
NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL QUALITY ENHANCEMENT OF GEORGIA

Self-Assessment Report for the ENQA Review



2018



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1. Introduction

National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) is the only educational quality assurance body in Georgia established by the Law on Educational Quality Enhancement (annex 1) in 2010. According to the Law, NCEQE is established as a legal entity of public law under the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (MoESCS) and is independent in its activities. NCEQE performs its activities on the principles of publicity and transparency, it operates under the Constitution of Georgia, international agreements and treaties of Georgia, relevant Laws and legal acts and the Statute of the NCEQE approved by the MoESCS.

The mission of the NCEQE is to support educational quality enhancement, promote and strengthen quality culture and management practice at Georgian educational institutions; provide customer-oriented services and ensure reliability of Georgian educational system. In this regard, the core functions of the NCEQE are: implementation of external quality assurance mechanisms of all educational institutions (higher education institutions (HEI), vocational education institutions, and general education institutions) operating in the country, development and governance of the national qualifications framework; recognition of foreign education.

Although the scope of the activities of the NCEQE is not limited to the quality assurance of higher education only, the purpose of this Self-Assessment Report is to demonstrate that NCEQE's activities related to the higher education quality assurance are in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015). As a result of the review, NCEQE intends to follow its declared strategic goal and to become the member of ENQA.

NCEQE is committed to constantly develop its capacity and be responsive to the ongoing trends. To fulfill its function of development and implementation of external quality assurance mechanisms for higher education institutions, the NCEQE continuously works on the development of the education quality concept, creates and maintains up-to-dated quality assurance (QA) standards and procedures and ensures relevant mechanisms for their proper implementation. Furthermore, the NCEQE supports the development of internal quality culture of educational institutions through providing various capacity building activities, including provision of guidelines, recommendations, and workshops for HEIs.

During 2015-2017, NCEQE has led the policy reform of higher education quality assurance system to shift it to the development-oriented and outcome-based evaluation approach and to ensure its alignment with the ESG 2015. NCEQE has started implementation of the revised QA system from 2017.



2. Development of the self-assessment report

Since 2017, the NCEQE has started the system-wide implementation of the revised higher education quality assurance mechanisms at Georgian HEIs. This was followed by the initiation of the self-evaluation process for the ENQA membership in March, 2018. Thus, the self-assessment process has been a valuable experience for the NCEQE to reflect on substantial changes that have been made for the improvement of the QA system and also, for the development of the NCEQE's organizational capacity.

At the initial stage of the self-assessment, a team was established that comprised of the NCEQE staff representing Higher Education Quality Assurance, Strategic Development and Internationalization, Internal Audit, Legal and Qualifications Development departments: Maia Gelashvili, Lasha Margishvili, Salome Benashvili, Marina Zhvania, Elene Nikolaishvili, Maia Margvelashvili, and Ketevan Panchulidze. The self-assessment team was led by Ketu Tsotniashvili. At the initial stage, the team has planned the self-assessment process and its timeline and defined the key stakeholders to be involved in the process. The team has been meeting regularly to discuss the interim results and drafted sections of the report and to clarify the open issues. The top management was engaged in the self-assessment process on a daily basis.

NCEQE has used the EFQM Excellence Model tools for the institutional self-evaluation with the wide-participation of the NCEQE's staff. The evaluation results were incorporated in the ENQA self-assessment report.

Self-assessment process entails the input from various stakeholders collected through various surveys and workshops. In order to collect feedback from external stakeholders' surveys were conducted among HEIs, peer-review experts, and Authorization and Accreditation Council members. Main findings of the surveys have also been discussed in focus groups. The self-assessment process also included discussion with the representatives of the MoESCS, where the key finding and self-assessment results have been shared. This was related to the relevant policy changes, such as establishment of the Coordinating Council at the NCEQE.

The self-assessment process and reflection on its results was of a highly beneficial experience for the NCEQE teams, as the results clearly showed the necessity of further improvements in certain areas. Most notable topic among them was to formalize certain processes to make them more sustainable. Some of the issues have already been addressed.

The engagement of the representatives of higher education institution, decision-making councils, and peer review experts allowed us to improve planning and organizational issues of the evaluation.

The self-assessment report considers the main structure offered by ENQA. The self-assessment team finalized the SAR on August 20, 2018 and the NCEQE approved it to be published on its website and presented to ENQA.



3. Higher education and QA of higher education in the context of the agency

Governance of the higher education and higher education quality assurance system in Georgia

The higher education system in Georgia is regulated by the Law on Higher Education, Law on Educational Quality Enhancement, other related sub legal acts and bylaw. Major changes and reforms of higher education system in Georgia have started since 2004 when the new law on higher education was adopted. The law took into account the major Bologna process requirements. In 2005, Georgia joined the Bologna process triggering the wave of reforms of higher education system: specifically, three cycle structure of higher education, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, and the higher education quality assurance system were introduced. As a result, institutional accreditation process has been developed and established as a mandatory procedure to define the status of a HEI. The law also emphasized the development of internal quality assurance procedures at HEIs.

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 and determined 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. To carry out the institutional accreditation of the higher education institutions, National Center for Educational Accreditation (NCEA) was established by the order of the Minister of Education and Science in 2006.

After finalizing the first cycle of the institutional accreditation, the new law on Educational Quality Enhancement was adopted in 2010. Thus, the educational quality assurance issues have been defined by the specific law which defined the authorization of educational institutions and accreditation of educational programs as the mechanisms of external quality assurance for Higher Education. The authorization of the educational institutions has been introduced as the mandatory institutional evaluation procedure for all HEIs to be allowed to operate in the country and issue the state recognized Diploma. The accreditation of the educational programs has been introduced as the mandatory programme evaluation procedure of the doctoral programs and the programs of regulated professions (Medicine, Law, Teacher Education, Veterinary, and Maritime). However, due to the policy that the voucher state funding follows only to the students that enroll on accredited educational programs, most of the programs are accredited (between 90-98 % at different times). The standards and procedures of authorization of the educational institutions (annex 3) and the accreditation of the educational programs (annex 4) are regulated by the relevant charters that are adopted by the orders of the Minister of Education and Science, (Charter of Authorization of Educational Institutions, order #99/n, 01/10/2010 and the Charter of Accreditation of Educational Programs, Order #65/n, 04/05/2011).

Higher Education System in Georgia

As it is stated in the Law on Higher Education, Georgian higher education system is based on the following goals and principles:

- Promotion of the development of Georgian and global cultural values, orientation toward the ideals of democracy and humanism essential for the existence and development of a civil society;
- Satisfaction of the needs of an individual to acquire higher education compatible with one's personal interests and capabilities, to master qualification, and to be retrained
- Realization of personal potential, development of creative skills, training of individuals whose competence is compatible with modern requirements, ensuring the competitiveness of graduates on domestic and



international labor markets, and offering high-quality education meeting the requirements of the student community and the public at large to the interested individuals;

- Training and retraining of new research personnel in order to ensure the sustainability of the country's development and the system of higher education itself; to create, maintain and develop the favorable conditions for research;
- To encourage the mobility of students and academic personnel of higher education institutions.

The Law defines three types of higher education institutions that can operate in Georgia: **University** - offering higher educational programs of all three cycles (Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral) and carries out research activities; **Teaching University** - carries out first and second cycle higher educational programs, while **College** - implements only the first cycle higher educational program.

In 2006, Georgia, as a Bologna member country, initially started to develop a Higher Education Qualifications Framework. In 2010, National Qualifications Framework of Georgia was officially approved, including three education sub-systems (General, Vocational, and Higher) frameworks. Higher education is described by the structures and descriptors set by the Bologna Process.

Georgia has the three-cycle higher education system which is applied to the higher educational programs as following:

- Bachelor's programme (240 ECTS);
- Master's programme (120 ECTS);
- Medical education programme (360 ECTS) is one-cycle higher educational program, which ends with awarding an academic degree of Medical Doctor. Academic degree received after the completion of the educational programme of medicine with 360 ECTS is equalized with academic degree of master's;
- Dental education programme (300 ECTS) is one-cycle higher educational program, which ends with awarding an academic degree of Doctor of Dental Medicine. Academic degree received after the completion of the educational programme of dental medicine with 300 ECTS is equalized with academic degree of master's;
- Integrated teacher education programme (300 ECTS) is an integrated educational program, which ends with awarding an academic degree of Master of Education (indication of the level of secondary education/group/groups of subjects);
- Integrated veterinary education programme (300 ECTS) – is an integrated educational program, which ends with awarding an academic degree of Master of Veterinary;
- Doctoral programme (180 ECTS).

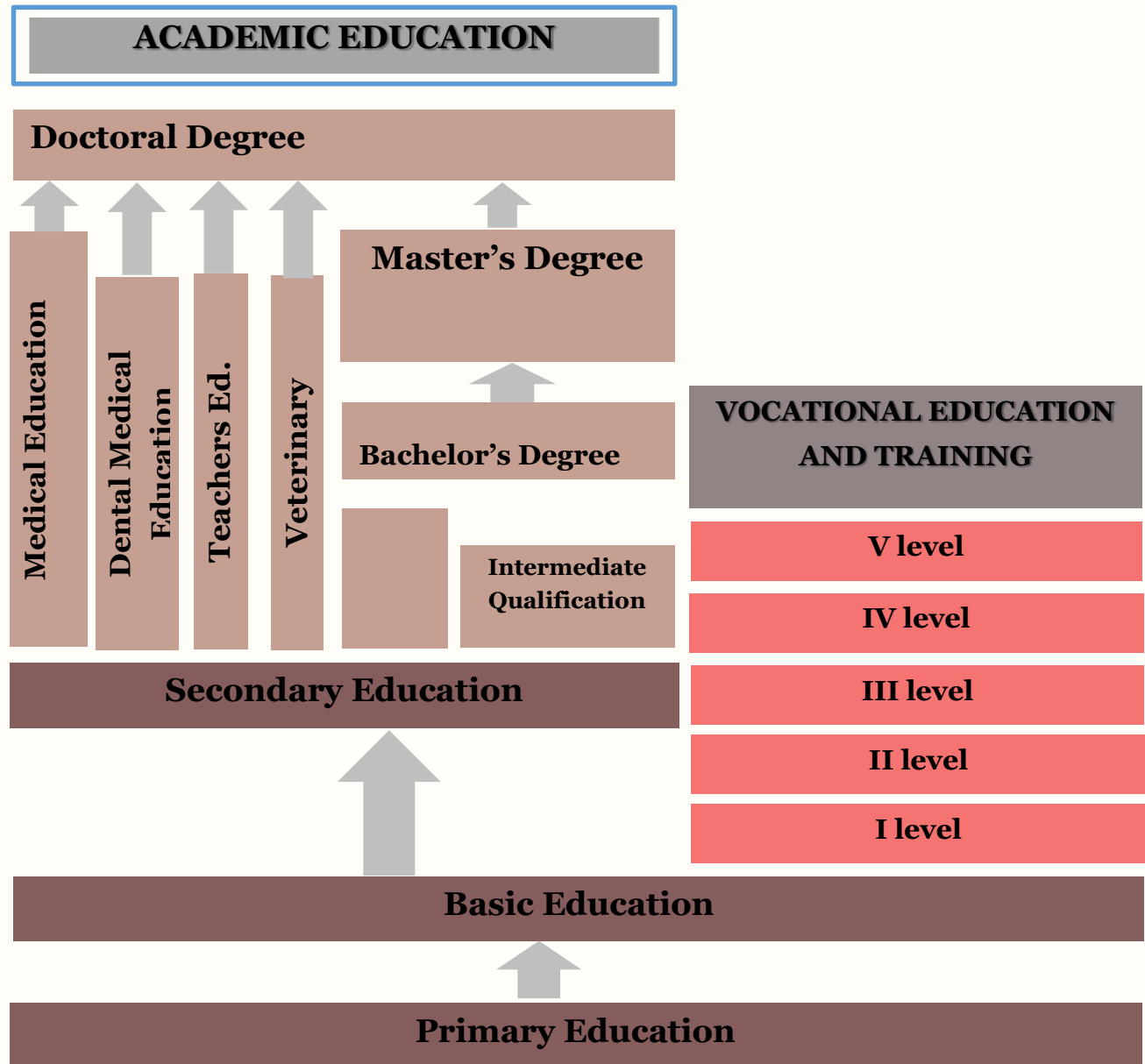
Further changes in the system of higher education are envisaged in order to bring it closer to the European Higher Education Area. On June 27, 2014, Georgia signed Association Agreement with the Europe Union. In order to ensure the fulfillment of duties in 2014, NCEQE started NQF analysis on the national level. Based on the analysis, the project of the unified framework has been elaborated. Revised NQF is in compliance with the EQF LLL and foresees the elimination of the existing deadlock between vocational and higher education. New Framework also envisages development of the Short Cycle, 180 ECTS Bachelor and 90 ECTS Master Programs in order to promote students' international mobility and development of joint programs at international level. In cooperation with MoESCS, NCEQE has initiated the changes in the relevant laws and has submitted the package of the legislative amendments. The package is submitted to the Parliament of Georgia for approval.

The Chart 1 below provides an overview of the Georgian Education System.



Chart 1. Education System in Georgia

EDUCATION SYSTEM IN GEORGIA



Governance of Higher Education Institutions

According to the law HEIs are autonomous in their academic, economic, and administrative activities and the academic freedom of academic, scientific staff and students to carry out academic and scientific work is preserved. The law, also, defines the main principles of the management of the HEIs as following:



- (a) Publicity and accessibility of the decisions, reports, and legal acts of the managerial bodies of HEI to all stakeholders. The HEIs should have the transparent procedures of decision-making in place;
- (b) Academic freedom of the academic personnel and students;
- (c) Involvement of the academic personnel and students in decision-making;
- (d) Equal treatment to all, regardless of one's ethnic or social origin, gender, political or religious beliefs, etc.;
- (e) Fairness and transparency of elections and publicity of the competitions held at HEI.

The main decision-making bodies of a public higher education institution are Academic Council and Senate. The leadership of the HEIs includes Rector, Chancellor, and Quality Assurance Service. The private HEIs are free to define their organization structure, managerial bodies.

Special provisions of the law put the emphasize on the rights of the student to receive a quality education, to establish/join freely student self-governance in a higher education institution, participate in governing bodies and quality assurance processes.

The admission preconditions of students in the HEIs of Georgia

To be admitted the first cycle of higher educational program, it is mandatory to hold a school leaving certificate and to pass the Unified National Examinations; for the admission to the second cycle of educational programme holding a bachelor degree diploma and completion of the unified master's examination is mandatory, as for the admission to the doctoral programs, holding a master degree or equivalent degree is required, while the additional requirements are defined by the HEIs.

Different rules apply to the applicants who have graduated from general and/or higher education institutions in other countries or are citizens of other rather than Georgia, these applicants are exempt from the Unified National Examinations/the Unified Master's Examination.

The sources of funding of a higher education institution are tuition fees, funds received through private grants, contributions or a will, research grants awarded by the state on basis of the competition, programme funding allocated by the ministries operating in the relevant fields. The HEI can also generate the funding from any other sources or activities allowed by the Law of Georgia, including the revenues from economic activities.

Currently, there are 67 authorized HEIs operating in Georgia. Among them 19 are public, 48 are private (8 of them are orthodox theological higher educational institution that accommodate up to 870 students.) By the end of the academic year 2017/18, there are 187,256 students in the national higher education, where 65% of the students are accommodated by the public HEIs (120,461). Overall, 1,790 higher educational programs are delivered, out of which 91% is accredited.

Table 1. Higher Education in Numbers

HEIs	Number of HEIs	Number of Programs				Number of Students			
		BA	MA	One Cycle	Doctoral	BA	MA	One Cycle	Doctoral
Public	19	504	447	21	181	90601	15069	8576	6215
Private	48	344	213	37	60	48615	8125	8511	1544
Sum	67	848	660	58	241	139216	23194	17087	7759



4. History, profile and activities of the NCEQE

In 2006, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia established the first quality assurance agency - the National Center for Educational Accreditation (NCEA) by the order of the Minister (Order #222, 27/03/2006) which was authorized to conduct institutional accreditation of higher education institutions of Georgia. As a result of the revision and reform of the quality assurance system, in 2010, the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement was established as a legal successor of the NCEA. Differently from the NCEA, the NCEQE has been established by separate new Law on Educational Quality Enhancement operating under the Ministry of Education and Science. The Law emphasized that the NCEQE is independent in its activities and operates in compliance with the principles of transparency and publicity. With its new scope of activities, the NCEQE has become one of the most active agencies contributing to the education policy-making and implementation in the country. NCEQE remains to be the only agency in the country that is responsible for educational quality assurance of higher, vocational and general education in Georgia.

NCEQE operates under the charter that is approved by order the Minister of Education and Science (annex 2, order #89/n, 14/09/2010), specifying the goals, functions, management and the structure of the agency. The main aims of the NCEQE are to promote enhancement of educational quality and development of quality culture at educational institutions through development and implementation of external QA mechanisms and supporting development of internal QA mechanisms at the educational institutions. At the same time, NCEQE promotes integration of Georgian educational institutions into international area and increasing confidence in them;

To fulfill its duties and responsibilities, NCEQE carries out the following core activities:

External Quality Assurance of Higher Education

NCEQE implements two external quality assurance mechanisms of higher education: authorization of higher educational institutions and accreditation of higher educational programs. The procedures identify the compliance of the HEIs and educational programs with the pre-determined standards in accordance with the procedures defined in relevant charters (the mechanisms are described in details in the next section).

Supporting Development of Quality Culture at Educational Institutions

NCEQE supports the development of internal quality assurance mechanisms of educational institutions through providing various capacity building activities, including provision of guidelines, recommendations, organization of conferences, and workshops for HEIs.

Authorization of Vocational and General Education Institution

NCEQE implements external QA mechanisms of vocational and general (private) education institutions as an obligatory procedure in order to be allowed to carry out educational activities and to issue an educational document that is recognized by the state. The procedure identifies the compatibility of vocational and general educational institutions with respective authorization standards. The term of the authorization is 6 years after which the institutions are obliged to go through the re-authorization procedure.

Recognition of Education

NCEQE undertakes validation of credentials issued in Georgia, recognition of foreign education and accommodates local in the ENIC-NARIC Networks.

Governance and Management of Qualifications

NCEQE develops and manages the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Currently, the NQF is being revised in line with the European Qualifications Framework - LLL.

Development of Sector Benchmarks and Educational Standards

NCEQE coordinates development, approval and further improvement of sector benchmarks, vocational education standards through setting up sector councils/working groups and coordination of their activities.



Maintenance the registry of higher educational institutions and supporting the student mobility process

NCEQE maintains and monitors the registry that includes data and information on staff, students, and programs of Higher Education Institutions authorized in Georgia. The registry also supports the implementation of student mobility process from one to another higher education institution in Georgia in accordance with Georgian legislation.

Management and structure of the NCEQE

The Charter of the NCEQE defines two governing bodies of the agency - the director and the Coordinating Council. The NCEQE is managed by the Director, while the Coordinating Council is a collegial body designed to ensure involvement of interested parties in the management and development of the agency.

The director defines the functions and obligations of structural units and coordinates their activities, approves the strategic and action plans, internal regulation of the agency, and other rules regulating the issues in case of need for specifying certain matters falling within the competence of the NCEQE. The director appoints and dismisses the center staff in accordance with the procedure prescribed by the legislation, and based on the relevant procedure selects and appoints the peer review experts.

In order to engage relevant stakeholders in the formal decision-making process, the NCEQE has recently initiated to establish a Coordinating Council as an additional managing body. The functions and the selections criteria of the council members have been defined in the Charter of the NCEQE (annex 2, Article 5¹, Order #89/n, 14/09/2010) that was approved by the minister on 31/05/ 2018. Currently, NCEQE is selecting and negotiating with the possible candidates for the Council membership and the selection process is planned to be finalized by the end of October, 2018. According to the charter the Coordinating Council can consist of 5 to 13 members that represent the MoESCS, educational institutions, employers, non-governmental and international organizations, international experts. The members of the council shall be appointed by the MoESCS upon the submission of the NCEQE for two years term. The Coordinating Council is collegial managing body that discusses NCEQE's strategic plan and progress reports, results and further development QA mechanisms, budget allocation, external evaluation reports of the NCEQE's activities, development of international cooperation.

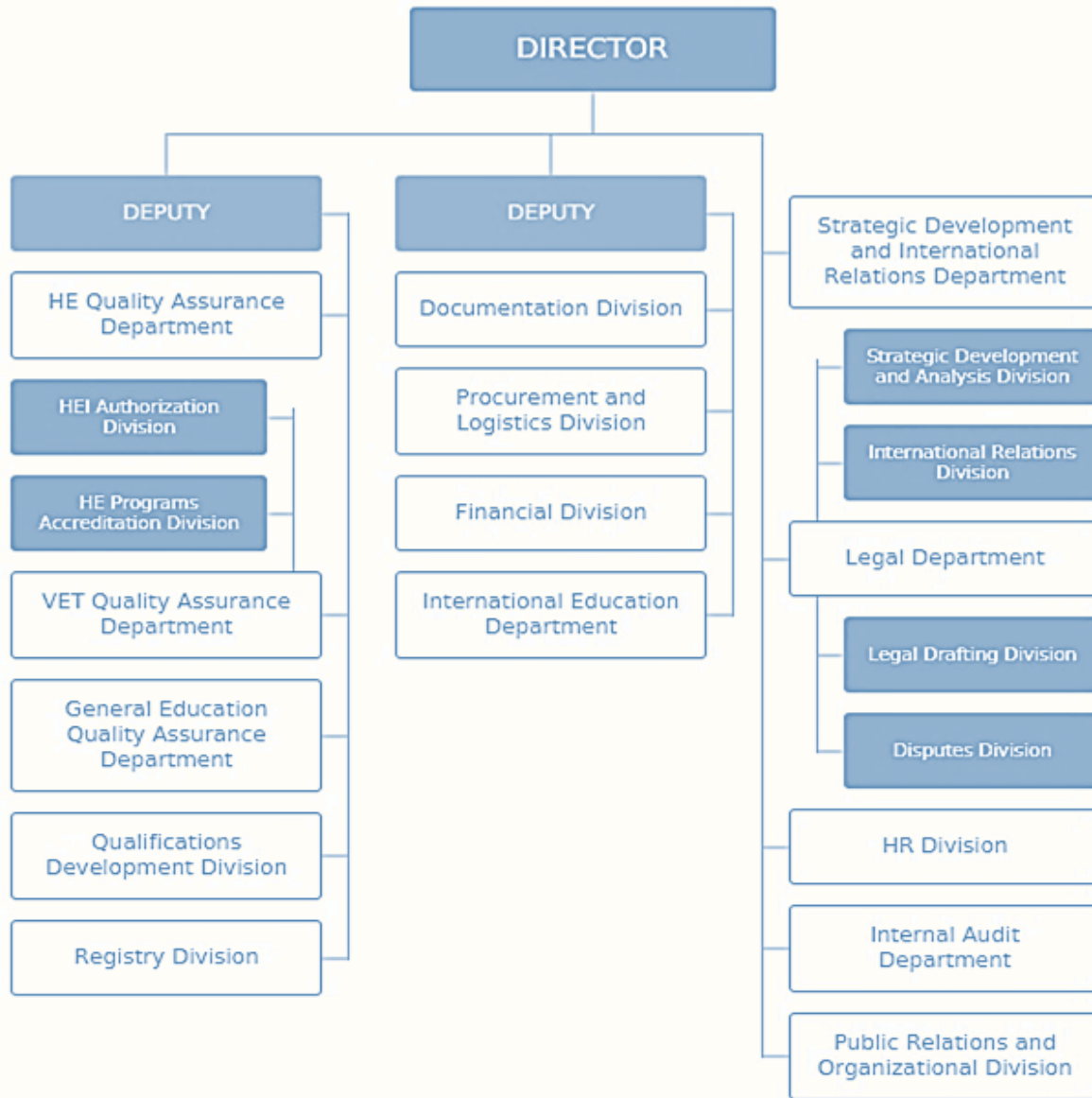
NCEQE's has identified strategic priorities for 2017-2020 which are improvement of organizational capacity of the agency, development and implementation of development-oriented and outcome-based quality assurance system, development of national qualifications framework and promote internationalization of Georgian higher education system. NCEQE's [strategic development plan](#) is publicly accessible on the web-site.

To maintain the internal conduct of the organization director approves the set of rules that is accepted by each member of the staff. The rule also entails the mechanisms of internal QA of the agency. Functions and responsibilities of each structural units of the NCEQE are defined in line with its strategy.

NCEQE's strategy revision and the need for more efficient functioning of the agency brought changes in the structure and the functions of each unit at the end of 2016. As a result, the structure indicated below (Chart 2) has been defined to support implementation of the strategic goals.



Chart 2. Organizational Structure of NCEQE



NCEQE is committed to continuously develop its' performance in line with its mission to promote and strengthen quality culture inside the organization and at educational institutions, as well. In this regard, since 2015, NCEQE has been implementing the EFQM Excellence model which implies continuous development of the business process and the service provided by the NCEQE.

The NCEQE is actively cooperating with its stakeholders, partner national and international organizations and participates in the Bologna Follow-up Group. NCEQE has been an ENQA affiliate since October 2013. Since 2015, the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement has acquired the status of an affiliate member of the European University Association (EUA). Currently, NCEQE is under the review of the World Federation of Medical Education



(WFME) to become recognized agency carrying out quality assessment of medical education in accordance with the WFME and WHO requirements. NCEQE has already received a very positive draft evaluation report (with full compliance in all areas) and is currently expecting the decision of the WFME Recognition Committee.

5. Higher education quality assurance activities of the agency and revision of the system

Historical Overview of the Higher Education Quality Assurance Activities

NCEQE (as a legal successor of NCEA) has up to 12 years of experience of implementing higher education quality assurance activities since the introduction of institutional accreditation as the first external quality assurance mechanism for higher education institutions, in 2006. The institutional accreditations have been replaced by the authorization of educational institutions and accreditation of educational programs, in 2010.

Initially, the purpose for introducing the higher education quality assurance system was to determine the basic parameters that the HEIs should have conformed to be allowed to carry out higher educational activities and issue the state recognized diploma to be eligible to receive the state funding. The evaluation criteria for accreditation were quantitative and focusing on assessing the input and resources of the HEI, such as number of teaching staff with scientific degree, status of ownership of the building, size of the teaching facility, number of computers and textbooks per students' number, etc.

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.

The system has been reformed in 2010 and the new Law on Educational Quality Enhancement has introduced two external quality assurance mechanisms: authorization of educational institutions and accreditation of educational programs. **The authorization of higher education institutions** is obligatory for all HEIs in order to be allowed to carry out educational activities and to issue a diploma that is recognized by the state. The procedure identifies the compatibility of educational institutions with authorization standards. **The accreditation of educational programs** determines the compatibility of educational programs with accreditation standards. Programme accreditation is mandatory only for doctoral programs and programs of regulated professions (Medicine, Law, Teacher Education, Veterinary, and Maritime). However, since state funding goes only to accredited programs, most of them are accredited.

Legal ground of the standards and procedures for authorization and accreditation are defined in the law on Educational Quality Enhancement (annex 1) and while they are described in details the relevant charters (Charter of Authorization of Educational Institutions, order #99/n, 01/10/2010 and the Charter of Accreditation of Educational Programs, Order #65/n, 04/05/2011) that are approved by the Minister of Education and Science.



In 2010, the introduction of the standards and procedures for authorization and accreditation was an attempt to shift the evaluation system from solely quantitative criteria to qualitative standards. Authorization of educational institutions was conducted against three standards: (1) Educational Programs, (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 programme mastering; (3) Student achievements and individual work with them; (4) Providing teaching resources, (5) Teaching quality enhancement opportunities.

Although the revised QA mechanisms were a step forward and allowed to evaluate the educational quality provided by higher education institutions and individual programs in more depth, they were still input-based and the scope of the standards did not cover all the criteria indicated in the ESG Part 1. 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.

Recent Revision of the Higher Education Quality Assurance Mechanisms (2015-2017)

NCEQE has initiated the reform of the QA standards and procedures in 2015 aiming to start the next cycle of quality assessment with the revised system. Main basis for reforming the system, on one hand, was the analysis of the implementation of authorization and accreditation mechanisms, feedback from the HEIs, experts and other stakeholders; while on the other hand, the revision of the QA standards and procedures was based on ESG 2015. Thus, the main purpose for revising the system was strengthening the development-oriented and outcome-based function of quality assurance and to ensure its compliance with the requirements of Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015).

In 2017, the quality assurance standards and procedures were revised with the wide participation of HEI representatives, national and international experts. Before the full scale implementation of the revised QA system, NCEQE conducted the pilot evaluations of HEIs and programs, provided capacity building activities for HEIs and experts, and developed review process guidelines. Government, in the form of specially designed project “Study in Georgia,” supported the implementation of the reform through the above mentioned activities.

After the completion of the pilot evaluations and reflecting its results in the relevant regulations, the NCEQE has started the system-wide implementation of the revised quality assurance standards and procedures at Georgian HEIs. The revised QA system also strengthened the follow-up procedures on the authorization and accreditation results.

NCEQE carries out the higher education quality assurance activities in a cyclical and continuous manner. According to the procedures, the term of authorization is 6 years, while the term of the accreditations for new programs is 4 years and for reaccreditation - 7 years. However, due to the follow-up procedures, the compliance of HEIs with authorization/accreditation standards is monitored after two or three years from granting the authorization/accreditation. The terms and preconditions of the follow-up monitoring for authorization and accreditation are indicated in the respective charters (Charter of Authorization of Educational Institutions, order #99/n, 01/10/2010, Article 25, Paragraph 6 and the Charter of Accreditation of Educational Programs, Order #65/n,



04/05/2011, Article 27⁶) and are also described in Chapter 10 of this report (Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines - Part 2).

The table below demonstrates the scale of the activities carried out by the NCEQE in terms of the authorization of HEIs and accreditation of higher educational programs.

Table 2. NCEQE's higher education QA activities

Reviews carried out during 2010-2018	Reviews for Authorization of educational institution	Reviews for Accreditation of higher educational programmes
2011-2016	143	1767
2017	0	65
2018 finalized	3	92
2018 in progress	24	124

As it is indicated in the table 2, there were no review for authorization done during 2017, which is because of the revision and piloting of the authorization mechanism. By the amendments in the law, the term of authorization has been extended by one year, which allowed the HEIs to better prepare for the authorization process. As for the implementation of the revised accreditation mechanism, it was approved on 31 January, 2018, and all the applications for the accreditation of educational programs that were received after this date have been evaluated according to the revised procedures and standards.

6. Quality assurance processes and their methodologies

The processes of NCEQE's two main quality assurance activities – [authorization of HEIs](#) and [accreditation of higher educational programs](#) are defined in the respective charters (Charter of Authorization of Educational Institutions, order #99/n, 01/10/2010, Article 14 and the Charter of Accreditation of Educational Programs, Order #65/n, 04/05/2011, Article 19) that are publicly available on NCEQE's websites and also in the Legislative Herald of Georgia – www.matsne.gov.ge.

The processes of authorization and accreditation imply following steps:

- Submission of authorization/accreditation application;
- Recognition of educational institution as an applicant for authorization/accreditation;
- Creation of authorization/accreditation expert panel;
- Desk-Study of authorization/accreditation application by the expert panel, and building the agenda for the site-visit;
- Authorization/accreditation site-visit;
- Elaboration of the draft evaluation report and submission to the NCEQE;



- Introducing draft evaluation report to the institution;
- Submission of feedback of the educational institution on the factual errors indicated in the evaluation report to the NCEQE;
- Development of the final version of the evaluation report by the expert panel, and submission to the NCEQE;
- Introducing the final evaluation report to the educational institution;
- Submission of the authorization/accreditation documents and evaluation report to the members of the Authorization/Accreditation Council;
- Authorization/Accreditation Council meeting - oral hearing, and decision-making;
- Publication of the decision and the report at the NCEQE website.

The timeline for the authorization and accreditation procedures is 180 days. NCEQE appoints its staff member (from the higher education quality assurance department) for each evaluation. The staff member is responsible for the organization of the review process and supporting the consistency in accordance with the NCEQE's evaluation methodology.

Peer-review experts

The authorization and accreditation evaluations are carried out by the independent expert panels. NCEQE pays crucial attention to the qualification and professional development of its peer-review experts. The expert's qualification requirements, selection process, functions, responsibilities and the principles for the composition of the expert panels are defined in the "[Rule of Authorization and Accreditation Experts' Selection and Activities and Termination of Membership of Expert Pool](#)" (hereafter, "Rule of Experts' Activities", annex 5) which is approved by the Director of the NCEQE (Order #170, 07/03/2018) and publicly available on NCEQE website. The Rule also indicates the issues related to the expert performance evaluation and professional development.

According to the "Rule of Experts' activities" and the Authorization charter, the authorization process of higher educational institutions are chaired by the international expert, other members of the panel are representatives of the academic and administrative staff of HEIs, student and employer representative and other experts with relevant experience in the higher education.

In case of the programme accreditation, the expert panel consists of the field specific expert members. Similarly to the institutional authorization, it is mandatory that the student experts participate in the review. Considering the field of educational programme the employer representatives are also present in the accreditation expert panels. To support the common understanding of the evaluation methodology relevant guidelines are provided for authorization and accreditation experts.

For the capacity building of its expert's pool, NCEQE regularly conducts trainings for its experts on different topics covering the procedure of evaluation and experts' role and conduct. NCEQE also organizes thematic trainings that target the needs identified from the experts' or HEI's feedback. Prior to each evaluation, a site-visit preparatory meeting is held for the experts' panel.



Issues related to the expert's ethical conduct and the conflict of interests with the HEIs or relevant terms are defined in the "Rule of Experts Activities" and "Code of Ethics of Authorization and Accreditation Experts", that are shared and accepted among all the expert panel members by signing the "Agreement on expert pool membership letter".

Standards for authorization and accreditation

As a result of the reform, the standards of authorization and accreditation have been updated to ensure that they took into account the standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance of the ESG 2015 (Part 1). At the same time, they became oriented on assessment of performance and outcomes of the HEIs and programs. The structure of the standards has also been changed, and descriptions, evaluation criteria, and indicators have been developed. The standards of [authorization](#) and [accreditation](#) are part of the respective charters (Charter of Authorization of Educational Institutions, order #99/n, 01/10/2010, annex 3 and the Charter of Accreditation of Educational Programs, Order #65/n, 04/05/2011, annex 3) that are publicly available on NCEQE's websites and also in the Legislative Herald of Georgia – www.matsne.gov.ge.

In the table below standards and standard components of authorization and accreditation are presented:

Table 3. Standards and Components of Authorization and Accreditation	
Authorization Standards	Accreditation Standards
1. Mission and strategic development of HEI 1.1 Mission of HEI 1.2 Strategic development 2. Organizational structure and management of HEI 2.1 Organizational structure and management 2.2 Internal quality assurance mechanisms 2.3 Observing principles of ethics and integrity 3. Educational Programs 3.1 Design and development of educational programs 3.2 Structure and content of educational programs 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 internationalization 6.3 Evaluation of research activities	1. Educational programme objectives, learning outcomes and their compliance with the program 1.1 Programme Objectives 1.2 Programme Learning Outcomes 2. Teaching methodology and organization, adequate evaluation of Programme mastering 2.1 Programme Admission Preconditions 2.2 Programme Structure and Content 2.3 Study Course 2.4 The Development of practical, scientific/research/creative/performance and transferable skills 2.5 Teaching and learning methods 2.6 Student Evaluation 3. Student achievements and individual work with them 3.1 Student support services 3.2 Master's and Doctoral Student supervision 4. Providing teaching resources 4.1 Human Resources 4.2 Professional development of academic, scientific and invited staff 4.3 Material Resources 4.4 Program/faculty/school budget and programme financial sustainability



7. Material, information and financial resources 7.1 Material resources 7.2 Library resources 7.3 Information resources 7.4 Financial resources	5. Teaching Quality Enhancement Opportunities 5.1 Internal quality assessment 5.2 External quality assessment 5.3 Programme monitoring and periodic review
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Evaluation of the programmes and HEIs

Based on the desk-study of the HEI's documents and the site visit, expert panel elaborates the evaluation report which includes the description and the analysis of the HEIs compliance with the requirements and also, the identification of one of the four compliance levels for each standard component: Compliance, Substantial Compliance, Partial Compliance, and Non-Compliance.

Decision-making and follow up procedure

The decisions regarding the authorization of the higher education institution and accreditation of educational programs are made by the respective councils – HEI Authorization Council and Accreditation Council. The councils make the decision based on the experts' evaluation report (other supporting documents, such as SER of the HEI/program, HEIs feedback on expert's evaluation report) and the discussion and arguments presented during the council meeting.

Authorization and Accreditation Councils

The members of the Authorization and Accreditation Councils represent academic and scientific staff of higher education institutions, employers, students and international/non-governmental organizations working on the educational issues. Currently each council consists of 17 members. The Authorization Council of higher education institutions consists of permanent members and invited members (with medical background according to the WFME requirements). Invited members (15 members) of an Authorization Council participate in the discussion and decision-making process only if the HEI that is under review implements medical programmes. The procedure, requirements and criteria for selecting the council members and their composition is described in the [“Rule on the selection of the candidates for General, Vocational, Higher Education Institutions Authorization, Educational Programs Accreditation and Appeals Councils' membership”](#), which is approved by the Minister and is publicly available on NCEQE website. The councils are the independent collegial bodies appointed by the Prime Minister upon the submission of the MoESCS for one-year term. Functional independence of the aforementioned Councils from educational institutions and state organs is guaranteed on the basis of the Law of Georgia on Educational Quality Enhancement ((Article 11 (1), Article 19 (2)). The councils are not accountable to the Prime Minister and their decisions can only be challenged in the Appeal Council or in the court. NCEQE provides administrative support for the Authorization and the Accreditation Councils.

Decisions and follow-up procedures related to the authorization

According to the Authorization Charter, the Authorization Council makes one of the three decisions:

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



As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, the revised QA system has introduced more flexible and development oriented approach of decision-making, rather than only positive and negative decision, 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 (Article 25, paragraph 6) is the following:

Decisions and relevant follow-up procedures	Criteria for decision-making
The HEI is granted authorization	If all standards are compliant with 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 programs) 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 programs) 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	If no more than one component of a standard (except standard 3 (educational programs) 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 are non-compliant with the requirements
As a general follow up procedure, all HEIs are expected to submit the interim SER after three years from receiving the authorization.	

While making the decision of authorization of the HEI, based on the methodology proposed by the HEI and the expert's report, the Authorization Council also defines the quota of students that the HEI can enroll during the authorization term. However, during the authorization term (6 years) the HEI is allowed to additionally apply for extension of the student quota. In this case, the procedure of evaluation is the same as it is for the regular authorization process.



Decisions and follow-up procedures related to the accreditation

According to the Accreditation Charter, the Accreditation Council makes one of the four decisions:

- on granting the accreditation
- on granting the conditional accreditation
- on refusal of accreditation (for new program)
- on cancellation of accreditation (for existing program)

The introduction of the “conditional accreditation” decision is also the result of the revision of the QA system. The decision of the accreditation council relies on the expert panel’s evaluation report, the compliance levels indicated in the report and the discussion, and the arguments presented during the council meeting. The rationale of possible accreditation decision, as it is defined in the accreditation charter (Article 27¹) is the following:

Decisions and relevant follow up procedures	Criteria for decision-making
Educational programme is granted the accreditation	If the educational programme was found compliant with the requirements with regard to every standard
Educational programme is granted the accreditation but the council sets a period of time for the institution to submit a progress report regarding the consideration of the recommendations	If at least one standard is substantially compliant with the requirements and none of the standards are partially or non-compliant with the requirements
Educational programme is granted the conditional accreditation In case of the conditional accreditation 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 at least one standard is partially compliant with the requirements and none of the standards are non-compliant with the requirements
Educational programme is denied to receive the accreditation	If at least one standard is non-compliant with requirements
As a general follow-up procedure, all HEIs are expected to submit the interim SER for their programs after three years from receiving the accreditations.	

Follow Up Monitoring

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 both educational institutions and educational programmes. The basis for the monitoring can be the decisions of the authorization and accreditation councils and



the recommendations indicated in the evaluation reports as they are described in the tables above. Moreover, the NCEQE might start the monitoring of the HEI or a programme, based on the official complaints submitted to the NCEQE by the relevant stakeholders (ex. Students, staff, etc.). Considering the purpose and the scope of the monitoring the procedure might include:

- Requesting the relevant documents and/or report from the HEI that is being studied by the NCEQE staff member
- Requesting the relevant documents and/or report from the HEI that is being studied by the expert panel
- Requesting the relevant documents and/or report from the HEI and expert panel's site-visit at the HEI.

7 NCEQE's internal quality assurance

In line with its mission, vision and values NCEQE strives to establish a profound quality management practice and culture inside the organization to better serve and meet the expectations of its stakeholders. In this regard, NCEQE has in place planning, monitoring and reporting mechanisms. In order to strengthen a systemic approach of internal quality management and create common understanding among all staff members, NCEQE has elaborated and approved the provision regarding the "Quality Assurance Mechanisms of the NCEQE's Activities" (annex 6) as an annex of the agencies Internal Rule.

Since 2015, the NCEQE is implementing the internal quality management system using the EFQM Excellence Model. In this regard, NCEQE has carried out a comprehensive self-assessment of all of its activities, and the results of the self-assessment have been used for the development of strategic and action plans for 2016-2020 and for the revision of the organizational structure of the agency.

In order to ensure proper implementation of the strategic and action plans, each structural unit has elaborated its own work plans, and their implementation is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Strategic Development and International Relations Department. The implementation and monitoring results are submitted to the leadership of the agency and are discussed during the staff meetings. As a result, immediate actions and amendments are made. The monitoring results are shared with all staff members by the internal system. The NCEQE elaborates [annual reports](#) addressing all of key its activities and performance carried out throughout the year that is publicly available on NCEQE web-site.

NCEQE regularly collects feedback from its internal and external stakeholders through the regular surveys regarding the development and implementation of QA mechanisms, provided capacity building activities, conferences, staff satisfaction, etc. The results of the surveys are carefully analyzed, discussed and considered for improving the performance.



To support efficient internal communication and timely response to any issues or initiatives weekly staff meetings are carried out, where the leadership of the NCEQE and heads of all departments and divisions participate. They are expected to liaise the information to and from the staff of each structural unit.

Moreover, NCEQE has established a systemic approach of internal control and risk management. For this purpose, Internal Audit Department was established in 2015 to carry out an audit of the performance of different structural units in accordance with the regulating acts of internal activities of the NCEQE and the law of Georgia on "State Internal Financial Control" and "Information Security".

8 Agency's international activities

NCEQE puts special emphasis on its international activities and considers that it is crucial to benefit from international experience and stay up-to date with current developments in the field. Therefore, in order to achieve this, one of our strategic goals expressed in the strategy of the NCEQE is to support internationalization and raise awareness about Georgian Higher Education Area. Additionally, in the Charter of the NCEQE, it is mentioned that one of the goals of the agency is to foster an integration of Georgian educational institutions into international education area. Furthermore, in the Association Agenda between European Union and Georgia (2017-2020), it is stated that one of the priorities of our cooperation is to carry out joint work and exchanges in order to promote Georgia's further integration into the EHEA in the context of its membership of the Bologna process, including through strengthening an independent and development-oriented quality assurance system.

In order to achieve the above mentioned goals, NCEQE tries to collaborate with most of the renowned quality assurance associations and agencies, and to be an active participant and supporter of Bologna process. Georgia is a member of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) since 2005, NCEQE is an Affiliate organization of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) from November 2013 and also, an affiliated member of the European University Association since 2015. Additionally, NCEQE represents Georgia in the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) and served as a co-chair of BFUG Working Group 2 on implementation. Within the framework of BFUG Work Programme 2015-2018, NCEQE hosted WG 2 meeting in Tbilisi. On the given meeting, the promotion of the development of quality assurance in the Eastern Partnership countries was discussed.

Currently, NCEQE is working on receiving recognition from the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME). WFME has already carried out the site visit at the NCEQE and observed the institutional evaluation and decision-making process. NCEQE is expecting the decision from the WFME recognition committee by the end of the year.

Another important project we are working on is a Twinning Fiche project which started in the summer of 2017 with the assistance from the European Commission. The given project is meant to be launched from January 2019 and its



main goal will be capacity building for quality assurance and governance of qualifications. We hope that the Twinning Fiche project will support further implementation and development of the quality assurance mechanisms and new National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

It is also worth mentioning that NCEQE has an Agreement on Cooperation with the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education of Lithuania from 2014. Due to this cooperation, we share experience of quality assurance mechanisms and work on the recognition of qualifications within the framework of higher arts education in terms of the Bologna Process of reforms.

NCEQE has signed a Memorandum on Collaboration with the European Law Faculties Association (ELFA) in 2018 (Barcelona, Spain). The objective of the memorandum is a cooperation between ELFA and NCEQE with regard to Law programme accreditation process at HEI's in Georgia. The aim of the cooperation is to synchronize Law Education in Georgia with legal education tendencies in Europe.

NCEQE together with MoESCS has been participating in WorldSkills Since 2012. And Since 2015, Georgia has been a full member of the WorldSkills International and participated in the WorldSkills International Competition for three times already.

NCEQE has a long experience of cooperation with the European Training Foundation (ETF). The most recent cooperation implies revision of the NQF in line with the EQF and supports its implementation. At this point, the project of revised NQF and the package of legislative amendments are already elaborated with the involvement of international and local expert. The next phase of the cooperation implies the implementation of the revised NQF at Georgian HEIs.

In order to ensure our internal quality, NCEQE is working on the implementation of European Foundation for Quality Management System (EFQM) with the support of the German International Cooperation (GIZ). NCEQE is a member of EFQM since 2016 and gained the first level recognition "Committed to Excellence." Currently we are working to move to the next level of recognition "Recognized for Excellence."

During the last five year NCEQE has been involved in four Tempus project as a partner organization with other Georgian and Armenian Higher Education Institutions.



9 NCEQE's Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines - Part 3

ESG standard 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

Standard: Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have a clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. There should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

NCEQE is the only entity in the country that is authorized by the Georgian legislation to implement higher education quality assurance mechanisms in the country. NCEQE is established by the law on Educational Quality Enhancement operating under the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports. Thus, the main purpose, principles of governance and the scope of activities of the NCEQE are defined by the law, while the detailed description of its goals, functions and the structure are given in the Charter of the NCEQE that is approved by the order #89 of the Minister of Education and Science, on September 10, 2010. According to the Charter the goals of the NCEQE are to:

- Promote the formation of internal mechanisms of educational quality, implementation of external mechanisms and their further development through cooperation with educational institutions and other stakeholders
- Promote free movement of pupils, vocational students, students, graduates and academic personnel with a view to ensuring learning, teaching, research and employment in Georgia, as well as abroad
- Promote development of quality education culture in educational institutions;
- Promote the integration of Georgian educational institutions into international space and increase confidence in them.

In line with these objectives, NCEQE has elaborated its [mission statement](#) with the active participation of its stakeholders which is publicly declared available on NCEQE's web-site. The mission of the NCEQE is "Promoting and strengthening quality culture and management practices at educational institutions operating in Georgia, providing customer-oriented services and increasing reliability towards Georgian education system."

In line with its goals, mission and [strategic development plan](#) (Strategic Aim 2), NCEQE develops and implements two main higher education quality assurance activities – authorization of higher education institutions and accreditation of educational programs and follow-ups on the evaluation results.

Since, its initial establishment as NCEA in 2006, NCEQE is carrying out the third cycle of institutional evaluations and second cycle of programme evaluations. The scale of the QA activities carried out by the NCEQE is indicated in Chapter 5.

As it is described in Chapter 3, NCEQE has experience of revising the quality assurance mechanisms and the most recent revision has been conducted with the wide stakeholder participation based on the shared and agreed purpose to promote development-oriented quality assurance system and its alignment with the ESG 2015.



Authorization of the higher education institutions and accreditation of educational programs are carried out in accordance with the pre-defined standards and procedures that are described in the respective charters approved by the Minister of Education and Science. The standards and procedures are publicly accessible on the NCEQE web-site and also in the Legislative Herald of Georgia. The standards for authorization and accreditation take into account the standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance indicated in the part one of the ESG 2015 (see chapter 10, NCEQE's compliance with ESG 2.1).

As for the implementation process of authorization and accreditation, they both include:

- Self-assessment of the HEI or a programme and submitting the relevant report and documents to the NCEQE
- Creating the expert panel to do desk-study of the documents and carry out the site-visit at the HEI
- Drafting the evaluation report by the expert panel
- Decision-making on the authorization/accreditation by the respective Council based on the evaluation results indicated in the report
- Follow-up monitoring of a HEI or a program, considering the decision of the council and the recommendations indicated in the evaluation report.

The evaluations are carried out by external experts that have been selected based on the qualification requirements and procedures described in the "Rule of Experts' Activities" and are trained to carry out the evaluations in accordance to the NCEQE's methodology. Expert pool members are representatives of academic and administrative staff of the HEIs, students, employer representatives, international experts (as the chairs of the expert panels) and others with relevant proven experience in higher education field.

Since revised system is already on the implementation phase, NCEQE has collected feedback from its immediate stakeholders who are directly involved in this process: representatives of HEIs, Peer-review experts, members of the authorization and accreditation councils. Revision of standards and procedures, planning and organization of the evaluation process, and involvement of international experts in the evaluations dominated as positive trends from all stakeholders.

The customer satisfaction survey that NCEQE conducts regularly, showed a significant improvement in terms of increased trust from 2014 to 2017 towards NCEQE activities.

In order to institutionalize the engagement of the stakeholders in the governance process, NCEQE has initiated establishment of the Coordinating Council as a governing body of the NCEQE with the Director. This amendment in the charter of the NCEQE has been recently approved and selection of the possible council members is in progress. According to the Charter (Article 51) the representatives of international organizations working in the field of education, international experts and other relevant persons, whose knowledge and experience will be important for the development of NCEQE's activities can be the members of the council. The scope of the issues that will be discussed by the council include strategic planning and progress reports, results and further development QA mechanisms, budget allocation, external evaluation reports of the NCEQE's activities, development of international cooperation.



ESG Standard 3.2. Official Status

Standard: Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognized as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

NCEQE is legal entity under public law¹, which is established under the management scope of the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture by the Law on Educational Quality Enhancement to independently carry out its activities with the purpose to enhance educational quality throughout the country (Article 3 (1)). Moreover, the Law on Educational Quality Enhancement sets basic areas of activities of the NCEQE and defines it as a sole national body authorized to apply external mechanisms for education quality assurance. According to the law for the purpose of external quality assurance NCEQE carries out authorization of educational institutions and accreditation of educational programs, as well as monitors implementation of authorization and accreditation standards. The NCEQE works on improving both external and internal quality assurance mechanisms, ensures their implementation, and elaborates relevant recommendations. Furthermore, for the purpose to ensure compliance with European Higher Education Area, it works on the improvement of National Qualification Framework; maintains the Registry of Educational Institutions and administers student mobility processes (Law of Georgia on Education Quality Enhancement - Article 5(1). The Charter of the NCEQE (Order #89/n, 14/09/2010) and the rules and procedures for its main quality assurance activities (Charter of Authorization of Educational Institutions, order #99/n, 01/10/2010 and the Charter of Accreditation of Educational Programs, Order #65/n, 04/05/2011) are approved by the order of the Minister of Education and Science.

Furthermore, the decisions on the results of the external evaluations are made by the respective authorization and accreditation councils which are approved by the order of the Prime Minister of Georgia emphasizing that the outcomes of the evaluations are accepted and considered by HEIs, state and other stakeholders.

Thus, NCEQE operations are grounded on the solid legal base and are recognized as a sole national body authorized to carry out external mechanism of assuring and enhancing educational quality.

¹ According to the Law of Georgia on Legal Entities Under Public Law – Article 2(1) the legal entity of public law is an organization separated from legislative and state governing bodies, established by the Government of Georgia or by the administrative act of the state governing body on the basis of law, which independently, under governmental control, carries out political, state, social, and educational, cultural and other public activities.



ESG Standard 3.3. Independence

Standard: Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

Pursuant to the Law of Georgia on Educational Quality Enhancement the NCEQE shall be independent in its activities and carry out its work in compliance with the principles of publicity, transparency, the Constitution of Georgia, international treaties and agreements of Georgia, this Law and other legislative acts (Article 3 (2)).

The Orders of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia on the Approval of the Charter of Authorization of Educational Institutions and the Charter of Accreditation of Educational Programs are the most important normative acts that regulate NCEQE's activities related to the external mechanisms for education quality assurance. NCEQE has a primary role in the policy-making and implementation of the external quality assurance mechanisms as it has the mandate for initiating development and further amendment of the related regulations.

The Director of the NCEQE approves additional regulations needed regarding the NCEQE's activities. The development and approval of particular regulations represents an exclusive authority of NCEQE's director. Examples of such regulations are General Internal Rules of the NCEQE; Detailed Regulations on the Activities of Structural Units (departments) of the NCEQE; Rules for Selection of Authorization and Accreditation Experts, their Activities, and Termination of Membership of Pool of Experts; Rules on the Experts' Payments; Rules on Setting Occupational Standards, Framework of Vocational Educational Programme and Module, etc. In addition to the aforementioned internal regulations, it is also under the competence of a director to approve and strategic document of the NCEQE, as well as to establish various committees on the basis of the individual administrative legal acts. Such examples are Sectoral Committees which develop sector benchmarks for educational programme directions.

The procedure for the appointment of the NCEQE's Director is provided in the Law of Georgia on Educational Quality Enhancement, according to which the Director is appointed by the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia on the basis of a consent of the Prime Minister of Georgia (Article 4 (2)). The selection and dismissal procedures and grounds for the Director of the NCEQE are defined by the Law of Georgia on Legal Entities under Public Law. According to the law selection of candidate for appointment on a position of a head of a legal entity under public law, a public competition shall be carried out through the online platform (www.hr.gov.ge) administered by the Civil Service Bureau, and the decision shall be made only on the basis of an interview with the selected candidates (Article 10¹(2)). The same law provides the grounds for the dismissal of NCEQE's Director. The grounds are limited to the following reasons: termination of Georgian citizenship, court's final judgment on conviction, been declared by the court as miss, resignation, death or failing to exercise the powers defined by a law or charter of the entity in appropriate manner or for four consecutive months.

According to the law on Educational Quality Enhancement (Article 4 (4)), the state control over the NCEQE's activities is exercised by the MoESCS in accordance with the Georgian legislation in terms of the procurement processes and



financial accountability. As for any other decisions made by the Director of the NCEQE, they can only be challenged in the Court (Charter of the NCEQE, Article 6 (6)).

NCEQE carries out the external evaluation of educational quality by the external peer review experts. The members of the Authorization and Accreditation Experts' Pool are selected by the Director, on the basis of open competition and nominations of relevant candidate upon the request of the NCEQE. Approval of Rules on Authorization and Accreditation Experts' Selection and Activities and Termination of Membership of Expert Pool, as well as the Code of Ethics, are also under the authority of the Director of the NCEQE.

Decisions of the Authorization/Accreditation Councils are based on the authorization/accreditation documents submitted by HEIs, evaluation reports of the authorization/accreditation expert panels and the arguments and discussion presented during the council meeting. The decisions shall be published on the NCEQE's website and can only be appealed to the Appeal Council or to the court (Law on Educational Quality Enhancement, Article 24¹(1)).

Members of the Authorization/Accreditation/Appeal Councils are appointed by the Prime Minister upon the submission of the MoESCS for one-year term. To make the selection procedure of the council members more transparent and objective, NCEQE cooperated with the MoESCS and developed the rule that defines the selection procedure, requirements and criteria for selecting the council members and ensuring representation of relevant stakeholders. The [rule](#) has been approved by the Minister and it is publicly available on NCEQE's website.

Functional independence of the aforementioned Councils from educational institutions and state organs is guaranteed on the basis of the Law of Georgia on Educational Quality Enhancement ((Article 11 (1), Article 19 (2)). The authority and functions of the councils are defined by the Charters of Authorization (Article 23¹) and Accreditation (Article 28 ¹).

ESG Standard 3.4 Thematic analysis

Standard: Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyze the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

Systematic approach of developing thematic analysis reflecting the findings of the external quality assurance activities is relatively new and still on the development stages. Yet the NCEQE has conducted certain thematic as well as system-wide analyses that have been discussed with the stakeholders, applied the findings and published them on the website². Various analysis are done in different directions. NCEQE did the first system-wide analysis in 2013, which analyzed the results of the implementation of external quality assurance mechanisms during the last three years. The report of the analysis has become the part of the [annual report of 2013](#) where special chapter was dedicated to the "Analytical Review of 2011-2013." The results of the analysis have been discussed during the presentation of the

² <https://eqe.ge/eng/static/327/about-us/Researches>
<https://eqe.ge/eng/static/59/annual-reports>



annual report. The similar analysis was done for 2014. This has been considered as a good practice for reflection and informing the society. The NCEQE is currently undertaking the similar review that will be finalized and published on NCEQE's web-site.

Furthermore, the results and the findings of the pilot institutional and programme evaluations conducted in 2017 have been analyzed. As a result, the key findings related to HEIs and programs' compliance to the revised QA standards and relevant recommendations have been elaborated. Additionally, the analysis demonstrated the key areas that the NCEQE should have considered to finalize the revision of the QA system. The results of the analysis were presented during the NCEQE's annual conference "Reforming the Higher Education Quality Assurance System: Results and Steps Forward" that was attended by the representatives of all HEIs and other stakeholders.

The NCEQE's plan is to sustain the practice of analyzing and presenting the QA outcomes on a regular basis.

NCEQE plans to follow the trends of programme evaluation results by the fields, as the programs' accreditation by fields are distributed to the next five years. As for the analysis of the institutional evaluations, NCEQE cooperates with the national Erasmus+ office and jointly plan to carry out an impact evaluation of implementation of the revised authorization mechanism.

To further support and institutionalize these activities, the Twinning Fiche project that NCEQE will implement with European Commission from 2019 envisages development of the methodology to systematically work on the thematic analysis and prepare relevant reports.

The NCEQE has been conducting the thematic analysis, considering the topics that were in the revision agenda. The example of such thematic analysis is the "Comparative Analysis of the National Qualifications Framework" that has been done in 2014. Report presented the international and national context of the qualifications framework. As a result of analysis the draft of revised NQF and the Classifiers of Fields of Study were prepared. In cooperation with the National Erasmus + Office analysis and research on the quality of doctoral programs and perception plagiarism at Georgian HEIs have been conducted. The problematic areas that were identified as a result of the analysis have been reflected in the authorization and accreditation standards.

The NCEQE coordinates the sector committees that are responsible on revision of the sector benchmarks of the relevant fields. One of the key components of the revision process is that the committees elaborate the analytical reviews of the fields. Such analysis has been done in veterinary, medicine, architecture, and law. As a result, the sector benchmarks of veterinary and medicine have been elaborated and revised, sector benchmark of the law programs is currently under revision; development of sector benchmark for architecture is being discussed and considered.

As the reform of higher education, QA system is a widely discussed issue, the students of the Education Administration Master's programs from various HEIs have expressed their interest to carry out their research for master theses on higher education quality issues and review the latest reform. NCEQE staff has been very actively supporting them with relevant materials and interviews to assist them finalize their research work. The summaries of theses will also be published at the NCEQE web-site by the end of September.



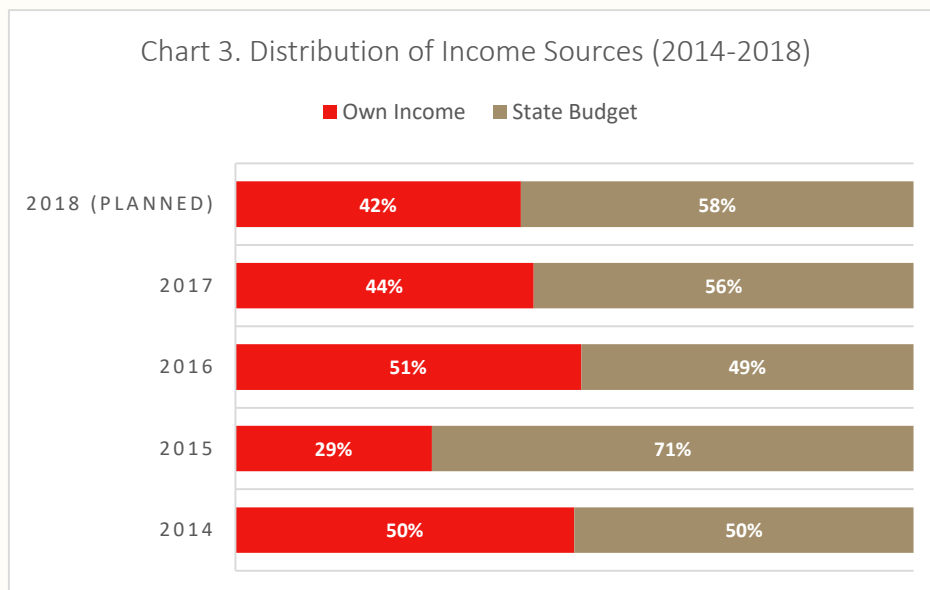
ESG Standard 3.5 Resources

Standard: Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

NCEQE has sustainable financial income (with good balance between the budgetary and own income sources) and well-staffed structural units that guarantee implementation of all NCEQE activities defined by its Charter and strategic development plan.

Financial Resources

The main financial source for the NCEQE are targeted funds allocated from the state budget of Georgia, fees received for services provided by the NCEQE and other revenues, allowed under Georgian legislation. The income generating services provided by NCEQE include authorization of educational institutions (HEIs, VET colleges and schools) and accreditation of educational programs, recognition of foreign education, validation of educational documents, administration of student mobility process. The fees for the services are calculated based on their costs. The latest revision of the service fees took place during 2017-2018. As a result, they are self-sufficient to cover all related costs. The fees for authorization of educational institutions and accreditation of educational programs have been defined based on the transparent criteria that are publicly available as it is defined by the authorization and accreditation charters (Order 99/n, annex 2 and Order 65/n, annex 2, respectively). The regular and sustainable income received from the QA and other services rendered by the agency guarantees sustainability of implementation of the NCEQE's activities. NCEQE has a good balance between income sources, for 2018 - 42% of income is generated from the service fees and 58% from budgetary income (Chart 3).

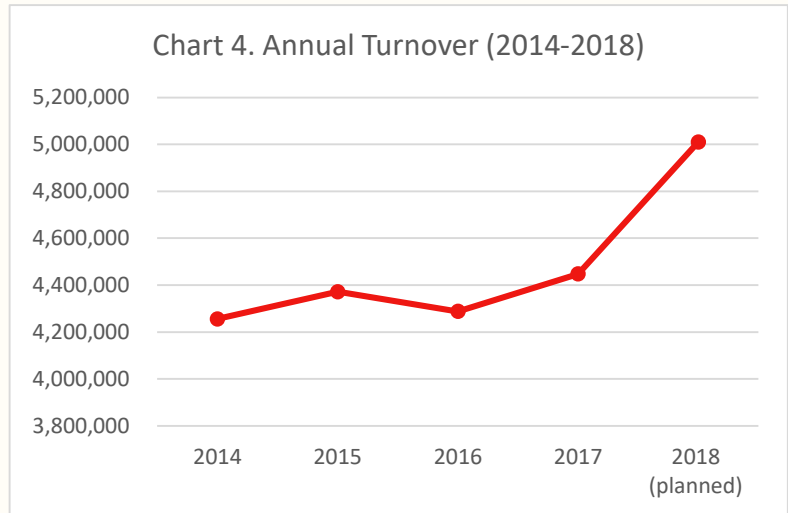


The budgetary income is mainly used to cover the general administrative costs and developmental activities of the NCEQE. Currently, NCEQE implements three targeted projects (Internationalization and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education, Implementation of the Modular Vocational Programs, and Coordination of Sector Committees) that are supported by the MoESCS.

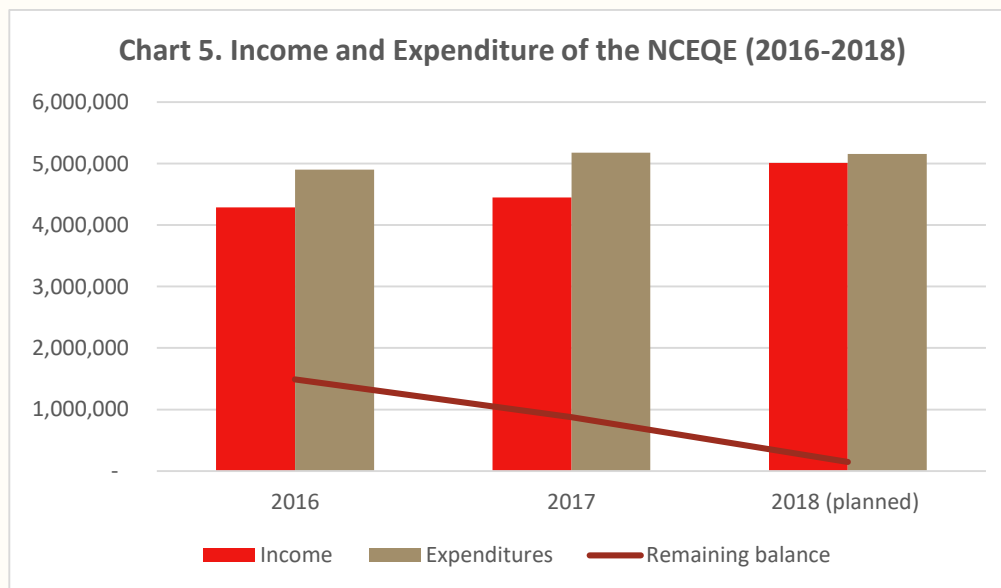


Budgetary financial sources are also used to subsidize some of the personal services, for example, recognition of education for IDPs and recognition of education obtained in the occupied territories are free of charge, there are reduced service fees for students, etc. The budgetary income is also used for maintenance of the registry of educational institutions.

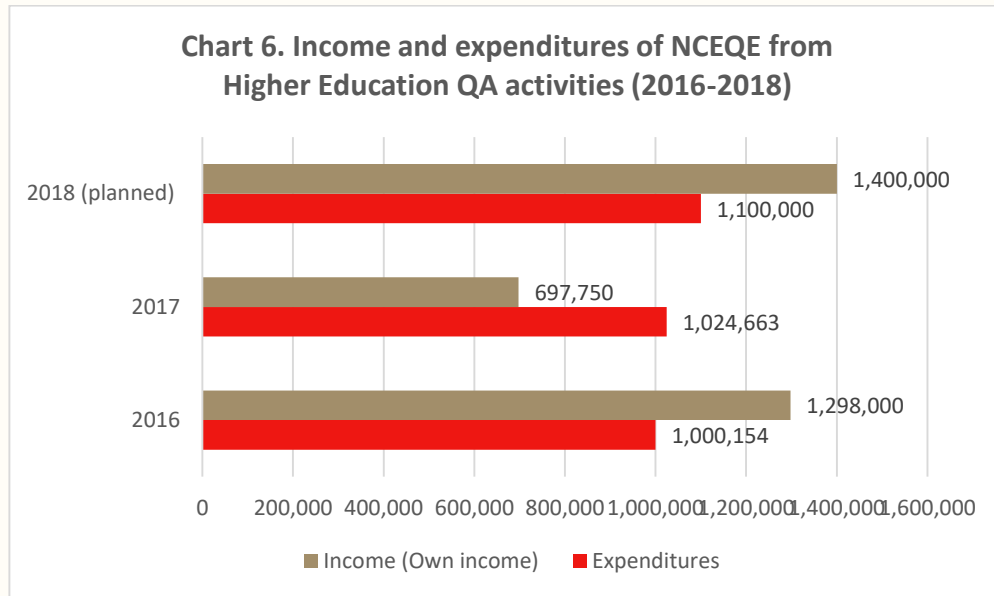
NCEQE has a positive trend (Chart 4) in terms of the Annual Turnover which is 5,010,000 GEL³ for 2018.



NCEQE has a structured approach for budgeting planning and monitoring. All structural units participate in the planning process and send their requested budget and forecasted income (if relevant) for their activities to the Financial Division. The proposed budget requests are discussed and agreed with the leadership. This process ensures efficiency and effectiveness of budget allocation. On the Charts below the balance between the income and expenditure of the NCEQE overall activities (5) and income and expenditure of NCEQE's higher education QA activities (6) are shown.



³ 1 Gel equals to 0.34 Euro (16/08/2018)



The NCEQE is accountable for the appropriate spending of budget funds and has a completed balance and account with the State Treasury.

Human resources

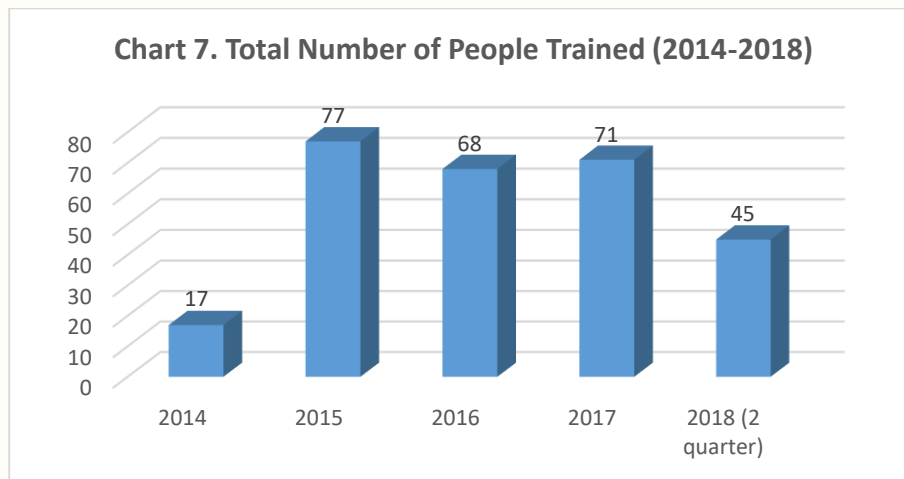
The NCEQE has defined the functions and responsibilities for each structural units and related qualification requirements for staffing. The NCEQE carefully selects its staff to ensure relevance of their qualification with the requirements. Usually, the staff selection process is based on the open competition. At present, NCEQE employees 149 staff members (without technical staff), among them 136 are permanent staff, while others are recruited with short term contracts to execute special tasks. 24% of the employees having BA degrees, 71% have MA and 4% - Phd degrees. Most of the staff members have been involved with NCEQE for more than five years ensuring sustainability and continuity of NCEQE's activities and achievement of the long-terms goals.

The Higher Education Quality Assurance Department of the NCEQE operates with 13 full-time staff members. All of them hold the MA degree, although this formal requirement only refers to the managerial positions. Most of them have working experience in education field.

The NCEQE carries out performance assessment of its staff based on the completion of the pre-defined work plans. The results of the completion of the works are discussed with the leadership of the agency. The purpose of performance assessment is to encourage and facilitate an individual's improvement or to find weaknesses and provide relevant feedback. The performance assessment is conducted on a semi-annual basis through the NCEQE's electronic system which implies reporting about performed activities by each staff member that is being monitored and commented by their supervisor.



Staff Development is one of the NCEQE's priorities. The needs for trainings and other capacity development activities are identified based on the information provided by each division and as a result of the analysis of relevant interventions are planned. For example, in 2018 priority was given to conduct "Conflicts Management Training" for Accreditation and Authorization staff, to be well prepared for accreditation and authorization site-visits at the HEIs. Representative of other units also expressed their interest to participate and as a result, total of 30 staff members attended the Conflict Management Training. In addition, employees attend various conferences, locally and internationally, workshops and other relevant activities. An annual budget and a special budget line allocated for the staff's professional development make further capacity building activities available. The table below shows the dynamic of the number of staff members who participated in various training since 2014.



Besides the external trainings, it is a common practice at the NCEQE that the heads of the various departments or divisions are coaching their staff, and the special attention is paid to coaching and instructing the new staff members to help them quickly integrate and familiarize with the job specific issues.

Material Resources

The office premises are situated in central part of Tbilisi just a few minutes walking distance from the subway station. The office is owned by the NCEQE; it covers an area of about 2171 m² and is equipped with a modern infrastructure. All employees have personal computers. The NCEQE has well-equipped offices and conference rooms that can be adapted to meet different needs, including ordinary meetings, conferences and council meetings, and online interventions.

Information systems

The NCEQE is defined as a subject to critical information system by the Governmental Decree N312 (29.04.2014) referring to the "Approval of the Critical Information System Subjects List." Accordingly, the NCEQE implements the information security management system to ensure the access to the information and information systems, authentication, confidentiality, and security of the processes. In this respect, the agency complies with the "Minimal Requirements for Information Security" as it is determined in the Law on Information Security and the Decree of the Chair of the Data Exchange Agency and with the best practices of ISO27001. The Information Management System is an integral part of the overall management of the NCEQE. It's based on the risk-oriented approach and serves to



provide the relevant level of the information security. In accordance with Law, the NCEQE has certified Information Security Manager.

The rule of proceeding at the NCEQE regulates the general principles of document registry, internal and external documentations, decrees, treaties, document drafting, formalizing, exchange and use of seal and the process is carried out in a centralized electronic system: e- flow.

The NCEQE pays attention to the development and utilization of the electronic resources and information technologies. Currently, the electronic quality management system is being piloted with the Education Management Information System (public entity operating under the MoESCS), which will support the implementation of the external QA processes (such as, application, sharing the documents, shared space for drafting the report, etc.).

ESG Standard 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

Standard: Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

The NCEQE operates with an integrated management system model that implies transparency and continuous monitoring of its activities that facilitates efficient use of its resources and fulfillment of its duties and responsibilities. The NCEQE's internal quality mechanisms are described in the "Quality Assurance Mechanisms of the NCEQE's Activities" (annex 6) document that is an integral part of the NCEQE's internal rules approved by the Director. Implementation of the internal quality management tools are seen as mechanisms that support quality improvement of its processes and services and enhance accountability to its internal and external stakeholders. The document gives the main guidelines for operating the internal quality management system at the agency.

Internal quality management system at the NCEQE operates on both, strategic and operational level. At both levels, the NCEQE collects information and opinion from stakeholders, international experts, internal and external audits. The NCEQE is using the EFQM Excellence Model tools (fundamental concepts, model criteria and RADAR Logic) while planning, implementing, assessing, and improving its activities. In every two year period, the NCEQE is conducting institutional self-assessment to reflect on its performance. The process is carried out with wide participation of its all structural units. The NCEQE has gained EFQM recognition status "Committed to Excellence" and currently is improving its mechanisms to move to the next recognition level "Recognized to Excellence." The action plan for 2018-2019 emphasizes on the implementation of the EFQM tools on the level of structural units that would support more efficient

Strategic Planning and Reporting

The NCEQE has an institutionalized approach for strategic planning, which implies participation of all structural units in the process and also involvement of various external stakeholders. As a result of the establishment of the Coordinating Council, stakeholder participation in the strategic planning and monitoring process will be improved. In line with the approved strategic plan, relevant action plans are developed that indicate the assessment criteria, responsible units, and timeline for its fulfillment. The implementation progress of action plans are carried out on a



quarterly basis and relevant interventions are made if necessary. The NCEQE develops annual reports and makes them accessible for its stakeholders on the web-site⁴.

Weekly staff meetings

To facilitate effective communication between the different structural units, weekly meetings of the NCEQE leadership and heads of all structural units are held. In special cases, weekly meetings are conducted with an extended composition attended by all staff of the Center.

Stakeholders Feedback

The NCEQE regularly collects feedback from its internal and external stakeholders through the regular surveys regarding provided capacity building activities, conferences. Regular satisfaction surveys are also conducted internally, among the staff of the NCEQE. Besides, to receive more comprehensive feedback, the NCEQE regularly outsources and orders a customer satisfaction research to relevant organizations. The results of the surveys are analyzed, discussed and considered for improving the performance.

The NCEQE puts a special emphasis on receiving a feedback from educational institutions regarding the development and implementation of the external evaluations conducted by the agency. After each site-visit the NCEQE asks HEIs to provide their feedback on expert panel's performance. The NCEQE also collects the feedback from the expert panel members to plan and organize evaluation processes better.

Internal Audit

Since 2015, Internal Audit Department operates at the NCEQE. Internal Audit helps the NCEQE to accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, internal control and governance processes.

Internal audit department has been conducting financial, operational and compliance audits, as well as information security management systems (ISMS) audit for the last three years. The audits provide reasonable assurance that the financial statements were free from material misstatement or fraud.

Internal audit department systematically monitors implementation of the recommendations given as a result of the audits.

Recommendations disclosed in reports of the internal audit are continuously considered within the NCEQE in order to strengthen the system of internal controls and the efficiency and effectiveness of work.

Staff assessment and development

Twice a year, the NCEQE staff has the E-system performance review where both performance and professional development needs are assessed. In addition to setting performance objectives for the coming year, staff members identify training and professional development needs. Based on this annual training, plan is developed and relevant budget is allocated.

⁴ <https://eqe.ge/eng/static/59/annual-reports>



Non-conflict of interest

The NCEQE is a subject to the Public Administration Act regulating conflict of interest aiming to regulate distinctive and individual circumstances, which may impair the trust in an individual's objectivity in a specific case. This law applies to all the NCEQE's employees, experts, and the councils. To make the rule more specific in certain instances, the NCEQE has a separate Code of Ethics and Conduct for its staff that is an integral part of the agency's internal rules, a separate Rule of Experts' Activities and Code of Ethics for its experts that cover the conflict of interest issues specifically related to their activities and put a special emphasis on integrity, impartiality, collegiality, self-development, confidentiality, reporting critical activities, and preserving the NCEQE's reputation.

Equal treatment

The NCEQE is strongly committed to the principles of equality and sees this as a part of its wider commitment to quality. The NCEQE demonstrates this through its internal policies and working practices. The NCEQE ensures the equal treatment of all educational institutions.

Accountability

The NCEQE is accountable to its stakeholders and general public. The NCEQE continuously informs its stakeholders and public regarding the development and implementation of its activities and publishes the annual reports and all evaluation reports. The NCEQE has identified the information that should be publicly available for everyone and has a separate section on its website where all stakeholders can find relevant information or make a request to obtain it. According to the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) survey results, the NCEQE was named among the most accountable and open public institutions in 2017.

ESG Standard 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies

Standard: Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

This is the first official review of the NCEQE's higher education quality assurance activities against the ESG 2015, as a result of which the NCEQE would welcome the recommendations and suggestions that could further improve its performance. However, for the developmental purposes, since 2013, NCEQE has carried out several external reviews of its accreditation and authorization mechanisms and the activities of the NCEQE against the ESG. The results of the evaluations have been discussed and used for the QA system reform as the reference points for initiating relevant changes in the laws and bylaw.



10. NCEQE's Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines - Part 2

ESG Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

Standard: External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

As it was mentioned in chapter 6, as a result of the higher education quality assurance system reform, the standards of authorization and accreditation have been updated and when working on their revision Part 1 of the ESG 2015 has been used as a reference point. At the same time, feedbacks from the HEI's and analysis of the implementation of the previous system have been taken into account. Based on this, the standards became more detailed and self-explanatory including the descriptions, evaluation criteria, and evidences/indicators for each standard component (sub-dimensions of each standard) to ensure transparent and consistent evaluation. At the same time, the standards leave the space for the HEIs to decide for themselves how to achieve quality culture in their institutions given their mission, uniqueness, and educational philosophy.

One of the key challenges of implementation of QA system in Georgia was that the HEIs have been oriented on conforming to standard requirements for the purpose of successful completion of the external evaluation. To address this issue, the main focus during the recent revision of the QA system was to encourage the HEIs to engage all their stakeholders in developing their internal processes and mechanisms and in enhancing educational quality. The revised standards and procedures promote the link between internal and external quality assurance and take into account the standards and guidelines indicated in the Part 1 of ESG 2015.

The table below shows the alignment of the authorization and accreditation standards and procedures with the ESG Part 1 requirements.

ESG Standards	Standards for Institutional Authorization	Standards for Programme Accreditation
1.1 Policy for quality assurance	2. Organizational structure and management of HEI 2.2 Internal quality assurance mechanisms 2.3 Observing principle of ethics and integrity	1.1. Programme Objectives 1.2. Programme Learning Outcomes 2.2. Programme Structure and Content 5. Teaching Quality Enhancement Opportunities
1.2 Design and approval of programs	2.2 Internal Quality Assurance 3. Educational programs 3.1 Design and development of educational programs 3.2 Structure and content of educational programs 3.3 Assessment of learning outcomes	1.1. Programme Objectives 1.2. Programme Learning Outcomes 2.2 Educational Programme Structure and Content 4. The Development of practical, scientific/research/creative/performance and transferable skills



		5.3 Programme monitoring and periodic review
1.3 Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment	Introduction of authorization standards 3.1 Design and development of educational programs 3.2 Structure and content of educational programs 3.3 Assessment of learning outcomes 5.2 Student support services	2.5. Teaching and learning methods 2.6. Student Evaluation
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	2.2 Internal Quality Assurance Mechanism 3.2 Structure of Educational Program 5.1. The Rule for obtaining and changing student status, the recognition of education, and student rights Diploma Supplement	2.1 Programme Admission Preconditions 5.1 Internal quality Diploma Supplement
1.5 Teaching staff	4. Staff of the HEI 4.1. Staff Management 4.2. Academic/Scientific and Invited Staff Workload	4.1 Human Resources 4.2. Professional development of academic, scientific and invited staff
1.6 Learning resources and student support	5.2 Student support services 7.1 Material resources 7.2. Library resources 7.3 Information Resources 7.4 Financial Resources	3. Student achievements and individual work with them 4.1. Human Resources 4.3. Material Resources 4.4. Programme/faculty/school budget and programme financial sustainability
1.7 Information management	1.2 Strategic Planning 2. Organizational structure and management of HEI 2.2 Internal quality assurance mechanisms Self-evaluation report template	1.2. Programme Learning Outcomes 5. Teaching Quality Enhancement Opportunities Self-evaluation report template
1.8 Public information	7.3 Information Resources	1.1. Programme objectives 1.2. Programme learning outcomes. 2.1. Programme admission preconditions 2.2 Structure and Content of Programs
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programs	2.2 Internal Quality Assurance 3. Educational Programs 3.1 Design and development of educational programs 3.2 Structure and content of educational programs	1.1. Labor market research and analysis of employers' demands 1.2. Programme Learning Outcomes 5.3. Programme monitoring and periodic review
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	Charter of Authorization (99/n) Article 25 (4) Self-Evaluation Report Template	5.2. External quality programme Charter of Accreditation (65/n), Article 276 (3) Self-Evaluation Report Template

It should be noted that some of the areas of accreditation and authorization standards do overlap, however, the rationale of how these are applied in each procedure is explicitly explained in the guidelines of experts and HEI. The major difference is that in case of authorization, the subject for evaluation is an institution and expert panel observes



how the planning, implementation and development processes are working on institutional level. As for the accreditation of an educational program, the specific programme is a subject of evaluation and is evaluated in-depth individually against all accreditation standard components.

Consideration of ESG Part 1 in NCEQE's QA standards and procedures

ESG 1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance

Authorization Standards

Implementation of the internal quality assurance mechanism is a separate standard component (2.2) of the authorization standard under the Standard 2 “Organizational Structure and Management,” which emphasizes that the internal quality management should be integrated into the management process. The description and evaluation criteria for this standard component emphasizes that leadership of the HEI should support implementation of the IQA mechanisms and establishment of the quality culture and consider the results for decision-making. QA mechanisms should be applied to all institutional activities, and relevant stakeholders should participate in this process. The component requirements also underline that relevant resources should be allocated to ensure proper implementation of IQA mechanisms and their effectiveness should be reviewed. Another component of the same standard “Observing the principles of ethics and integrity” (2.3) underscore that the HEI should have a principles and mechanisms for protecting academic integrity and academic freedom.

Accreditation Standards

Standard 5 “Teaching Quality Enhancement Opportunities” underlines that in order to enhance the quality of teaching, internal and external quality assurance mechanisms should be applied and the results garnered from these processes should be used for informed decision making and programme development on a regular basis. The standard components “Programme Objectives” (1.1), “Programme Learning Outcomes” (1.2) and “Programme Content and Structure” (2.2) emphasize involvement and participation of all relevant stakeholders in programme design, assessment, and improvement processes

ESG 1.2 Design and Approval of Programs

Authorization Standards

Authorization standards indicate a separate standard component “Design and development of educational program” (3.1) underlining that HEIs should have the policy and methodology for planning, designing, implementing and developing educational programs which should be carried out with the participation of staff, students, alumni, employers, professional associations and best practices should be considered. The standard also requires that procedure for approving, amending, and canceling the educational programme should be in line with Georgian legislation. The standard component “Structure and content of educational program” states that programs should follow the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) guidelines; learning outcomes of the programme should be stated in line with the higher education cycle and qualification to be granted; the programme structure and content should be logically connected to and ensure achievement of learning outcomes.



Accreditation Standards

According to the standard component “Programme Objectives” (1.1) they should be clear, realistic and achievable and at the same time, they should be in line with HEI’s mission, objectives and strategy. Standard component “Programme Learning Outcomes” (1.2) states that programme should have measurable, achievable and realistic learning outcomes that are consistent with the appropriate level of National Qualifications framework (NQF). Programme learning outcomes should be defined with the participation of all programme stakeholders (academic/scientific/invited staff, students, graduates, employers. etc.) and in the same manner all stakeholders should be involved in programme design. Component 5.3 on programme monitoring and periodic review explains that the developmental peer review and programme benchmarking against similar programs should be utilized for programme improvement. Component 2.4 on development of practical, scientific/research/creative/performance and transferable skills explicates how students research and transferable skills can be developed and required that programme practice component is organized according to programme learning outcomes.

ESG 1.3 Student Centered Learning Teaching and Assessment

Authorization Standards

The introduction of the authorization standard 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 Programs). The standard components emphasize students’ role and feedback in designing and development of educational programs. 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 also emphasizes on offering Individualized education programs 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 programs should be publicly accessible on HEI’s web-site. The standard component 5.2 underlines that HEI should provide relevant consultation for students to support them plan their educational process and improve their academic performance.

Accreditation Standards

The Standard component 2.5 “Teaching and learning methods” require that student centered teaching and learning methods should be utilized in order to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes. They should be flexible enough to take into consideration students’ individual necessities, cultural or other peculiarities. Additionally, if necessary, individual learning path should be created for a student taking into consideration his/her academic readiness and interests. Component 2.6 - “Student Assessment” states student assessment should be conducted in accordance with established procedures that are fair and transparent to all students and complies with existing legislation. Also, it states that HEIs should have appeal procedures on assessment results. Also, evaluators should be familiar with modern assessment methods and they should get professional development opportunities as well. Evaluation forms, components and methods should be fair and published, and known to students in advance. Students should receive



feedback on their strengths and weaknesses and get informed to what extent they achieved learning outcomes. It is recommended to involve more than one evaluator in the assessment process.

ESG 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Authorization Standards

The standard component 5.1 “The Rule for obtaining and changing student status, the recognition of education, and student rights” require that HEIs should have transparent and fair regulations for student admission, suspension and termination of student status, mobility, qualification granting, educational documents issuance as well as recognition of education received during the learning period for each education level. The procedure should be in line with the current legislation. The standard components on internal quality assurance (2.2) and structure and content of educational programme (3.2) requires that HEI’s should monitor students’ academic performance, programme completion timeframe and dropout rates and use results for improving teaching process.

Accreditation Standards

Component 2.1 on Programme Admission Preconditions states that HEI should have relevant, transparent, fair, public and accessible programme admission preconditions. Also, programme admission preconditions should be set in a way to ensure admission of students with relevant knowledge, skills and competences. Also according to component 5.1 Internal quality – programme staff together with internal quality assurance office should regularly collect data on students’ profiles, progression, drop-out rates, satisfaction, graduate employment rates etc. and utilize these data for programme evaluation and improvement.

The NCEQE is in charge of recognizing higher education qualifications received abroad and periods of study. The agency checks the validity of an educational document and determines the compatibility of the qualification and learning outcomes with Georgian National Qualifications Framework. When recognizing study periods the Center works in collaboration with HEIs and considers their report. The Center ensures fair and transparent recognition procedures. The recognition procedure takes a maximum of one month.

Since 2005, all Georgian HEIs are required to issue a diploma and diploma supplement. An official form of the diploma supplement is approved by order N 149 of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia. Diploma and diploma supplement have to be prepared in Georgian and English Languages and include the following information: holder of the qualification, qualification granted, level of the qualification, content and results of the program, access to further studies and status of the qualification, information on national HE system, and some additional information.

ESG 1.5 Teaching Staff

Authorization standards

Standard 4 for Staff of the HEI requires that HEIs should have developed staff management policy that includes transparent and objective recruitment procedures (emphasizing on hiring qualified academic/scientific and invited staff), staff professional development and appraisal mechanisms. The authorization standard also initiated the concept of academic staff affiliation, which implies that academic staff member should perform his/her major educational, research/scientific/creative/performing activities at the HEI where he/she is affiliated. The standard also underscores that the number and workload of academic and scientific staff should ensure implementation of educational programs, and proper fulfillment of research and other functions and duties assigned to them.



Accreditation Standard

The component 4.1 on Human Resources specifies what qualifications academic and invited staff members should possess in order to hold an academic position and/or be in charge of a course. There are also, special requirements set for MA and PhD student supervisors and the head(s) of the program. Component 4.2 Professional development of academic, scientific and invited staff – requires HEI to support staff's development in teaching and learning methods, evaluation methods, programme assessment, etc. Staff's scientific and research work should be fostered as well. Additionally, HEI should regularly evaluate staff and use evaluation results for their professional development.

ESG 1.6 Learning Resources and Student Support

Authorization Standards

The Standards 7 indicates the requirements on material, information, library and financial resources that support proper implementation of the teaching and learning process. The first component of this standard emphasizes the provision of relevant teaching and learning environment and field specific material resources related to the educational programs and research that HEI implements. The component also highlights that HEIs should have adopted learning environment for students with special educational needs. The standard also requires provision of library resources, environment and service (7.2); also the provision of IT infrastructure, study process management system and updated website (7.3) to ensure delivery of information to students and other relevant stakeholders. The last component addresses the issue of financial resources which states that HEI should have adequate and sufficient financial resources to effectively perform activities described in strategic and action plans; also should allocate budget to support students and staff participation in various activities.

Authorization standard 5 addresses student support services that should be provided by HEIs. It emphasizes students' counseling on academic, career and personal development and mobility issues. The component 5.2 also addresses support mechanisms for students with low social economic status.

The evidences/indicators related to the above mentioned standard components indicate student survey results can be utilized as evidence that adequate learning resources and student support services are ensured.

Accreditation Standards

Standard 4 deals with material and human resources necessary for programme implementation. The component 4.1 touches upon human resources and it includes both teaching and administrative staff, their qualification and ratios. The component 4.4 deals with programme budget, which should demonstrate program's financial sustainability. Standard 3 is solely devoted to students support services and points out how HEIs should offer appropriate consultations to students in different areas.

ESG 1.7 Information management

Authorization Standards

The standard component 1.2 on Strategic Development indicates that the goals included in strategic development plan should be achievable and measurable. The standard component 2.2 requires that HEI collect and analyze



information regarding all of its activities (with special emphasis on the implementation of educational programs, monitoring student performance and conducting student surveys) and use the results for their development. The standard stresses the consideration of the QA results by the leadership of the HEI and its utilization for the decision making process. One of the evidences for standard components 3.2 and 5.2 is alumni tracer study regarding their career (including employment rate with obtained qualification) and academic development.

Accreditation Standards

Standard 5 on “Teaching Quality Enhancement Opportunities” requires HEI to collect, analyze and utilize relevant information in order to improve the programme and to ensure informed decision-making. Also, component 1.2 Programme Learning Outcomes – specifically asks universities to collect and analyze data on the achievement of programme learning outcomes and use the results of that analysis to improve the quality of program.

Self-Evaluation Reports

Self-evaluation report templates (approved by the Director of the NCEQE) for authorization and accreditation requires HEI to provide statistical data and indicators related to the standard requirements that helps the HEIs to reflect on them and also supports experts’ judgments.

ESG 1.8 Public information

Authorization standards

Various standard components require that the related information should be publicly accessible for students and other stakeholders. In addition, the standard component 7.3 on Information Resources indicate the list of information that should be publicly accessible and updated on the HEI website in Georgian and English languages (e.g. mission of HEI, structure, catalogue of educational programs, programs and enrolment criteria, expected learning outcomes and qualifications to be granted, methods for teaching-learning and assessment, administrative/academic/scientific staff, library electronic catalogue, strategic development plans, annual reports, financial reports, employment opportunity, etc.).

Accreditation Standards

The requirements set by ESG 1.8 are spread out in different parts of accreditation standards. For example, standard component 2.3 requires that regulations on ethics and integrity should be publicly accessible, component 1.1 of accreditation standards, asks HEI that programme objectives are public and accessible; component 1.2 states that HEI ensure that all the stakeholders of the programme are familiar with programme learning outcomes; component 2.1 points out that programme admission preconditions and procedures are fair, public and accessible; component 2.2 requires that HEI ensures publicity and accessibility of programme related information.

ESG 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programs

Authorization Standards

Standard component 2.2 on Internal Quality Assurance requires that HEIs have mechanism for evaluation and improvement of educational programs. Academic/scientific/invited staff, together with students and external



stakeholders (employers, alumni, etc.) should be actively involved in the implementation of these processes; HEI should have developed monitoring mechanisms for students' academic performance, and should use its results for the improvement of the teaching process. The results of the student surveys should be indicated as the evidences for various standard components to ensure that all the services and resources provided by the HEI are regularly assessed and developed. Standard component 3.1 on design and development of educational programs underlines that programs should be designed regularly monitored and developed with the participation of relevant stakeholders including labor market representatives, students, and alumni; at the same time, international and local best practices should be considered to ensure relevance of educational programs with constantly changing environment.

Accreditation Standards

Standard 5, which consists of three components, is specifically devoted to programme quality enhancement. Component 5.1 is related to program's internal quality assurance and requires HEI's IQA office together with programme staff to assess the quality of programs and utilize assessment results for programme review and development. It also touches upon SER preparation procedures and asks HEIs to work on the document together with all programme stakeholders. 5.2 component asks HEI to utilize the results of external quality assurance. Also, in the experts' report template, there is a special requirement for an expert panel to indicate whether the HEI took into consideration the recommendations received during previous accreditation. Component 5.3 asks HEI to regularly monitor the quality of programme involving all stakeholders by conducting peer review of the program, benchmarking of the programme against similar programs, utilizing best practices, conducting classroom observations, course evaluation, etc. Component 1.2 also requires programme assessment in order to ensure its continuous improvement. Component 1.1 asks that programme objectives are set out based on labor market analysis and employers' demands in order to ensure that programme is up-to date and considers societal needs. Also, HEIs have to collect and analyze data on students' progression and completion rates and make relevant decisions. Students satisfaction surveys have to be conducted by the IQA office and results of the surveys utilized for programme improvement.

ESG 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

Authorization Procedure

According to the Charter of Authorization, the term of authorization is 6 years (Article 25 (4)), thus all HEIs are obliged to go through authorization procedure in every 6 years to be allowed to operate and issue a state recognized diploma. The self-evaluation report template for authorization and the guidelines ask the HEIs to reflect on the consideration of the results of previous evaluations.

Accreditation Procedure

Component 5.2 on External Quality assessment asks HEI to utilize the results of external quality assurance for further development.

As it was explained in previous chapters, programme accreditation is mandatory for regulated professions and Doctoral Programs only. However, HEIs have a financial incentive to go through accreditation procedures and as a result, most of the educational programs are accredited. According to the Charter of Accreditation, existing programs



are granted accreditation for 7 years, new programs for 4 years and in case the programme is granted a conditional accreditation, the term is no more than 2 years.

ESG Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

Standard: External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aim and objective set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

The NCEQE leads the development and revision of the external quality assurance standards and procedures. Development and implementation of higher education quality assurance mechanisms are regulated by the Law on Education Quality Enhancement and the minister's orders on approval of Charter of Authorization and Charter of Accreditation. Thus, the formal procedure requires that the revision of the system should be agreed on governmental and parliamentary level. At the same time, to ensure that the system fits to its purpose the NCEQE involves all of its stakeholders in the design and development of the QA mechanisms and methodology. The NCEQE implements two main external quality assurance mechanisms - authorization as institutional evaluation and accreditation as programme evaluation procedures.

As it was mentioned in the previous chapters the higher education quality assurance system was reformed during 2015-2017. The reform had two main purposes that were shared by its stakeholders. Firstly, it aimed to shift the system to a development-oriented approach and ensure transparent and coherent evaluation and secondly, to ensure its alignment with the ESG 2015 and promote integration of Georgian higher education system into the EHEA and fulfill the Georgia-EU Association Agreement requirements.

The revision of the QA standards and procedures consisted of four main phases for each mechanism:

- **Setting up the working groups** consisting of the NCEQE staff, representatives of the MoESCS and other relevant agencies, representatives of HEIs. The working group was responsible for developing the first draft of the documents and facilitating discussions with wider audience. People with specific expertise were invited to participate in the development of particular standards, for example, head of the National Scientific Library participated in the development of the standard component for library resources.
- **Receiving the written feedback from stakeholders.** The NCEQE has sent out the draft documents to all of its stakeholders, such as HEIs, local and international experts, relevant ministries and regulatory bodies and requested the submission of their feedback on the documents, which have been studied and analyzed and the results were reflected in the next drafts of the documents.
- **Discussing the draft documents on the conferences.** The NCEQE has conducted the conferences for the purpose to discuss and finalize the draft of the revised QA regulations. They were attended by the representative of all HEIs, experts, council members, representatives of MoESCS and other governmental and nongovernmental organizations working on the higher education issues. With the support of the Council



of Europe, the NCEQE has invited international experts who review the documents and facilitated the working group discussions during the conferences.

- **Piloting and finalizing the documents.** After finalizing the regulations regarding the revised QA mechanisms the NCEQE has conducted the pilot institutional and programme evaluations. The results of the evaluations were reflected in the final versions approved by the Minister. Although, the limited number of HEIs directly participated in the piloting exercise (institutional evaluations were conducted at 4 HEIs and programme evaluations at 5 HEIs), NCEQE tried to involve wider audience in these evaluations. Representatives of the various HEIs participated in the process as the peer review experts, while other had an opportunity to attend the process as observers. Thus, pilot evaluations have been a valuable capacity building exercise for the NCEQE staff, for peer review experts, and for HEIs.

The NCEQE has developed a guidebook for HEIs on development of self-evaluation process and preparation for authorization. The similar guidebook on accreditation process is in progress. The NCEQE carries capacity building activities for HEIs to support them better prepare for the external evaluation and improve internal quality assurance system (e.g. Training on Strategic Planning, Development of Self Evaluation Process and Report, HR management, Assessment of Learning Outcomes, etc.), also, provides recommendations and advice in terms of explanation of regulations, standards and procedures of external QA.

To ensure involvement of stakeholders in design and continuous development of the QA system, the NCEQE has initiated introduction of the Coordinating Council as a governing body of the agency. One of the key functions of the Coordinating Council is to review of the quality assurance standards and procedures of higher education institutions and the results of their implementation and to develop appropriate proposals for their improvement. Coordinating Council will be composed of the representative from the MoESCS, educational institutions, employers and non-governmental organizations, international experts, and other relevant persons whose knowledge and experience will be important for the development of NCEQE's activities.

ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing processes

Standard: External quality assurance process should be reliable, useful, predefined, implemented consistently and published. They include a self-assessment of equivalent

- an external assessment normally including a site visit
- a report resulting from the external assessment
- a consistent follow up.

The NCEQE implements authorization of educational institutions and accreditation of educational programs according to the pre-defined processes that are indicated in the Charter of Authorization and Charter for Accreditation and publicly assessable on the NCEQE's website. The timeline for each procedure is 180 days and the charters and the order of the director of the NCEQE on creation of the expert panel also indicate interim deadlines for NCEQE, HEIs, and Experts.



The implementation of authorization and accreditation processes includes the following steps:

Self-Evaluation

To initiate the authorization/accreditation process the HEI prepares its self-evaluation report and with the enclosed annexes submits it to the NCEQE. The Self-Evaluation Report Templates (Annex 7/Annex 8) are approved by the administrative legal acts of the director of the NCEQE and are published on the NCEQE's web-site. The templates give the directions to the HEIs 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 for 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, the 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 working 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.

As the application is fully submitted, the NCEQE acknowledges the institution as an applicant for authorization/accreditation and defines an authorization/accreditation fee in accordance to the criteria indicated in the respective charters. As a result of being acknowledged as an authorization/accreditation applicant, the institution makes the payment of the fee within 15 days

Setting up an expert panel

Based on the administrative legal act of the Director, the NCEQE establishes an authorization/accreditation expert panel within 60 days after payment of the fee. The act defines the expert panel members, the chair (and the co-chair, if relevant) of the panel, the dates for the site visit and the deadlines for submitting the draft evaluation report and the final evaluation report. Upon receiving the Order on the establishment of the authorization/accreditation expert panel, the HEI is entitled to submit an argumentative statement on the exclusion of expert/experts to the NCEQE because of the possible conflict of interests. The NCEQE reviews the statement of the HEI and in case of approval, an expert is replaced

Evaluation Process

The NCEQE delivers the NCEQE evaluation methodology and the self-evaluation report with the enclosed documents to expert panel and facilitates development of the site-visit agenda. Expert panel is expected to do the desk study of the documents and identify the lines for inquiry for the site-visit. The site visit agenda is agreed with the HEI in advance. The participants of the interview sessions are selected by the HEI, excluding the academic and invited staff, heads of the programs, and students. The latest ones are randomly selected by the NCEQE, at the same time the representation of various programs/departments is considered. The site visit for the authorization lasts from 3 to 5 days upon the size of the HEI, as for the accreditation the duration of the site visit is one day. They include meetings and interviews with the leadership of the HEI, representatives of various administrative and support offices, teaching



staff, students, alumni, employers, and other stakeholders. During the site-visit the expert panel also observes the HEI facilities. The site visit is finalized with the presentation of the general key finding of the evaluation.

Development of the evaluation report

After the site visit the expert panel is expected to develop an evaluation report within the timeline indicated in the order on setting up an expert panel. The report should be based on the analysis of the information received from the desk-study of the documents and the interview results carried out during the site visit. The report should identify HEIs/programs compliance with the standards and give relevant recommendations/suggestions for further development.

The draft evaluation report is sent to the HEI requesting the feedback on possible factual errors indicated in the report. As a result of the feedback the evaluation report is finalized and submitted to the NCEQE and to the Authorization/Accreditation Council.

Formal Decision-Making and Follow up procedure

The evaluation report is the main basis for the authorization and accreditation councils to make relevant decision. Along with the evaluation report the NCEQE also provides the councils with all the authorization/accreditation documents provided by the HEI. The decisions are made based on the evaluations and compliance levels of the HEIs/programs with the QA standards, discussion and arguments presented during the council meetings. Decisions and minutes of the authorization and accreditation council meetings along with the evaluation reports are published on the [NCEQE's web-site](#).

The compliance level defined by the expert panel in the evaluation reports and the recommendation of the authorization/accreditation councils are the basis for the relevant follow up procedures, that might include: submission of the progress report after one year from granting the authorization/accreditation, and monitoring of the HEI/programme after 2 years to observe whether the recommendations indicated in the report have been addressed.

As a general follow up procedure, HEIs are expected to submit the institutional and programme self-evaluation reports after 3 years from receiving authorization and accreditation.

ESG Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts

Standard: External quality assurance should be carried out by group of external experts that include (a) student member(s)

In order to carry out institutional and programme evaluations, the NCEQE has built up the registry of experts that consists of the members with relevant experience in administrative, teaching and research activities, and other relevant experiences in higher education nationally and internationally. The expert's register also includes students' and employers' representatives.



In order to ensure selection of qualified experts, the NCEQE has defined the qualification requirements and the procedure for selecting expert pool members. Along with the revision of the QA mechanisms in 2017 the NCEQE announced a public call for local, international, and student experts. The procedure for selecting the local experts included submission of application and interviews with the selected candidates, while only applications of international experts were reviewed for their selection. The NCEQE is continuously looking for the possible expert candidates through recommendations and nominations made by HEIs, possible employer organizations, and foreign quality assurance agencies. The nominated and recommended candidates are registered in the expert's registry through simplified procedure. The qualification requirements and the procedures of experts' selection, including the simplified procedure is defined in the of Rule of Experts' Activities (Article 4 and 5).

The Rule of Experts' also defines the principles of composition of expert panels (Article 7 and 10).

Peer review experts for Authorization of Educational Institutions

According to the Charter of Authorization and the Rule of Experts activities, in case of the authorization of educational institutions the expert panel is chaired by international expert with relevant experience. It is mandatory that all authorization expert panels include student and employer representatives. Other members of the panel are academic and administrative staff of HEIs and other experts with relevant experience in the higher education. In case of the evaluation of the multi-profile HEIs that also implement medical programs, international co-chair of the panel with medical background and members with fundamental biomedical sciences and or/clinical studies also participate in the evaluation. Thus, considering the size of the HEI 5-8 experts are presented in the panels. Although, authorization is an institutional evaluation, while selecting the members of the expert panel the profile of the programs and research activities of the HEI are considered allowing more comprehensive evaluation of HEIs activities.

Peer review experts for Accreditation of Educational Programs

In case of the programme accreditation, the field specific expert panel members are selected to evaluate the specific programs. It is mandatory that the student experts participate in the review. Considering the field of educational programme the employer representatives are also present in the accreditation expert panels. As for the participation of the international expert, it is mandatory only for the medical programs. In case of the other educational programs, it is optional and depends on the preferences of the HEI as it is linked to the additional programme accreditation fee defined by the Charter of Accreditation. With the support of the MoESCS of Education and Science, in 2017, the NCEQE introduced a targeted programme "Higher education quality enhancement and internationalization." During the last year, in the frameworks of this program, all the educational programs that are delivered in English were accredited with the involvement of international experts (21 programs). As for 2018, all the programs delivered in English, doctoral programs and programs of regulated fields (Law, Teacher Education, Medicine, Veterinary, Maritime Education) are supported to be accredited with the participation of the international experts.

Besides the authorization and accreditation procedure, the NCEQE carries out regular or case-based monitoring of HEIs and programs. In this regard, the NCEQE considers the scope of the monitoring while composing the experts' panel. If only certain issues should be studied the expert panel might be composed of at least two experts that might not include student and employer representatives.



No Conflict of Interests

The Rule of Experts Activities highlights on the prevention of the conflict of interests (Article 2). The rule indicates provision on definition of conflict of interest that is indicated in the General Administrative Code of Georgia (Article 92) and additional provision that is specifically related to the expert's activities. The NCEQE has also developed the code of ethics to support the establishment of the unified code of conduct for the authorization and accreditation experts emphasizing the integrity, objectivity/impartiality, collegiality, self-development, and confidentiality. The issues related to the conflict of interests are also reflected in the code of ethics and emphasizes that the expert should not be an interested party or related to the interested party of the case, should not have previous engagement in the labor relation with the institution for past two years and should not be a former participant in development/assessment of the concerned institution/program, and should not own shares or foundation capital in the institution which is an interested party. In the above mentioned cases and also if there is any personal interest and/or other circumstances that influence (or will influence) impartiality and objectivity of the evaluation, expert should notify the NCEQE about the refusal to participate in the process.

Violation of the provision on conflict of interests and the code of conduct are preconditions for termination of the expert status. The rules are shared and accepted by all expert panel members and prior to participation in the evaluation they confirm by signing the "Agreement on expert pool membership letter." [The Rule of Experts Activities and Experts' Code of Ethics](#) are publicly accessible on NCEQE web-site.

Capacity Building of Experts' Pool

To ensure a coherent evaluation process and understanding of the standards, the NCEQE has developed guidelines explaining the Georgian Higher Education System, principles and process of evaluation, duties and responsibilities of experts, elaboration of the evaluation report and its technical requirements.

For the capacity building of its experts' pool, the NCEQE regularly conducts trainings for its experts on different topics covering the procedure of evaluation, and experts' role and conduct. The NCEQE also organizes thematic trainings that target the needs identified from the experts' or HEI feedback. As an example, with the support of National Erasmus + Office training on report writing has been conducted by the international trainer, evaluation of programs in the field of business administration, etc.

Prior to each evaluation site-visit, a preparatory meeting is held for the experts' panel. During the preparatory meeting where the expert panel is provided with the necessary knowledge and guidance on the evaluation procedures, as well as with the general information on the applicant HEI and higher education system of Georgia. The preparatory meeting also presents an important opportunity for the expert panel members to be introduced to each other, discuss the findings of the desk study, the lines of inquiry and prepare for the site visit.

Due to the fact that the NCEQE continues selection of the new members of expert's pool, while setting up the expert panel new members are involved in the evaluations with the experienced ones that supports new experts to be better engaged in the process. Participation of the international experts in the evaluation has been identified as one of the most efficient experience for the expert panel members to receive valuable instruction regarding the evaluation and report writing process.



Evaluation of expert's performance

The rule also indicates the expert performance evaluation and professional development related issues. The educational institution submits a survey on the performance of the expert's panel; the chair of the panel and the NCEQE coordinator submit the surveys for each expert panel members. The survey results are used to give a feedback to the expert panel members and plan their further capacity building activities.

ESG Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

Standard: Any outcomes or judgments made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

The most important outcome of external quality assurance is a final decision on HEI's authorization and study programme accreditation. This outcome is based on the evaluation carried out by an expert panel according to the pre-defined and published criteria such as accreditation and authorization standards and procedures. Accreditation and Authorization standards are detailed so that all parties involved in the process (HEIs, experts, accreditation and authorization councils, and other stakeholders) have the same understanding of the document ensuring its transparent and consistent application. Also it is worth mentioning that standards were discussed with all stakeholders before they were enacted and their feedback was incorporated. Additionally, the NCEQE offers trainings and advising for HEIs to explain the standards requirement and evaluation procedures.

As a result of the external evaluation, expert panel defines the level of compliance of higher education institutions against each authorization standard components and compliance level of educational programme against each accreditation standards component. The evaluation is based on four level compliance scheme (compliance, substantial compliance, partial complains and non-compliance), which is defined in the Charter of Authorization and Charter of Accreditation. The charters indicate the definitions of each compliance level for assessing standard components (Charter of Authorization, Article 20 ², Charter of Accreditation, Article 26¹), the rational for defining a compliance level for each standard (Charter of Authorization, Article 20¹, Charter of Accreditation, Article 27) and the decision-making based on the evaluations indicated in the evaluation report Charter of Authorization, Article 25(6), Charter of Accreditation, Article 27⁶). The relevant charters also describe different types of accreditation/authorization decisions and how they are tied to expert evaluations (The scheme is described in Chapter 6).

Important outcomes of external evaluations are the evaluation reports developed by the expert panel. The experts are expected to cover analysis of compliance of the HEI/programme against each component requirements, give relevant recommendation or suggestions and therefore, define the level of compliance. The authorization/accreditation experts' evaluation report templates (annex 9 and annex 10) indicate the definitions for recommendations and suggestions. Moreover, reports ask experts to indicate evidences upon which the evaluation of each component is based in order to ensure evidence-based review of the HEI/program.

As a result of the external evaluation carried out by the expert panel and the evaluation reports the Authorization and Accreditation Councils make the decisions regarding the authorization of educational institution, accreditation of



educational programmes and their relevant follow-up procedures. The decisions are made based on the same pre-defined procedures and standards that are defined by the authorization and accreditation charters. As it is described in chapter 6 (p. 17) the Councils are the independent collegial bodies appointed by the Prime Minister of Georgia and the NCEQE provides their technical and organizational support. The rational and possible outcomes of the Councils' decisions are indicated in chapter 6 (p. 18 and p. 19).

The representative of the HEI that is under review and the expert panel members participate in the council meetings, including the international panel chairs (via Skype intervention). During the council meetings all relevant parties are allowed to give their arguments that they consider to be important for decision making. The council ensure that the evaluation report is accurate and complete.

Authorization and Accreditation Councils decisions along with authorization/accreditation reports and minutes of the accreditation/authorization council hearing are published on the NCEQE website.

ESG Standard 2.6 Reporting

Standard: Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

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, the NCEQE has developed and approved the authorization and accreditation report templates (annex 9 and annex 10). According to the structure of the reports, they should include a general overview of the educational institution/program, site visit and the quality of SER and the compliance of HEIs/programs with standards.

The core structure of the report should include analysis of compliance of HEI/programme 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 requirements, while the suggestions are non-binding statements for further development.

The chair of the expert panel is responsible to coordinate the report writing process and submitting the draft and final versions of the evaluation reports to the NCEQE. The chair of the panel usually assigns certain sections of the report to be drafted by different panel members that reflects panel's observations. It is emphasized in NCEQE's regulations and in practice that whole expert panel is responsible on entire evaluation report and each panel member is expected to comment and contribute to various sections to ensure objective and comprehensive evaluation report.

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. The NCEQE is conducting the training in report writing and this topic is also discussed during the expert panel's preparatory meetings. After receiving the draft evaluation report, NCEQE reviews them to ensure compliance of the reports 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 errors, HEIs are



asked to give their feedback on the draft evaluation report. Evaluation reports are the main basis for decision making and they are publicly accessible on NCEQE's website with the minutes of the council meeting and the [council's decisions](#).

Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals

Standard: Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

There are clearly defined complaints and appeals processes implemented in the NCEQE's quality assurance processes. These processes are described in accreditation/authorization procedures. In case the HEI does not agree with the final decision made by accreditation/authorization council, it has the right to appeal the decision either to an appeal council and/or to a court.

An appeal council is comprised of eleven members. The council is nominated by the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia and appointed by the prime minister of Georgia for a period of one year. The council discusses an appeal and in case they find out any violations in the accreditation/authorization decision-making process, they make a decision to send the case back to the accreditation/authorization council for rehearing (The appeal council is not allowed to overrule the decisions made by the accreditation/authorization councils, but to return it back for revision). In case the Appeal council does not find any violations and agrees that the decision was made correctly, they make a decision that they agree with the decision of the accreditation/authorization council. After that, the HEI can make an appeal to the court. Also, the HEI can skip the appeal procedures of the appeal council and file an appeal directly to the court.

The appeal council has been established in 2016. Since then it has discussed 10 appeal cases submitted by HEIs, mainly complaining about lack of arguments from the authorization/accreditation councils for making the negative decisions. Out of the 10 cases, the appeal council returned 2 cases to the relevant councils for reconsiderations.

Apart from appealing the final decision, the HEIs can also comment on the accreditation/authorization site visit through special surveys that is sent to them after the site visit. They can evaluate each expert panel member together with the Chair of the panel. At the end of the year, the NCEQE analyzes the data and makes appropriate decisions regarding professional development of the peer review experts. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the HEIs can always send an official letter to the agency stating any kind of complaint they may have regarding quality assurance process. The NCEQE discusses and address the issues raised in the letter within the frame one month.



11. Key stakeholders and their opinions

The NCEQE has identified its wide range of stakeholders who contribute to policy-making process, are directly involved in the implementation process and those who benefit from its implementations. In this regard, the NCEQE considers as its key stakeholders: the Government of Georgia, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, the Parliament of Georgia, HEIs, International and non-governmental organizations supporting the development education system, students, employers, peer review experts, decision-making council members.

The NCEQE cooperates with its stakeholders and makes an effort to involve them in the QA system development and implementation processes and consider their feedback. Specifically, the revision of the QA system has been carried out with the active participation of all of the above-mentioned stakeholders, student and employer representative participate in the evaluation expert panels with the representatives of academic and administrative staff of HEIs, and representatives of students, employers, international and non-governmental organization, HEIs are the members of the decision-making councils. For the engagement of stakeholders in the NCEQE governance, the Coordination Council will be established.

The NCEQE has collected the feedback from its stakeholders regarding the recent development and implementation process of the higher education quality assurance system. The main positive feedback was received regarding the NCEQE's open communication and advising meetings with HEIs, the involvement of international experts in the evaluations, detailed and transparent evaluation standards and procedures. Student involvement in the peer expert panels was also emphasized as a very positive trend. The feedback also signaled on the need for capacity development of expert's pool and the HEIs representatives. Also, the tight timeline and the workload for the preparation of the external evaluation was highlighted by the HEIs and experts among the areas that they requested to be addressed.

NCEQE is committed to consider the feedback from its stakeholders and improve the tools to receive feedback from wider stakeholders.

Complaints

NCEQE mainly receives the complaints from the staff and students of various HEIs regarding the possible violation of the QA standards. Each complaint is studied by the NCEQE staff, and if needed expert is also involved in the process in a maximum one-month timeframe if the issue does not require additional investigation.



12. SWOT analysis

While working on the self-assessment using the EFQM Excellence model, the NCEQE team has elaborated the SWOT analysis and has identified its challenges and priority areas for the future development. The analysis covered all of the NCEQE's activities. However, this section will reflect the key issues that are related to the development and implementation of the external quality assurance system. Additionally, the feedback received from external stakeholders is also reflected in the analysis. From the responses of the various stakeholders, it was observed that recent developments of the higher education quality assurance system have been seen in a very positive way.

Strengths

- Well-grounded educational quality assurance agency with solid experience of developing and implementing educational quality assurance mechanism at national level.
- Experience of delivering various educational services and accumulated knowledge base;
- Significantly increased participation of various stakeholders in the development and implementation of the quality assurance mechanisms (ex. Participation of the HEIs in the development of the QA standards and procedures, participation of international experts, students and employer representatives in the expert panels, etc.), including their participation in the formal decision-making process.
- Capacity and flexibility for implementing system-wide changes and commitment to the continuous development of our performance.
- Introducing the revised higher education QA system as a development-oriented mechanism that takes into account the outcomes achieved by the HEI.
- Open and extensive cooperation with HEIs and providing advice regarding the self-evaluation process, clarification of QA standards and procedures. Furthermore, providing various related capacity building activities
- Transparency and accountability of the NCEQE's activities and increased customer satisfaction results
- Financial sustainability of the NCEQE and good balance between budgetary and own income sources.
- Qualified staff and high retention rate that ensures continuity and sustainable implementation of the NCEQE's core activities.

Weaknesses

- Lack of international experience of local peer review experts in terms of evaluation of educational institutions and programs.
- Periodical scale up of the workload.
- Lack of information technologies used for the implementation of the QA processes that would enhance the efficiency of the processes.
- Bureaucratic issues that prolongs certain procedures, such as procurement, staff recruitment.
- Lack of analytical work performed by the NCEQE.
- Less effective mechanisms for keeping, consolidating and using data.
- Lack of communication and outreach to the wider society regarding the reforms and activities carried out by the NCEQE.



Opportunities

- Reforming the educational quality enhancement is one of the priorities of the country's Sustainable Development Goals that is also emphasized in the Georgia-EU Association agenda for 2018-2020.
- Obtaining the ENQA membership to strengthen the mandate and trustworthiness of the NCEQE's activities
- Strengthen cooperation with donors for the continuous analysis and improvement of the QA policies and processes.
- Technological developments that can enhance the efficiency of the NCEQE activities.
- Obtaining the status of "Recognized for Excellence", and becoming the role model organization in terms of promoting quality culture.

Threats

- HEIs intentions to compare evaluation reports to one another.
- Maintenance of the expert's code of conduct due to the "small country syndrome".
- Resistance and Scarce of academic and scientific capabilities of certain HEIs to follow ongoing changes of the QA system.
- Be oriented on superficial conformation of the external QA requirements rather than using the QA system for their internal development.

13. Current challenges and areas for future development

Based on the analysis and discussions the NCEQE has identified current challenges and key areas for future development.

Current Challenges:

- Implementation of the revised system to ensure that it meets its purpose.
- The consistency of evaluations and professional conduct of experts.
- Scale up of the workload.
- Technical issues for processing the large-scale authorization application documents and their translation.
- Lack of understanding of the QA system that might cause misinterpretation of the evaluation results.
- Lack of communication and outreach to the wider society regarding the QA system reform.

Areas for Future Development:

- Capacity building and information dissemination sessions for HEIs, students and other stakeholders.
- Continuous capacity building and guidance for experts to improve their performance and enhance the consistency of evaluations.
- Along with the implementation of the revised NCEQE, shifting from individual programme accreditation approach with the study programme group evaluations.
- Implementation of the EFQM on each structural unit level and enhancing the internal capacity.
- Implementation of the Quality Management System online platform that will technically support the authorization and accreditation application process and be processing the documents.
- Capacity building of the translators working on the SDL Trados (translation online platform) and the increase of the system knowledge-base.
- Information dissemination sessions for the wider society regarding the QA activities and use of the results.



Glossary

BFUG – Bologna Follow-Up Group

ECTS - European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

EFQM – European Foundation for Quality Management

EHEA –European Higher Education Area

ELFA - European Law Faculties Association

ENQA - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EQF LLL – European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning

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

ETF – European Training Foundation

EU – European Union

EUA – European University Association

HEI – Higher Education Institution

MoESCS – Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports

NCEA – National Center for Educational Accreditation

NCEQE – National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement

NQF – National Qualifications Framework

QA – Quality Assurance

SAR – Self Assessment Report

SER – Self Evaluation Report

WFME – World Federation for Medical Education

WHO – World Health Organization



List of the Enclosed Documents

- Annex1. Law on Educational Quality Enhancement
- Annex 2. Charter of the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement
- Annex 3. Charter of Authorization of Educational Institutions (with Authorization Standards)
- Annex 4. Charter of Accreditation of Educational Programmes (with Accreditation Standards)
- Annex 5. Rule of Authorization and Accreditation Experts' Selection and Activities and Termination of Membership of Expert Pool
- Annex 6. Quality Assurance Mechanism of the NCEQE's activities
- Annex 7. Self-Evaluation Report Template for Accreditation
- Annex 8. Self-Evaluation Report Template for Authorization
- Annex 9. Experts' Evaluation report Template for Accreditation
- Annex 10. Expert's Evaluation report template for Authorization



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