure. It should be noted that this rule does not specify whether the candidates should be nominated or can submit their personal nominations. In several cases, the HEIs have pointed out that during the selection process the selection committee did not consider the nominations introduced by the HEIs and selected other persons from the same HEI and it was then unclear why the Ministry has requested submission of nominations from HEIs. HEI representatives have also pointed out that representation in the council is not balanced and representation of some of the HEIs are dominated not only in the authorization council, but also in accreditation and appeal councils. The rule should define not only who should be represented in the council, but also specific quotas (number) for each type of representation. The council members and the experts who participated in the selection process, have noted that the selection procedure was not transparent and it was unclear how the selection committee was established or how they made the decisions, as the interviews were very short and the questions asked were not relevant.

Recommendations on Implementation of the Authorization Mechanism

Recommendation on planning and organization of authorization process:

1. Timeline of the authorization process should be revised and extended, with special emphasis on time allocated for the authorization document desk study and time allocated for drafting the experts' report.

2. The quality of the translation of authorization documents should be improved. In this regard, NCEQE should make an effort to maintain the quality material in the translation software system (SDL Trados Studio) that it uses for translation and train the translators in the QA terminology, to improve the quality of further translations; or legislative changes obliging HEIs to take responsibility on translating their own documents should be initiated.

3. Review the list of the documents that should be submitted with the SER report as an application for authorization and differentiate them in three categories: the documents that are not needed for authorization purposes, the documents that HEIs should have but should not submit with the application, the documents that should be submitted with the application. While considering this list, the risks associated with changing or creating new documents during the site-visit should be considered. The research team considered some of those documents and recommends that e.g. HEIs do not have to submit the certificates related to the safety and sanitation of building, CVs of the staff (note: standard 7.3 requires that HEIs should have published the profiles of academic staff on the website and the biographies cannot be developed or significantly changed during the site-visits).

4. Procedure and guidelines for evaluating new HEIs should be elaborate.

5. Composition of the expert panels should be diversified to make sure that a panel is not dominated by experts representing the same HEI.

6. Additional day after the site-visit should be allocated officially as expert panels' working day to foster discussion and clarification of key findings, recommendations and making the joint judgements on HEI's compliance levels for all authorization standards and standard components.

Recommendations on Experts' activities

7. Regular training for authorization experts should be provided emphasizing the issues related to the consistent evaluation, discussion of previous evaluations and expert's behavior during the site visit.

8. Training of experts should include simulation of actual authorization process and study visits in other ENQA member agencies.

9. Training for international experts acting as expert panel chairs should be provided (online sessions) emphasizing the national QA regulations, higher education context, cultural issues to ensure that written and oral communication is clear and understandable for HEIs and council members.

10. Considering the actual workload of the authorization experts, the remuneration rate of Georgian experts should be reviewed and increased.

11. Authorization experts should be provided with feedback on their performance evaluation collected from HEIs, NCEQE and peers and the expert's performance evaluation results should be considered in the expert pool attestation process.

12. To create a common understanding of the authorization process, standards and compliance judgements joint training and workshops should be provided for authorization experts and council members.

Recommendations on Evaluation procedure

13. Additional guidance should be provided for the evaluation experts to make sure that evaluation thoroughly considers and analyses the benchmarks and key data of HEIs, student enrolment planning methodology and staff affiliation during the evaluation process.

14. The data on the academic staff affiliation should regularly be recorded, updated and monitored by the NCEQE, to ensure the validity and completeness of the record; authorization experts should have given more clear instruction how to analyze the database and make judgements on the academic staff workload.

15. Special regulation tentatively under separate Act of Minister should be developed specifying the affiliated academic staff requirements in more details, including quantitative indicators considering the specifics of different fields of study, that would be more effective.

16. NCEQE should consider to add pre-evaluation stage in the authorization procedure, which implies pre-evaluation of the HEIs documents before the desk study on some technical issues, such as: relevance of educational programmes with Classifier of Learning Fields and qualifications to be awarded, certifications on safety and sanitary norms of buildings, summary of the academic staff affiliation data, etc.

17. National QA related regulations (e.g. Law on Educational Quality Enhancement, Charter of Authorization/Accreditation) should reflect and emphasize the "fitness to the purpose" principle of higher education quality assurance.

18. The rule for selection of authorization council members should be revised to ensure fair representation of the stakeholders in the process and ensure that transparency and objectivity of the council members selection process is guaranteed.

7. Outcomes of the Implementation of the Revised HEI Authorization Mechanism

The study has been conducted after one year of the initiation of the implementation of the new authorization mechanism, thus it summarizes the immediate outcomes of the system implementation.

7.1 Outcomes of the Implementation of Authorization Mechanism at the Institutional Level

In terms of the outcomes of the implementation of the authorization mechanism at the institutional level, the study inquired the major changes that the HEIs have made in the process of preparation for institutional authorization. HEI representatives have pointed out that the preparation for the authorization process has been an important trigger to initiate various changes at HEIs. As a starting point most of the HEIs have reviewed and renewed their mission statements and engaged university community in this process, which increased the sense of commitment and accountability.

All of the HEIs have developed a new strategic development plans, reviewed their organizational structures and distributions of roles and responsibilities. Internal regulations have been revised and changed and certain business processes have been optimized. Besides, some of the HEIs have carried out reorganization resulting in the optimization of the organizational structure, human resources and finances.

HEIs have reviewed and updated the educational programmes. HEIs have pointed out that compared to the previous years, when the revision of educational programmes was considered as a responsibility of QA offices solely, the participation of academic and teaching staff in this process and also the participation of employers has significantly increased. The number of academic programmes implemented at Georgian HEIs has decreased from 1905 by the end of 2017 to 1767 by the end of 2018. In case of 83 programmes the reason was cancellation of the authorization of HEIs either by the HEI's own decision or the decision of the authorization council.

24 HEIs that were authorized during the 2018 implemented 1246 educational programmes by the end of the 2017, while the number of programmes implemented by the end of 2018 by the same HEIs was 993. Thus, in the process of reviewing the educational programmes prior to the authorization application HEIs have made the decision to cancel various educational programmes, in total 253. At the same time, 198 new programmes were accredited.

Although it was noted that introduction of the requirement for affiliation of the academic staff has not been sufficiently effectively implemented or evaluated, HEIs had to review contracts with academic staff and negotiate with them on responsibilities and salary to maintain them as affiliated academic staff. In some cases, representatives of private HEIs mentioned that they have increased the salaries for academic staff and stressed research as one of the responsibilities of academic staff, as research performance has also been one of the requirements of the new authorization standards. Moreover, to improve the research performance, HEIs have increased the internal research budget, developed internal research funding mechanisms and created research support units.

One of the most notable changes across all the HEIs has been development of student services, improving the performance or creating new units for students' support, career development and student counselling. HEIs have also been emphasizing on the development and improvement of IT infrastructure, such as electronic study process management system and the electronic system of document flow, and software for detecting plagiarism. HEIs have

also developed library resources, gained access to more international scientific-library databases, trained the library staff. Some of the public HEIs have also emphasized on speeding up to finalize several infrastructural projects, reviewed labs and student dormitories.

HEI representatives were prominently pointing out that as the preparation for the authorization required participation of all units and stakeholders of a HEI in the process, the concept of "Quality Culture" became more clear and tangible. One of the rectors has pointed out:

> *"In the process of preparation for the authorization we realized we could achieve the quality culture by engaging all units in this process and recognizing that each of them are responsible to foster the quality in their activities... we have realized the meaningfulness of development of the mission statement to which we can identify ourselves and strive for its achievement.*

It should be noted that a couple of HEIs have mentioned that they did not have to do much of the changes because of the authorization, but they already had most of the mechanisms in place or had planned certain developments anyways, and the requirements indicated in the authorization standards were the confirmation that they were on the right track. In some cases, HEIs had to develop new regulations to describe the processes that were already implemented in practice.

<u>Outcomes of decisions on authorization of HEIs</u>

At the beginning of 2018 there were 75 HEIs in Georgia, among them 27 went through the authorization process in 2018. As a result of the decision of the authorization council, two private and two public HEIs have received the authorization for 6 years without any conditions, majority of the HEIs (16) received the authorization with the condition to submit the progress report in one-year period. Among them, in case of 5 HEIs the authorization additionally requested from NCEQE to monitor the performance of HEIs regarding the standards related to research and other creative activities (Standard 6), in one case – regarding the material, information and financial resources (Standard 7) and educational programmes (Standard 3). Two HEIs have received authorization with full institutional monitoring and another two have received the authorization with the restriction of student enrolment. The authorization council cancelled the authorization of 3 private teaching universities. The table indicating the decisions and compliance levels of each evaluated HEI and related decision are indicated in Annex 6.

During a one-year period (2018) after establishing the new authorization mechanism, the number of HEIs has decreased by 12. Among them, 3 HEIs have been reorganized as vocational education institutions, 3 HEIs have been closed by their own decision, 3 of them have lost their authorization as a result of the institutional monitoring, and as mentioned above, the authorization council cancelled the authorization for 3 HEIs as a result of the evaluation results.

Although the new authorization mechanism is focusing on evaluation of the performance and outcomes of HEIs, the developments that were carried out by the HEIs while preparing for the authorization process were still mostly focusing on improvement of regulations and resources. Thus, the first cycle of authorization evaluations can be considered as a baseline evaluation of HEIs, and in order to foster development of their performance and to evaluate the outcomes, it is essential that the follow up procedures of the authorization mechanism, such as midterm evaluations are applied in a coherent manner.

7.2 Main System-level Changes and Meeting the International Commitments

As it was mentioned in Section 2 the higher education quality assurance system reform was focusing on establishing and implementing development oriented and outcome-based evaluation system. In this regard, the system level changes were based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in EHEA (ESG 2015). Thus, working on development of standards and procedure of authorization of higher education institutions, implied moving towards harmonization of the QA system with the European requirements. Harmonization of the Georgian Higher Education QA System with the ESG 2015 has also been one of the main goals of the reform, which is also emphasized in the Unified Strategy of Education and Science 2017-2021 (MoES, 2017).

In this regard, the major changes include development of the authorization standards that cover all dimensions of HEIs activities and focus on evaluation of not only the resources and regulations, but also the performance and outcomes. In terms of the evaluation procedures, participation of the international experts as the chairs of the authorization expert panels has entirely changed the format, practice and quality of evaluations. Involvement of students and employers in the expert panels, enhanced consideration of student interests and requirements of the labour market by the HEIs. This was also reflected by increased students' and employers' participation in the internal institutional processes, such as programme design and development, strategic planning, internal quality assurance.

Replacing the binary evaluation (compliance/non-compliance) and decision-making (granting or refusal of authorization) system by four level evaluation scheme and diversifying option of authorization related decisions made the system more flexible and promoted the developmental function of QA. This change also strengthened the accountability of the HEIs to follow-up and consider the recommendations elaborated by the authorization experts. To increase the transparency of the evaluation results and accountability of all stakeholders involved in the QA process, NCEQE started publishing the experts' evaluation reports on its website.

As a result of the changes, NCEQE applied for ENQA membership in February 2018 and hosted the experts' panel of ENQA review in October 2018. As a result of the review, the experts have confirmed that the revised QA standards and procedures have been in full or substantial compliance with the requirements of the ESG 2015 and commended the NCEQE for making substantial progress to redesign and implement the quality assurance system with a high degree of stakeholder involvement and commitment to the purpose of quality enhancement. The only areas where the ENQA expert panel evaluated the NCEQE as "partially compliant" with the ESG was "independence" of the QA agency (Standard 3.3) and recommended that absolute independence of the QA agency from the government should be ensured, so that the Minister should not be able to dismiss the agency director or the council members without "serious reasons". It was also emphasized that the ownership of nominating the decision-making council members should shift from the Ministry to the NCEQE.

Based on the ENQA review panel evaluation report (ENQA, 2019) and decision of the ENQA Board[9] NCEQE has become the member of ENQA, thus has also addressed the commitments towards the EHEA and Georgia-EU Association Agreement. NCEQE was registered in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) in April 2019. This entails that the experts' reports on evaluation of Georgian HEIs are also published on EQAR website[10].

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[9]Decision of the ENQA board on granting the NCEQE membership of ENQA
https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Letter-ENQA-to-NCEQE_130519.pdf
[10] https://www.eqar.eu/register/agencies/agency/?id=59

Furthermore, as a result of the revision and implementation of the higher education quality assurance mechanisms, NCEQE has gained the recognition of the World Federation for Medical Education. This accreditation implies that the accreditation of medical programmes and institutions granted by the NCEQE are recognized internationally.

Recommendations Related to the Outcomes of Implementation of Authorization Mechanisms

1. In order to foster development of HEI's performance, quality of education and evaluation of the HEIs' outcomes, it is essential that the follow up procedures of the authorization mechanism, such as midterm evaluations are applied in a coherent manner.

2. In order to foster coherent and objective quality evaluation, the independence of the QA agency from the government shall be ensured.

8. Sustainability of the Implementation of Authorization Mechanism and Promoting the Development of Higher Education Quality

Becoming a full member of ENQA and gaining the recognition of WFME has been underlined as the main achievements of the higher education quality assurance system reform at international level. This was followed by the changing practice of making the internal quality assurance and self-evaluation participatory processes, which was considered as a good start for the development of the HEIs' performance and initiating various institutional changes. At the same time, some of the stakeholders have pointed out that more demanding evaluation process and more significant reduction of the number of HEIs and educational programmes was expected. It was pointed out that initial evaluations and the decisions made by the authorization council were more rigorous and consistent, but the system was not sufficiently grounded to handle various political interventions, lobbing of various HEIs, which loosened the authorization process.

In terms of the political interventions, changing narrative from the policymakers that was associated with the changing leadership in the Ministry of Education and Science, and consequently leadership of the NCEQE three times during the reform implementation process has been highlighted. Particularly, stakeholders refer to the developments that took place in 2018 when the new system was fully operational and application for ENQA membership filed and processed. The need for changes in the evaluation standards to make it compatible with the European requirements announced by the Minister in 2018 generated confusion and raised questions around the reform. Equally, public speeches made by the Minister with the main message on making system more supportive to HEIs rather than

controlling diminished the purpose of comprehensive external evaluation and at the same time put the institutions that went through the rigorous evaluation process in an unequal condition with those awaiting the evaluation (see Section 5). These messages were followed by the initiation of the changes in the legislation by the Head of Parliamentary Committee for Education and Science on suspension of the authorization process for two years. The risk of suspending the authorization process by the initiated legal amendments has been mitigated by the public statements of experts and media coverage of the topic, stressing on international commitments as a leverage to ensure sustainability of the system level factors[11].

However, HEI representatives have pointed out that disjointed political messages have impacted the attitudes of the stakeholders towards the process. After some of the initial evaluations "it has become easier to go through the authorization evaluation" and also impacted the council decisions to upgrade the compliance levels indicated in the experts' evaluation reports. One of the rectors has mentioned during the interview:

> *"In order the authorization system to meet the expected results, it is very important that the full-scale implementation of the new evaluation system has strong and continuous support from different stakeholders, including political support".*

Some of the HEIs have underlined that the authorization process met their expectations, but not the outcomes of the evaluations. Maintaining the consistency and rigorousness of implementation of the QA mechanisms was underlined as a significant factor for translating the reform into enhancement of higher education quality in the country.

As it was mentioned above, the first cycle of authorization evaluations demonstrated a baseline picture of HEIs' performance, but it is essential that the follow up mechanisms are also implemented in a rigorous and consistent manner. This would give the HEIs motivation to keep up their work and translate the new regulations and mechanisms into practice.

HEIs have highlighted that based on the evaluation results HEIs should be given various incentives in terms of funding:

> *"It should be clear for the HEIs what benefits they will receive or what problems they might face as a result of the authorization. More differentiation of the evaluation outcomes and they should impact the funding of HEIs and be considered in the performance-based funding model".*

As for the keys for the sustainability and further development of the system, capacity building of experts, council members, NCEQE and HEI representatives and setting the system free of political pressure has been underscored. In terms of the capacity building of the stakeholders, it was underlined that development of the critical mass of stakeholders that are highly qualified and at the same time, value and strive to develop educational quality rather than focusing on monetary or non-monetary personal gains is essential. HEI representatives also stressed the need for

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[11]One of the public statements made by the Higher Education Reform Expert of Erasmus+ national office, which was also officially sent to the chair of the Georgian Parliament
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GPGR7s9CV_b6H7ghnAJ98BK0Zvvx_u_B/view?fbclid=IwAR2LQJntignik6aa8WYfBzTfB-LIVKRIWHU9qc9ZcU2dQH2gAaPezDgzZUc

providing relevant support from the government for fulfilling the standard requirements, legislative changes (related to procurement, funding, etc.) and financial resources.

Results of the authorization process could be considered as a thorough situational analysis of HE system development of Georgia. The strengths and weaknesses of the HEIs – identified in the process of external assessment should be addressed not only by the HEIs themselves in their strategies and action plans, but by the Government as well. The results of the authorization should be closely linked to the state policy of HE development.

Recommendation on Sustainability of Implementation of Authorization Mechanism and Further Enhancement of Educational Quality

1. More support should be provided for the HEIs to enhance their institutional, organizational and infrastructural capacity.

2. Higher education regulatory framework should be modernized, considering the issues related to the performance-based funding model, simplification of the procurement process, workload and activities of the academic staff.

3. The system and politics should safeguard sustainable, coherent and independent operation of the higher education quality assurance mechanisms.

4. Capacity building of all stakeholders should be intensified to foster common understanding of the principles and meaningfulness of the quality assurance system and engage them in the system development process.

9. Main Recommendations of the Research

Recommendation on improvement of HEIs' self-evaluation process and common areas for improvement

1. Methodological guidance/training should be provided for HEIs on developing and analyzing performance/institutional benchmarks such as employment rate of graduates, student drop-out rates, staff and budget related ratios, etc. It is essential that HEIs keep tracking of the data (IQA results, performance indicators, etc.,) on a regular basis and use the results for relevant interventions;

2. Considering the initial experience of self-evaluation process, additional guidance should be provided for HEIs to ensure that the self-evaluation report is based on relevant evidences (e.g. results of IQA), is analytical, realistic, self-critical and reflective and suggests appropriate strategies and action for further development;

3. Main recommendation for the HEIs related to the authorization standards could be summarized as following:
    o Prioritize strategic activities and allocating relevant human and financial resources;
    o Optimize and improvement of administrative capacity;
    o Consider the external and internal QA results in decision making;
    o Provide relevant guidance in terms of academic integrity in teaching and research, implementation and application of software to detect plagiarism;
    o Promote better understanding of learning outcomes, update them in line with modern requirements and align relevant teaching material, methodology and assessment methods to ensure their achievement;
    o Fully implement the human resource management and evaluation system, monitor and consider staff evaluation results and provide appropriate professional development opportunities;
    o HEIs should ensure that the workload and performance of the affiliated academic staff meets the needs and expectations of academic process and provides relevant incentives for the affiliated academic staff;
    o Develop and diversify student services that best serves enhancement of students' learning experience and personal growth;
    o Develop mechanisms to support advancement of research activities, especially support academic staff and students to enhance their research skills, participate in international research projects;
    o Create attractive learning environment and develop facilities to serve the students with special educational needs;
    o Develop library resources and services; and provide relevant instructions for the staff and the students on the application of electronic library-scientific databases;
    o Diversify financial sources and enhance the efficiency of budget planning and financial management processes.

4. It should be underlined that in many cases HEIs had newly elaborated regulations or policy documents, newly established mechanisms, thus, during the evaluations their outcomes or even performance could not be evaluated. Thus, it is essential that HEIs fully implement the policies and actions as described in the documents and the follow up internal and external evaluations take into account the progress and the outcomes of HEIs' performance.

5. Timeline of the authorization process should be revised and extended, with special emphasis on time allocated for the authorization document desk study and time allocated for drafting the experts' report.

6. The quality of the translation of authorization documents should be improved. In this regard, NCEQE should make an effort to maintain the quality material in the translation software system (SDL Trados Studio) that it uses for translation and train the translators in the QA terminology, to improve the quality of further translations; or legislative changes obliging HEIs to take responsibility on translating their own documents should be initiated.

7. Review the list of the documents that should be submitted with the SER report as an application for authorization and differentiate them in three categories: the documents that are not needed for authorization purposes, the documents that HEIs should have but should not submit with the application, the documents that should be submitted with the application. While considering this list, the risks associated with changing or creating new documents during the site-visit should be considered. The research team considered some of those documents and recommends that e.g. HEIs do not have to submit the certificates related to the safety and sanitation of building, CVs of the staff (note: Standard 7.3 requires that HEIs should have published the profiles of the academic staff on the website and the biographies cannot be developed or significantly changed during the site-visits).

8. Procedure and guidelines for evaluating new HEIs should be elaborate.

9. Composition of the expert panels should be diversified to make sure that a panel is not dominated by the experts representing the same HEI.

10. Additional day after the site-visit should be allocated officially as expert panels' working day to foster discussion and clarification of key findings, recommendations and making the joint judgements on HEI's compliance levels for all authorization standards and standard component.

Recommendations on experts' activities

11. Regular training for authorization experts should be provided emphasizing the issues related to the consistent evaluation, discussion of previous evaluations and expert's behavior during the site visit.

12. Training of experts should include simulation of actual authorization process and study visits in other ENQA member agencies.

13. Training for international experts acting as expert panel chairs should be provided (online sessions) emphasizing the national QA regulations, higher education context, cultural issues to ensure that written and oral communication is clear and understandable for HEIs and council members.

14. Considering the actual workload of the authorization experts, the remuneration rate of the Georgian experts should be reviewed and increased.

15. Authorization experts should be provided with the feedback on their performance evaluation collected from HEIs, NCEQE and peers and the expert's performance evaluation results should be considered in the expert pool attestation process.

16. To create a common understanding of the authorization process, standards and compliance judgements joint training and workshops should be provided for authorization experts and council members.

17. Additional guidance should be provided for the evaluation experts to make sure that evaluation thoroughly considers and analyses the benchmarks and key data of HEIs, student enrolment planning methodology and staff affiliation during the evaluation process.
18. The data on academic staff affiliation should regularly be recorded, updated and monitored by the NCEQE, to ensure the validity and completeness of the record; authorization experts should be given more clear instruction how to analyze the database and make judgements on academic staff workload.
19. Special regulation tentatively under separate Act of Minister should be developed specifying the affiliated academic staff requirements in more details, including quantitative indicators considering the specifics of different fields of study, would be more effective.
20. NCEQE should consider to add pre-evaluation stage in the authorization procedure, which implies pre-evaluation of the HEIs documents before the desk study on some technical issues, such as: relevance of educational programmes with Classifier of Learning Fields and qualifications to be awarded, certifications on safety and sanitary norms of buildings, summary of academic staff affiliation data, etc.
21. National QA related regulations (e.g. Law on Educational Quality Enhancement, Charter of Authorization/Accreditation) should reflect and emphasize the "fitness to the purpose" principle of higher education quality assurance.
22. The rule for selection of authorization council members should be revised to ensure fair representation of the stakeholders in the process

Recommendations related to the outcomes of implementation of authorization mechanisms

23. In order to foster development of HEI performance, quality of education and evaluation of the HEIs' outcomes, it is essential that the follow up procedures of the authorization mechanism, such as midterm evaluations are applied in a coherent manner.
24. In order to foster coherent and objective quality evaluation, independence of the QA agency from the government should be ensured.

Recommendation on sustainability of implementation of authorization mechanism and further enhancement of educational quality

25. More support should be provided for the HEIs to enhance their institutional, organizational and infrastructural capacity.
26. Higher education regulatory framework should be modernized, considering the issues related to the performance-based funding model, simplification of the procurement process, workload and activities of academic staff.
27. The system and politics should safeguard sustainable, coherent and independent operation of the higher education quality assurance mechanisms.
28. Capacity building of all stakeholders should be intensified to foster common understanding of the principles and meaningfulness of the quality assurance system, and engage them in the system development process.

10.   Annexes

Annex 1. List of the HEIs evaluated during the 2018, with indication to the HEIs that agreed to participate in the study in terms of analyzing their SERs.

N	Consent on Participation in the SER analysis	HEI	TYPE (university, Teaching University, College)	Public/Private (PB/PR)	Location
1	Yes	Akaki Tsereteli State University	U	PB	Kutaisi
2	Yes	Apollon Kutateladze Tbilisi State Academy of Art	U	PB	Tbilisi
3	Yes	Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University	U	PB	Batumi
4	No	Caucasus International University	U	PR	Tbilisi
5	No	David Aghmashenebeli University of Georgia	U	PR	Tbilisi
6	Yes	David Tvildiani Medical University	U	PR	Tbilisi
7	No	Euroregional Teaching University	TU	PR	Gori
8	No	Free University of Tbilisi	U	PR	Tbilisi
9	Yes	Georgian Institute of Public Administration	U	PR	Tbilisi
10	No	Georgian Technical University	U	PB	Tbilisi
11	Yes	Grigol Robakidze University	U	PR	Tbilisi
12	Yes	High School Georgia	C	PR	Tbilisi
13	Yes	Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University	U	PB	Telavi
14	Yes	Ilia State University	U	PB	Tbilisi
15	Yes	International Black Sea University	U	PR	Tbilisi
16	No	International Teaching University of Georgia - Unigeo	TU	PR	Tbilisi
17	Yes	Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University	U	PB	Tbilisi
18	Yes	Kutaisi University	U	PR	Kutaisi
19	Yes	Open Teaching University	U	PR	Tbilisi
20	Yes	Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy	TU	PR	Tbilisi
21	Yes	Shota Rustaveli Theater and Film Georgia State University	U	PB	Tbilisi
22	Yes	Shota Meskhia Zugdidi State Teaching University	TU	PB	Zugdidi
23	Yes	Sokhumi State University	U	PB	Tbilisi
24	Yes	Tbilisi State Medical University	U	PB	Tbilisi
25	No	Tbilisi Teaching University	TU	PR	Tbilisi
26	Yes	Teaching University- Batumi State Maritime Academy	TU	PB	Batumi
27	Yes	Vano Sarajishvili Tbilisi State Conservatoire	U	PB	Tbilisi

Annex 2. Rubrics for assessing the quality of self-evaluation reports

4 - SER is analytical, reviews the strengths and areas for improvement of HEIs past performance in a comprehensive manner, the analysis is based on the results of the internal surveys, quantitative data and relevant evidences. It reflects the specific steps for HEI's further development.

3 - SER is analytical, gives the general overview of the strengths and areas for improvement of the HEIs past performance, the analysis is mostly based on the internal survey results, quantitative data and evidences. It reflects general areas for HEIs further development.

2 - SER is mostly descriptive, gives a superficial overview of the strengths and areas for improvement of the HEIs past performance, the analysis lacks the evidences such as survey results, quantitative data or references to other sources, broad plans for HEI's further development is given.

1 - SER mainly repeats the internal regulations of the HEI, the overview of the strengths and areas for improvement is superficial, does not reflect on internal survey results. Superficially reviews the plans for HEI's further development.

Annex 3. List of participants of the interviews and the focus groups

Interviews with policy-makers
Mikheil Batiashvili – Former Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia (2018-2019)
Elene Jibladze – Former Director of the NCEQE (2012-2015)
Giorigi Vashakidze – Former Director of NCEQE (2018-2019)

HEIs participating in the interviews and focus groups
Akaki Tsereteli State University
Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University
Caucasus International University
Davit Tvildiani Medical University
Free University of Tbilisi
Georgian Technical University
Grigol Robakidze University
Ilia State University
Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University
Kutaisi University
Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy,
Teaching University- Batumi State Maritime Academy

Focus Groups
Authorization Experts
Authorization Council
Authorization Division Representatives

Annex 4. The summary of the key data and benchmarks indicated in the self-evaluation reports

	Public HEIs	Private HEIs	HEIs in Tbilisi	HEIs in regions	Universities	Teaching University/College	Public universities	Private universities	Overall average
Graduation rate (BA)	61.9%	53.2%	55.3%	63.4%	59.1%	51.7%	64.4%	55.4%	58.2%
Graduation rate (MA)	51.9%	56.3%	55.1%	51.2%	58.4%	33.8%	60.2%	58.5%	53.6%
Graduation rate (Phd)	25.5%	20.7%	21.0%	28.0%	23.4%		25.5%	20.7%	23.4%
Graduation rate (MD)	74.0%	43.1%	48.9%	82.0%	55.5%	56.0%	74.0%	36.7%	55.5%
Average number of students	6508	1415	4962	3326	5066	1203	7508	1663	4471
Average number of academic staff	241	76	179	165	198	60	277	84	175
Average number of affiliated academic staff	230	56	164	154	183	41	267	68	161
Ratio of affiliate academic staff to overall teaching staff (academic and invited Staff)	38.0%	25.4%	33.2%	43.1%	35.5%	29.8%	37.9%	25.8%	35.5%
Affiliated academic staff to overall academic staff ratio	95.7%	74.4%	91.5%	93.4%	92.6%	67.7%	96.2%	81.8%	92.0%
Average number of scientific staff	128	1	102	14	88	1	156	-	74
Average number of administrative and support staff	545	78	401	259	408	64	635	101	358
Average number of invited teaching staff	365	146	314	192	319	76	426	181	277
Ratio of invited staff to overall teaching staff	56.3%	62.6%	60.9%	54.0%	60.7%	53.1%	57.2%	67.7%	58.8%
Ratio of the administrative expenditure to the HEI's total budget	36.7%	28.8%	30.7%	39.6%	29.3%	52.6%	28.2%	22.2%	33.7%
Ratio of academic-scientific staff to overall staff	27.8%	26.7%	27.4%	27.2%	27.1%	30.3%	28.0%	23.3%	27.4%
Ratio of academic and scientific staff to administrative and support staff	72.1%	107.9%	94.8%	67.0%	89.8%	117%	73.6%	81.6%	86.4%
Number of affiliated academic staff per academic programme	5	8	7	3	6	7	5	7	6
Number of academic staff per academic programme	5	10	8	4	7	11	5	8	7
Teaching staff to programmes ratio	12	29	23	9	20	27	13	23	19
Number of students per academic and invited staff	8	6	6	9	7	7	7	6	7
Number of students per affiliated academic Staff	13	26	20	11	15	28	12	23	16
Graduate employment rate	68.3%	76.1%	74.1%	65.3%	70.0%	69.7%	67.3%	81.4%	71.4%
Graduate employment rate (with the received qualification)	54.7%	65.4%	60.4%	55.8%	58.3%	57.8%	53.9%	70.4%	59.0%
Ratio of the budget allocated for research activities to the total HEI budget	11.1%	4.4%	9.5%	5.8%	9.5%	3.7%	13.3%	3.4%	8.4%

Annex 5. Statistics of the compliance levels for each standard and standard component defined by the authorization experts

	Compliance	Substantial Compliance	Partial Compliance	Non-Compliance	Compliance	Substantial Compliance	Partial Compliance	Non-Compliance	Compliance or Substantial Compliance
1. Mission and Strategic Development	15	9	2	1	56%	33%	7%	4%	89%
1.1 Mission	14	10	2	1	52%	37%	7%	4%	89%
1.2 Strategic Development	8	11	6	2	30%	41%	22%	7%	70%
2. Organisational Structure and Management of the HEI	7	13	6	1	26%	48%	22%	4%	74%
2.1 Organisational structure and management	4	17	5	1	15%	63%	19%	4%	78%
2.2 Internal quality assurance mechanisms	6	13	6	2	22%	48%	22%	7%	70%
2.3 Observing principles of ethics and integrity	13	5	8	1	48%	19%	30%	4%	67%
3. Educational Programmes	5	19	1	2	19%	70%	4%	7%	89%
3.1 Design and development of educational programmes	9	13	5	0	33%	48%	19%	0%	81%
3.2 Structure and content of educational programmes	5	18	2	2	19%	67%	7%	7%	85%
3.3 Assessment of learning outcomes	9	12	4	2	33%	44%	15%	7%	78%
4. Staff of the HEI	12	10	2	3	44%	37%	7%	11%	81%
4.1 Staff management	5	13	6	3	19%	48%	22%	11%	67%
4.2 Academic/Scientific and invited Staff workload	12	10	4	1	44%	37%	15%	4%	81%
5. Students and their Support Services	15	9	2	1	56%	33%	7%	4%	89%
5.1 The Rule for obtaining and changing student status, the recognition of education, and student rights	16	8	1	2	59%	30%	4%	7%	89%
5.2 Student support services	8	13	5	1	30%	48%	19%	4%	78%
6. Research, Development and/or Other Creative Work	4	13	8	2	15%	48%	30%	7%	63%
6.1 Research activities	4	10	12	1	15%	37%	44%	4%	52%
6.2 Research support and internationalisation	5	11	10	1	19%	41%	37%	4%	59%
6.3 Evaluation of research activities	6	9	9	3	22%	33%	33%	11%	56%
7. Material, Information and Financial Resources	3	15	6	3	11%	56%	22%	11%	67%
7.1 Material resources	9	9	7	2	33%	33%	26%	7%	67%
7.2 Library resources	8	12	7	0	30%	44%	26%	0%	74%
7.3 Information resources	13	8	4	2	48%	30%	15%	7%	78%
7.4 Financial resources	8	10	6	3	30%	37%	22%	11%	67%

Annex 6. Compliance levels of evaluated HEIs defined by the authorization experts, by the authorization council and related authorization decisions

Experts/Councils' Evaluation	HEIs	Akaki Tsereteli State University	Apollon Kutateladze Tbilisi State Academy of Art	Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University	Caucasus International University	David Aghmashenebeli University of Georgia	David Tvildiani Medical University	Euroregional Teaching University	Free University of Tbilisi	Georgian Institute of Public Administration	Georgian Technical University	Grigol Robakidze University	High School Georgia	Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University	Ilia State University	International Black Sea University	International Teaching University of Georgia -	Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University	Kutaisi University	Open Teaching University	Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy	Shota Rustaveli Theater and Film Georgia State	Shota Meskhia Zugdid State Teaching University	Sokhumi State University	Tbilisi State Medical University	Tbilisi Teaching University	Teaching University-Batumi State Maritime	Vano Sarajishvili Tbilisi State Conservatoire
	TYPE	U	U	U	U	U	U	TU	U	U	U	U	C	U	U	U	TU	U	U	TU	U	U	TU	U	U	TU	TU	U
	PB/PR	PB	PB	PB	PR	PR	PR	PR	PR	PR	PB	PR	PR	PB	PB	PR	PR	PB	PR	PR	PR	PB	PB	PB	PB	PR	PB	PB
	Location	KT	TB	BT	TB	TB	TB	GR	TB	TB	TB	TB	TB	TL	TB	TB	TB	TB	KT	TB	TB	TB	ZG	TB	TB	TB	BT	TB
experts	1	SC	SC	FC	FC	FC	SC	PC	FC	FC	SC	SC	PC	FC	FC	FC	SC	SC	SC	FC	FC	FC	FC	FC	SC	NC	FC	FC
	1.1	SC	SC	FC	FC	FC	SC	PC	FC	FC	SC	SC	PC	FC	FC	FC	SC	SC	SC	FC	FC	FC	FC	FC	SC	NC	SC	FC
	1.2	SC	SC	FC	FC	SC	PC	NC	FC	FC	PC	PC	PC	FC	FC	SC	PC	PC	SC	FC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	NC	FC	SC
council	1	FC	SC	FC	FC	FC	SC	PC	FC	FC	SC	SC	PC	FC	FC	FC	SC	FC	SC	FC	FC	FC	FC	FC	FC	NC	FC	FC
	1.1	FC	SC	FC	FC	FC	SC	PC	FC	FC	SC	SC	PC	FC	FC	FC	SC	SC	SC	FC	FC	FC	FC	FC	FC	NC	SC	FC
	1.2	SC	SC	FC	FC	SC	SC	NC	FC	FC	SC	SC	PC	FC	FC	SC	PC	FC	SC	FC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	NC	FC	SC
experts	2	SC	SC	SC	FC	SC	SC	NC	FC	FC	PC	SC	PC	SC	FC	SC	SC	PC	PC	SC	FC	FC	SC	PC	FC	PC	SC	SC
	2.1	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	NC	SC	SC	PC	SC	PC	SC	FC	SC	SC	SC	PC	PC	SC	FC	FC	SC	SC	PC	SC	SC
	2.2	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	NC	FC	FC	PC	PC	PC	SC	FC	SC	SC	SC	PC	PC	SC	FC	FC	SC	FC	NC	SC	SC
	2.3	PC	PC	PC	FC	SC	SC	PC	FC	FC	FC	FC	SC	FC	FC	PC	FC	FC	PC	SC	PC	FC	FC	FC	PC	FC	PC	SC
council	2	SC	SC	SC	FC	SC	SC	NC	FC	FC	SC	SC	PC	SC	FC	SC	SC	SC	PC	SC	FC	FC	SC	PC	FC	PC	SC	SC
	2.1	SC	SC	SC	FC	SC	SC	NC	SC	SC	PC	SC	PC	SC	FC	SC	SC	SC	PC	PC	SC	FC	FC	SC	SC	PC	SC	FC
	2.2	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	NC	FC	FC	SC	PC	PC	SC	FC	SC	SC	SC	PC	PC	SC	FC	FC	SC	FC	NC	SC	SC
	2.3	SC	SC	PC	FC	SC	SC	NC	FC	FC	FC	FC	SC	SC	FC	FC	PC	SC	PC	FC	FC	FC	FC	PC	FC	PC	FC	SC
experts	3	SC	SC	SC	FC	PC	SC	NC	FC	FC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	FC	SC	SC	FC	NC	SC	SC
	3.1	SC	SC	FC	FC	PC	SC	PC	FC	FC	SC	SC	SC	SC	FC	FC	SC	FC	PC	SC	PC	FC	SC	SC	FC	PC	SC	SC
	3.2	SC	SC	SC	FC	SC	SC	NC	FC	FC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	PC	SC	SC	SC	FC	PC	SC	SC	NC	SC	FC
	3.3	SC	SC	SC	FC	PC	PC	NC	FC	FC	PC	FC	SC	FC	SC	SC	PC	SC	FC	SC	FC	SC	SC	SC	FC	NC	FC	SC
council	3	SC	SC	SC	FC	SC	SC	NC	FC	FC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	FC	SC	SC	FC	NC	SC	FC
	3.1	SC	SC	FC	FC	SC	SC	PC	FC	FC	SC	SC	SC	SC	FC	FC	SC	FC	PC	SC	PC	FC	SC	SC	FC	PC	SC	FC
	3.2	SC	SC	SC	FC	SC	SC	NC	FC	FC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	FC	PC	SC	SC	NC	SC	FC
	3.3	SC	SC	SC	FC	PC	SC	NC	FC	FC	PC	FC	SC	FC	SC	SC	PC	SC	FC	SC	FC	SC	SC	SC	FC	NC	FC	SC

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Experts/Councils' Evaluations	HEIs	Akaki Tsereteli State University	Apollon Kutateladze Tbilisi State Academy of Art	Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University	Caucasus International University	David Aghmashenebeli University of Georgia	David Tvildiani Medical University	Euroregional Teaching University	Free University of Tbilisi	Georgian Institute of Public Administration	Georgian Technical University	Grigol Robakidze University	High School Georgia	Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University	Ilia State University	International Black Sea University	International Teaching University of Georgia - Unigeo	Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University	Kutaisi University	Open Teaching University	Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy	Shota Rustaveli Theater and Film Georgia State University	Shota Meskhia Zugdid State Teaching University	Sokhumi State University	Tbilisi State Medical University	Tbilisi Teaching University	Teaching University- Batumi State Maritime Academy	Vano Sarajishvili Tbilisi State Conservatorie
	TYPE	U	U	U	U	U	U	TU	U	U	U	U	C	U	U	U	TU	U	U	U	TU	U	TU	U	U	TU	TU	U
	PB/PR	PB	PB	PB	PR	PR	PR	PR	PR	PR	PB	PR	PR	PB	PB	PR	PR	PB	PR	PR	PR	PB	PB	PB	PB	PR	PB	PB
	Location	KT	TB	BT	TB	TB	TB	GR	TB	TB	TB	TB	TB	TL	TB	TB	TB	TB	KT	TB	TB	TB	ZG	TB	TB	TB	BT	TB
experts	4	SC	SC	FC	FC	PC	SC	NC	FC	FC	SC	FC	PC	FC	FC	SC	NC	SC	SC	SC	FC	FC	FC	FC	FC	NC	SC	SC
	4.1	SC	SC	SC	FC	PC	SC	NC	FC	SC	PC	SC	PC	SC	SC	SC	NC	PC	PC	PC	FC	FC	SC	SC	FC	NC	SC	SC
	4.2	SC	SC	FC	FC	PC	SC	PC	FC	FC	SC	FC	PC	FC	FC	PC	SC	FC	SC	SC	SC	FC	FC	FC	FC	NC	SC	SC
council	4	SC	SC	FC	FC	PC	SC	NC	FC	FC	SC	FC	PC	FC	FC	SC	NC	FC	SC	SC	FC	FC	FC	FC	FC	NC	SC	SC
	4.1	SC	SC	SC	FC	PC	SC	NC	FC	SC	SC	SC	PC	SC	SC	SC	NC	SC	PC	PC	FC	FC	SC	SC	FC	NC	SC	SC
	4.2	SC	SC	FC	FC	PC	SC	PC	FC	FC	SC	FC	PC	FC	FC	PC	SC	FC	SC	SC	SC	FC	FC	FC	FC	NC	SC	SC
experts	5	SC	SC	FC	FC	SC	SC	PC	FC	FC	SC	FC	SC	FC	FC	FC	NC	FC	SC	FC	FC	FC	SC	SC	FC	PC	FC	FC
	5.1	SC	SC	FC	FC	FC	FC	PC	FC	FC	SC	FC	SC	FC	FC	FC	NC	FC	SC	SC	FC	FC	SC	SC	FC	NC	FC	FC
	5.2	PC	PC	SC	FC	PC	SC	PC	FC	FC	SC	SC	SC	SC	FC	SC	NC	SC	SC	FC	FC	FC	SC	SC	FC	PC	SC	SC
council	5	SC	SC	FC	FC	SC	SC	PC	FC	FC	FC	FC	SC	FC	FC	FC	NC	FC	SC	FC	FC	FC	SC	SC	FC	PC	FC	FC
	5.1	SC	SC	FC	FC	FC	FC	PC	FC	FC	FC	FC	SC	FC	FC	FC	NC	FC	SC	SC	FC	FC	SC	SC	FC	NC	FC	FC
	5.2	SC	SC	SC	FC	PC	SC	PC	FC	FC	SC	SC	SC	SC	FC	SC	NC	SC	SC	FC	FC	FC	SC	SC	FC	PC	SC	SC
experts	6	PC	SC	PC	SC	PC	PC	NC	FC	SC	SC	SC	SC	PC	FC	SC	PC	SC	PC	SC	SC	FC	SC	SC	SC	NC	SC	FC
	6.1	PC	SC	PC	SC	PC	PC	NC	FC	PC	SC	PC	SC	PC	FC	PC	PC	SC	PC	SC	PC	FC	SC	SC	SC	PC	SC	FC
	6.2	PC	PC	SC	SC	PC	PC	SC	FC	FC	PC	PC	PC	FC	SC	SC	SC	FC	PC	SC	SC	SC	PC	SC	SC	NC	PC	FC
	6.3	PC	SC	PC	FC	NC	PC	NC	FC	FC	PC	SC	SC	PC	FC	SC	PC	SC	FC	PC	SC	FC	SC	SC	PC	NC	PC	SC
council	6	PC	SC	PC	SC	PC	SC	NC	FC	SC	SC	SC	SC	PC	FC	SC	PC	FC	PC	SC	PC	FC	SC	SC	SC	NC	PC	FC
	6.1	SC	SC	PC	SC	PC	SC	NC	FC	PC	SC	SC	SC	PC	FC	PC	PC	FC	PC	SC	PC	FC	SC	SC	SC	PC	PC	FC
	6.2	PC	PC	SC	SC	PC	SC	PC	SC	FC	FC	PC	PC	FC	SC	SC	SC	FC	PC	SC	PC	SC	PC	SC	SC	NC	PC	FC
	6.3	PC	SC	PC	FC	PC	PC	NC	FC	FC	SC	SC	SC	PC	FC	SC	PC	SC	SC	PC	PC	FC	SC	SC	SC	NC	PC	SC

	HEIs	Akaki Tsereteli State University	Apollon Kutateladze Tbilisi State Academy of Art	Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University	Caucasus International University	David Aghmashenebeli University of Georgia	David Tvildiani Medical University	Euroregional Teaching University	Free University of Tbilisi	Georgian Institute of Public Administration	Georgian Technical University	Grigol Robakidze University	High School Georgia	Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University	Ilia State University	International Black Sea University	International Teaching University of Georgia - Unigeo	Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University	Kutaisi University	Open Teaching University	Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy	Shota Rustaveli Theater and Film Georgia State University	Shota Meskhia Zugdid State Teaching University	Sokhumi State University	Tbilisi State Medical University	Tbilisi Teaching University	Teaching University- Batumi State Maritime Academy	Vano Sarajishvili Tbilisi State Conservatorie
	TYPE	U	U	U	U	U	U	TU	U	U	U	U	C	U	U	U	TU	U	U	U	TU	U	TU	U	U	TU	TU	U
	PB/PR	PB	PB	PB	PR	PR	PR	PR	PR	PR	PB	PR	PR	PB	PB	PR	PR	PB	PR	PR	PR	PB	PB	PB	PB	PR	PB	PB
	Location	KT	TB	BT	TB	TB	TB	GR	TB	TB	TB	TB	TB	TL	TB	TB	TB	TB	KT	TB	TB	TB	ZG	TB	TB	TB	BT	TB
experts	7	SC	PC	SC	SC	SC	PC	NC	FC	SC	PC	SC	SC	PC	FC	SC	NC	PC	PC	FC	SC	SC	SC	SC	SC	NC	SC	SC
	7.1	SC	PC	FC	SC	SC	SC	NC	FC	PC	PC	FC	SC	PC	FC	SC	PC	PC	SC	FC	FC	SC	FC	SC	FC	NC	FC	PC
	7.2	FC	PC	SC	SC	SC	SC	PC	FC	FC	SC	SC	FC	PC	FC	SC	PC	SC	PC	FC	PC	FC	SC	SC	SC	PC	SC	FC
	7.3	SC	SC	SC	FC	FC	PC	PC	FC	FC	FC	FC	SC	FC	FC	FC	NC	FC	NC	FC	FC	SC	FC	SC	FC	PC	FC	SC
	7.4	SC	PC	SC	SC	SC	PC	NC	FC	FC	PC	FC	PC	SC	FC	FC	NC	PC	SC	FC	FC	FC	SC	SC	PC	NC	SC	SC
council	7	SC	PC	SC	SC	SC	SC	NC	FC	SC	SC	SC	SC	PC	FC	SC	NC	SC	PC	FC	SC	SC	SC	SC	FC	NC	SC	SC
	7.1	SC	PC	FC	SC	SC	SC	NC	FC	PC	SC	FC	SC	PC	FC	SC	PC	SC	SC	FC	FC	SC	FC	SC	FC	NC	FC	SC
	7.2	FC	PC	SC	SC	SC	SC	PC	FC	FC	SC	SC	FC	PC	FC	SC	PC	SC	PC	FC	PC	SC	SC	SC	SC	PC	SC	FC
	7.3	SC	SC	SC	FC	FC	PC	PC	FC	FC	FC	SC	SC	PC	FC	FC	NC	FC	PC	FC	FC	SC	FC	SC	FC	PC	FC	SC
	7.4	SC	PC	SC	SC	SC	SC	NC	FC	FC	PC	FC	PC	SC	FC	FC	NC	PC	SC	FC	FC	FC	SC	SC	FC	NC	SC	SC
Decision		AR	AR	AR	AR	SR	AR	CA	A	AR	AR	AR	SR	AM	A	AR	CA	AR	AM	AR	AR	A	AR	AR	A	CA	AR	AR

Increase of compliance level by the council

Decrease of compliance level by council

Authorization without any conditions	A	4
Authorization with report	AR	16
Authorization with monitoring	AM	2
Authorization with student restriction	SR	2
Cancelation of authorization	CA	3

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