



Authorization of Higher Education Institutions

Guidebook

National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE)

The purpose of this guidebook is to assist the higher education institutions to get prepared for authorization process, provides them the information on the process of institutional evaluation and authorization standards. The guidebook covers five key stages of the authorization process of higher education institutions: self-evaluation, site-visit of expert panel, drafting of authorization evaluation report by expert panel, decision-making, and follow-up activities. Moreover, the guidebook includes the recommendations in relation to the requirements of authorization standards.

Contents

Introduction	3
Main Principles of Evaluation:	3
Authorization Process	4
Self-Evaluation Process and Filling the Self-Evaluation form.....	6
Overview	6
Main Principles of Self-Evaluation	6
Self-Evaluation Process	6
Duration of Self-Evaluation Process and Authorization Timeline	6
Persons Involved in the Self-Evaluation Process.....	6
Technical Characteristics of the Self-Evaluation Report	7
Structure Self-Evaluation Report.....	7
Introduction	7
General Information	7
Quantitative Indicators	7
Area	10
Target Benchmarks.....	10
Evaluation of Compliance with Authorization Standards	11
Description and Evaluation.....	11
Evidence/Indicators	12
Strengths and Areas for Improvement	12
Annexes.....	13
Pre-check of the Authorization Application.....	13
Expert Panel and Evaluation	13
Composition of the Expert Panel.....	13
Authorization Evaluation Carried out by Expert Panel.....	13
Desk Study of the Documents.....	14
Site-Visit at the HEI	14
Technical specifics of the site-visit at the HEI	14
Agenda of the Site-Visit	14
The expert evaluation report	18
Decision-making	19
Follow-up on the Evaluation Results	20
Definitions of the terms	21

Introduction

The authorization of a higher education institution (hereinafter "HEI") is an external quality assurance mechanism, operated by the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (hereinafter - Center), **Authorization is an obligatory procedure to obtain the status of a higher education institution and the right for implementing the relevant educational activities.** The procedure and standards of authorization are defined and approved by the Order of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia "on the Approval of the Educational Institutions Authorization Charter and of Authorization Fees".¹

The purpose of the authorization is to conduct an institutional evaluation of educational institution and to define whether the institution complies with the authorization standards. The authorization evaluation is carried out by expert panel, and is based on the analysis of the self-evaluation report of HEI and information clarified through the site-visit. *The process of authorization is being performed in compliance with the requirements of Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG²) and includes five main stages: self-assessment of HEI, institutional evaluation by experts, drafting of the authorization evaluation report by expert panel, decision-making by the Authorization Council, follow-up activities in relation to the evaluation results.*

Main Principles of Evaluation:

- The evaluation is carried out to determine the compliance of HEI with the requirements of the authorization standards;
- The evaluation process is performed by a panel of independent experts and is evidence-based;
- The evaluation is performed with regard to the mission of the institution;
- During the evaluation, the information reflected in the self-evaluation report (SER) and the annexed documents submitted by HEI, is checked out. Within the site visit, all inquiries that are necessary to determine the compliance of HEI with the requirements of the authorization standards are cleared up/clarified;
- The information reflected in the self-evaluation report and the annexed documents submitted by HEI is deemed to be accurate, if the contrary evidences are not confirmed;
- Authorization evaluation report prepared by expert panel and the decision made by the Authorization Council are publicly published.

¹Order of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia №99/N of 01/10/2010

² Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015)

<http://erasmusplus.org..ge/files/publications/ESG%202015.pdf>;http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

Authorization Process

The duration of authorization process to obtain the status of a higher education institution is 180 days. The counting of this period starts after the Center determines the accuracy of the authorization application and acknowledges the HEI as an applicant of the status of higher education institution. This table below shows the fixed and probable timeline of each stage of the process:

	Authorization Process	Timeline defined by the Order of the Director of the Center/ Authorization Charter	180 days (6 months) Probable distribution according to the months
1	Submission of the authorization application to the Center HEI submits to the Center: self-evaluation form ³ , annexed documents and a proof of payment for the review of the authorization application		-
2	The Center checks the self-evaluation report and the annexed documents to make sure that they are submitted in the accurate way. In case if the self-evaluation form is not filled out completely and/or the documents are not submitted in full, the Center informs the HEI about the existing gaps in the application	3 working days	
3	In case of the gaps clarified, HEI is given from 5 to 15 working days to correct them. If HEI does not submit the revised application to the Center within the timeframe defined, the relevant Order on the termination of the administrative proceeding will be issued.	5-15 working days	
4	As a by-product of the submission of the authorization application in full, the Center acknowledges the applicant as a seeker of the status of education institution and defines an authorization fee	20 calendar days	I month
5	As a result of being acknowledged as an authorization applicant, the institution makes the payment of the authorization fee	15 calendar days	I-II month
6	The Center establishes an authorization expert panel ⁴	60 calendar days	II-III month
7	Upon the issuance of the Order on the establishment of the authorization expert panel and the site-visit to the higher education institution, the institution is entitled to make a one-time submission of additional documents with regard to the changes of the information reflected in the self-evaluation form submitted to the Center	5 calendar days	
8	Upon familiarizing with the Order on the establishment of the authorization expert panel, the authorization applicant HEI is entitled to submit an argumentative statement on the exclusion of expert/experts to the Center	2 working days	

³Please find the self-assessment form of the seeker of HEI on the following link:

<http://eqe.ge/geo/static/461/Quality-/HE-QA/>

⁴ The principle of the establishment of an authorization expert panel and the functions of the experts are described in details in "Regulation for the selection of authorization and accreditation experts, their activity and termination of membership of the experts panel" (please see the following link:

http://eqe.ge/res/docs/_%E1%83%9B%E1%83%A3%E1%83%A8%E1%83%90%E1%83%9D%E1%83%91%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1_%E1%83%AC%E1%83%94%E1%83%A1%E1%83%98.pdf)

9	The Center reviews the statement of the authorization applicant HEI and in case of approval, an expert is replaced	3 working days	
10	The Center delivers the authorization documentation to expert panel and develops the site-visit agenda	7 working days; 30 calendar days, in case if translation is needed	II-IV month
11	Study of the documents by expert panel; Working on the site-visit agenda with the institution (at least one week prior to the site-visit)		III-IV month
12	Site-visit of expert panel to the HEI	3-5 days	IV-V month
13	Working of the expert panel on draft report	10 - 20 working days	
14	The institution familiarizes with the draft report prepared by expert panel and submits its argumentative position on the factual circumstances in the written form to the Center, which is then sent to the expert panel and the Authorization Council	10 calendar days	
15	After familiarizing with the argumentative position of the institution, the expert panel elaborates the final report and submits it to the Center	5 - 10 working days	
16	The Center sends the authorization evaluation report to the institution.	1 day	V-VI months
17	The Authorization Council meeting is scheduled and the interested parties are informed about it before the commencement of the oral hearing. The authorization documentations of the institution are sent to the members of the Authorization Council for further review at the Council meeting.	7 calendar days prior to the Council meeting	
18	The Council meeting (oral hearing)		
19	After the completion of the Authorization Council meeting, the record of proceeding/protocol is prepared and the decision is issued. . The record of the Council meeting, the decision and the authorization evaluation report is published publicly on the webpage of the Center ⁵	10 working days after the Authorization Council meeting	

⁵ Authorization Council decisions and authorization evaluation report: <http://eqe.ge/geo/decisions>

Self-Evaluation Process and Filling the Self-Evaluation form

Overview

The first and the most significant stage of authorization evaluation of higher education institution is a self-evaluation of the HEI's activities and preparation of the relevant evidence-based report. The self-evaluation process enables HEI itself to analyze its activities, the gained experience, achieved outcome, current condition, and accordingly, to plan the ways to further development. Moreover, a self-evaluation report is a key document the expert panel relies on in the process of the evaluation. Therefore, self-evaluation report is a tool for HEI to represent its activities to the expert panel, to explain its unique features and demonstrate the compliance with the standards. In the course of the self-evaluation, HEI must follow with the authorization standards of higher education institution, and assess its activities in accordance with the requirements of each component of the standard. The self-evaluation report must be represented in accordance with the form approved by the Director of the Center. ⁶

Main Principles of Self-Evaluation

- While self-evaluating, HEI has to consider its mission, objectives and direction of priorities, and describe 'fitness to the purpose' to each standard;
- While self-evaluating, HEI has to assess its performed activities and practice, the achieved results, current condition in line with the requirements of each standard component. Accordingly, it has to draw its conclusions and set the ways for further development⁷;
- Self-evaluation must be analytical, and based on the relevant quantitative and qualitative data and evidences;
- Self-evaluation must be a participatory process, reflecting the ideas of the relevant stakeholders.

Self-Evaluation Process

Duration of Self-Evaluation Process and Authorization Timeline

With the purpose of conducting the high quality self-evaluation, it is recommended HEI to initiate the process at least 5 months earlier. However, considering the size, features, data and level of data systematization (e.g. whether the data on the student employment is systematically collected or not, data on the completion of the program, etc) into account, the process may take up to 9 months.

With the purpose of conducting the self-evaluation process in an effective manner, HEI should outline the plan, with indication of the specific internal timeline for self-evaluating activities.

The authorization to HEI is granted for the period of 6 years. Furthermore, on the 3rd year after granting the authorization, HEI has to submit the interim self-evaluation report to the Center. Accordingly, with the purpose of implementing the continuous activities and preparing the interim self-evaluation on time, HEI should start the working on the self-evaluating and reporting with taking the concrete timeline into account.

Persons Involved in the Self-Evaluation Process

Due to the fact that the authorization standards cover the wide range of the processes in HEI, its qualified analysis and evaluation is impossible without full involvement of the structural units.

⁶Please find the self-evaluation form of the authorization applicant HEI on the following link: <http://eqe.ge/geo/static/461/Quality-/HE-QA//>

⁷ Comment: while defining the level of compliance of HEI with the standards, expert panel particularly relies on the analysis of the established practice, the achieved outcome, current condition and future development plan

It serves as the best practice to establish self-evaluation team, which will be representative to cover full range of HEI's activities and also, to reflect the ideas of stakeholders. It's recommended to distribute the functions and responsibilities between the members of the group. Due to the size and complexity of HEI, the involvement of stakeholders could be provided both directly (membership of the self-evaluation team) and indirectly. One of the main instruments of indirect involvement is the organization of the meetings with wider audience of HEI and external interested people. For instance, the organization of the meetings by deans, who are also members of the self-evaluation team, with academic and invited staff. And, the feedback will be finally incorporated in the self-evaluation report. The engagement of a student is also crucial in the self-evaluation process. Due to the quantity of students, members of student organizations or clubs who are able to represent the ideas and interests of students in the self-evaluation report could be directly involved in the self-evaluation team. Also, with the purpose of taking the attitude of students into account, HEI could conduct surveys on particular topics or organize focus groups/workshops, etc. In the paragraph 6 of the introductory part of the self-evaluation report, the whole process of self-evaluation should be described, like who were involved in the process and how the responsibilities were divided among the team members.

Technical Characteristics of the Self-Evaluation Report

- Each field of self-evaluation form should be completed (if, HEI does not have the accurate information for the moment of self-evaluation or the information is irrelevant, an appropriate footnote should be indicated);
- Information presented in the self-evaluation form directly responds to the requirements of standard components and evaluation criteria;
- On the approval of the information reflected in the self-evaluation report, the relevant documents should be indicated in the field of Indicators/Evidences. The relevant documents must be referenced in the narrative. The mentioned documents should be numbered in sequential order and submitted as appendices;
- The documents/information represented in the 3rd part of the evaluation form must be fully represented;
- In relation to each standard, considering each component into account, HEI's strong sides and areas of improvement must be represented.

Structure Self-Evaluation Report

The structure of the self-assessment report is composed of three main parts: Introduction, evaluation of the compliance with the authorization standards, and appendices.

Introduction

The purpose of the introductory part is to describe the factual circumstances in order to show the whole picture of HEI's activities to the expert panel. For example, it should review founding history of HEI, its key priorities and fields, main quantitative indicators and achievements.

General Information

In view of practical purposes, the introductory part also includes factual information about HEI, such as the name of HEI, an organizational-legal formⁱ, typeⁱⁱ, identification code, also main contact information and information about the management.

Quantitative Indicators

In the part of quantitative data, HEI has to submit the quantitative information about programs, students, staff, budget, research activities, library usage and volume of student dormitory. Due to the fact that the quantitative data is a matter of continuous changes, HEI must select the concrete dates (*which should not exceed the period of two months prior to the date of submission of authorization application to the Center*) and describe the situation for that period.

Programs

HEI should submit the information about the number of educational programs according to the levelsⁱⁱⁱ of education. Also, information about the program accreditation^{iv} and specificity (joint^v/exchange^{vi}) of implementation.

Students

The margin number of students - according to the component 2.2 of the authorization standard, HEI is required to elaborate the student planning methodology and mechanisms.

According to the levels of educational programs, HEI should indicate a factual number of active students and students with a suspended status, as well as data on the completion of the program. Also, HEI should indicate the data on the foreign students and students with special educational needs.

The indicator for the completion of the program implies the following - what number of students enrolled in a certain year completed the educational program within the period of standard duration (Bachelor's program - 4 years, Master's program - 2 years, one-cycle program - 5 or 6 years, PhD program 3-5 years)⁸. For example, what number (what percentage) of students enrolled at Bachelor's program in 2012 completed this level in 2016. HEI, at its own discretion, may also additionally calculate the indicator for the completion of the program within the period of 2 years after the standard duration period of the program. For example, what number (what percentage) of students enrolled at Bachelor's program in 2012 completed this level in 2018.

While calculating the indicator for the completion of the program, the number of students participated in the mobility program should be estimated accordingly: the number of students enrolled through the mobility program must be added to the inflow of the students of the certain year. For example, if students used the mobility on their 3rd year of studies in 2015, their number their number should be added to the number of enrolled students in 2012.

⁸While calculating the mentioned data, HEI should calculate the average of the indicators for the completion of the program for each year of the authorization period. In the case of non-availability of the full data for the previous authorization period, it should be mentioned which years have been used in the calculation of the indicator for the completion of the program.

Recommendation with regard to the mechanism of planning student enrollment

Despite the fact that the evaluation form requires the sum amount of the margin number of students, it seems impossible to calculate without taking the specificity of the educational programmes into consideration. While developing the planning methodology for student population, it is crucial to take the specificity of the program/direction and material (e.g. (premises, classrooms, laboratories, centers for practice, etc.) or human resources (affiliate academic staff, invited staff, etc.) into account. In the same context, it is important to consider the specificity of the levels of educational programs.

At the university level, it is vital to consider all the resources of HEI, including library, IT, administrative and other resources, and opportunities of student services.

The student population planning should be done according to years, where the duration of the educational program as well as the dynamics of enrollment of students and the indicators for the completion of programs should be considered.

If HEI plans to receive foreign students, it is also necessary to document the existence of relevant resources (English-language literature, English-language speaking staff, etc.), that assures the achievement of the program learning outcome for foreign students.

To evaluate the above mentioned resources, HEI may use different examples of HEI with similar profile and positive results both at the national and international levels. Although, the self-experience of the HEI carries the most valuable information to determine relevant student number and assess the resources of the HEI. It is vital that the mechanism of student population planning considers the outcome of internal quality assessment (including the ideas of students, the ideas of academic/invited staff in line to the particular programs/courses, the ideas of administration, target benchmarks determined by the HEI).

One more important factor which should also be considered in the planning of student population is a potential interest of students to be enrolled in particular direction/program of HEI and a marketing strategy of the HEI designed to attract them. HEI should document that if it plans to increase the number of student, it will manage to attract potential students. In other cases, an institution may face such circumstances, when instead of the planned 1000 students, only 100 students were enrolled, and the resources available for 1000 students remained unused, and the financial plan (income and expenditures) remained unrealistic. Such circumstances also put the creation of suitable educational environment for the enrolled 100 students under threat.

Based on the mentioned above, four key stages can be clarified in the implementation of the mechanism and development of student population methodology

- determination of main factors in the planning of student population by the HEI;
- assessment of the current situation in accordance with the determined main factors;
- determination of the need for decrease or increase of the number of students based on the results of the assessment of current situation; In case of the increase of student population, relevant documentation on the demands of students/entrants.

After the evaluation of the current condition, if HEI decides to increase the margin number of students in the certain period after authorization, it is significant the action plan to reflect the increase/development of the HEI resources.

Staff

HEI should indicate the number of staff, covering the following categories -academic staff^{vii}, scientific staff^{viii}, affiliate^{ix} academic staff, administrative and assisting staff^x. It should also separate the number of foreign staff engaged in teaching and research.

The separate fields are allocated for academic staff and affiliate academic staff. Although, this does not neglect the fact that the HEI should have non-affiliate academic staff. The definition 'affiliation' emphasizes the functions of the academic staff. If HEI has both affiliated and non-affiliated academic staff, it should have the argumentations to explain the difference between the functions and workloads of these two categories.

Other Quantitative Indicators

In the field of other quantitative indicators, the following quantitative data should be indicated:

- Number of researches implemented during the last authorization period and number of current researches
- Total budget of HEI – indication of the total budget of the year while applying for authorization procedures
- Number of scientific-research institutes - it refers to HEIs which have scientific-research institutes
- Budget allocated for the research-scientific activities- it is important the HEI to allocate the relevant budget for the research-scientific activities. The HEIs in the field of Art must indicate the budget allocated for the arts/performing works.. These indicators should also be indicated for the year while applying to the authorization process.
- Budget allocated for the functioning and development of the library - includes the renewal of book , purchase of international scientific databases, renewal of the material resources of library , institutional development of library resources (e.g. (staff, technologies, etc.) and others. This data should be also indicated for the year while the application is submitted for authorization.
- The indicator of the usage of international scientific databases - the sum of the usage of all databases during the past one year.
- The number of students, for whom the student dormitory is designated for

Area

HEI should indicate the total area available for educational, research, creative or performing activities. Furthermore, educational and support area should be represented separately.

Target Benchmarks

This part incorporates indicators and target benchmarks with regard to different standards (it is required to submit factual indicators and target benchmarks as attachments, in the context of faculties/departments). Although, beside the list of indicators offered in the table, HEIs may add the indicators, which are utilized by them during the evaluation of their activities. It is important the HEI to analyze the meaning of factual quantitative indicators (quantitative data/indicators and target benchmarks analysis is recommended to be reflected in the description and analysis of self-evaluation), in particular:

- How the current situation (factual indicator) guarantees an effective implementation of student oriented and high quality educational process
- Whether there is a need for the improvement of the current indicators
- What is the concrete target benchmark that is necessary to be achieved to improve its activities
- What period is necessary to achieve the target benchmark

Taking the above-mentioned into consideration, with the purpose of achieving the target benchmarks in reality, HEI should have the concrete plan on the specific steps it will take to improve its activities. Accordingly, on one hand it is necessary to have suitable action plan to achieve the target benchmarks, whereas on the other hand, target benchmarks represent indicators for the implementation of the action/strategic plan of HEI.

Determination of Target Benchmarks

While determining the target benchmarks, it is recommended for HEI to consider the following:

1. results of internal assessment (including the internal comparison between the results of different directions/faculties)
2. resources and opportunities available at its hand
3. Existing practice in other HEIs with similar characteristics (programs/similarities in directions, mission, size, etc.), which might have better results and their achievement could be realistic.

The following data should be indicated in the target benchmarks field of the evaluation report: ratio of staff of different categories, ratio of staff and students, ratio of budget allocated for research and total budget, ratio of administrative expenditures and total budget should be presented as of the year when the application for authorization is submitted.

The following data should be presented in a form of an average data for the last authorization period (in the case the HEI is unable to present the mentioned data in a form of an average data for the mentioned period, the data should be presented for the period the data for which is available at the institution and the institution should indicate that in a reference note about this period):

Staff Retention Indicator - this indicator shows the percentage of the staff which are still working in the organization for the time period given (last authorization period). Retention indicators of academic, administrative, invited and support staff are indicated separately in the table, due to the specificity of their activities may significantly differ from one another. It is important that these data are used in the descriptive part of the staff standard while analyzing the HR policy and activity of the HEI,

Graduates employment indicator - this indicator shows what percentage of the graduates have been employed in the given period of time (within the period of last authorization). This indicator should be presented according to the programs/directions in the table of annex 1 of the self-evaluation form. In case if HEI has long history of processing and collecting of this data, this is clearly positive. And, it is important to be this data mentioned in the relevant descriptive and evaluation part of standards components. It is also important to analyze the change of employment indicators according to the years.

Graduates employment indicators according to the received qualification - while conducting surveys on the employment of the graduates, HEI should differ the employment indicator according to the received qualification (it is advisable to consider the classifier of categories and employment fields indicated in the description of educational programs).

Evaluation of Compliance with Authorization Standards

Description and Evaluation

HEI should describe and analyze against each component how resources, regulations, practice and achieved results of HEI ensure meeting the requirements of the standard components. The descriptive part has to be evidence-based (e.g. indicate a particular document, quantitative indicator, etc.). The regulatory texts should not be copied in the self-evaluation report, but the need of their elaboration and implementation have to be analyzed. This part is a good opportunity for HEI to deliver information to expert panel and explain them any circumstance, specificity of this particular HEI, or internal and external factors hindering the HEI to comply with standards during the period of authorization.

In this part of the self-evaluation, HEI should also indicate the fields for further improvement to meet the requirements of and be compliant with the standard components.

While drafting the narrative part of self-evaluation, HEI should guide with the following questions below, in line with the particular component of the standard:

1. What resources and or/regulations does the HEI have to meet the requirements of the standard component?
2. How is the current practice and experience with regard to the requirements of standard component?
3. What are the achieved outcome and are they aligned with the goals set by the HEI?

4. What are the internal evaluation outcome of the practice, regulations and existing resources and what should be addressed for improvement?
5. What is the vision/plan of the HEI to improve its activities?

While answering each of the questions above, HEI should consider its mission and goals, and assess how its activities are aligned with the mission of the HEI, and how it will guarantee the achievement of the set goals.

In the case of problematic issues or/and recommendations given in the previous evaluation reports of HEI's authorization/accreditation (if it is relevant in the context of institutional assessment), protocols of the Authorization/Accreditation Council or other external evaluation reports, the HEI should also describe how it dealt with them.

Evidence/Indicators

The self-evaluation made in accordance with each component of the standard should be evidence-based. Therefore, HEI should indicate all sources and evidences used in the writing of descriptive and assessment parts of the narrative (e.g. particular documents and/or other evidence).

Strengths and Areas for Improvement

On the basis of the self-evaluation and analysis of all components of standard, HEI should identify strong sides and area for improvement. The aim of this model is to help HEI and experts to structure the analysis in relation to the concrete standard. Accordingly, experts evaluate the real condition, strong sides, current problems and the ways to solve them.

While identifying the strong sides and areas for improvement, HEI has to take its mission and goals into account. In relation to them, HEI must analyze its work in line with the standard component/component parts. It is important to formulate clearly, based on evidences and outcome.

Example of formulating strengths:

Example of weak description

HEI promotes the development of scientific-research activity

VS

Example of good description

HEI has created the service for the support of researches, which helps interested parties to prepare grant research projects. As a result of the mentioned, the number of grants received has increased from # to #.

Example of outline areas for improvement

Example of weak description

Student services are to be improved in the HEI

Example of good description

The student surveys have shown that the HEI should ensure the retraining of employees of the Career Planning Center, to enable them to provide more qualified consultations to the students.

Annexes

The list of the documents and information which should be included into the authorization application is presented in the form of annexes. The documents should not be presented separately, different information could be a part of one document.

For example, the mission of the HEI could be a part of strategy document, not approved separately. Also, specific data may be a part of the self-evaluation, not presented as a separate document. For example, distribution of staff according to sex and age might be written down in the self-evaluation, in the descriptive and analyzing part of the standard component.

It is important that the documents submitted in the form of annexes are numbered and a relevant reference is made in the field of evidence in the narrative of self-evaluation.

Pre-check of the Authorization Application

For an institution to become authorization applicant, the Center checks the authorization application within the period of 3 days, whether the self-evaluation form and the supporting documents are submitted in full. Therefore, please pay attention to the comments made to the "Technical Characteristics of the Self-Evaluation Report" of this manual. In the case of the self-assessment form and the supporting documents haven't been submitted in full, the Center discards the submitted application for authorization and stipulates a period of 5 to 15 working days for the institution to correct the mentioned mistakes. If the HEI is unable to submit a corrected application for authorization within the stipulated period, the Center leaves the application unconsidered. In this case, to initiate the authorization process, it is necessary for the HEI to submit an application for authorization once again.

Expert Panel and Evaluation

An independent panel of experts, with the organization of the Center, performs the assessment of the compliance of the higher education university seeking the status of authorization with the authorization standards.

Composition of the Expert Panel

To define the compliance of HEI with the authorization standards, the Center establishes the panel of experts including administrative/academic staff and student, international expert, also employer and other persons with relevant qualification. The expert panel is chaired by international expert. The composition of the experts group, the number of experts (approximately 5-8 experts) and the duration (2-6 days) of the site-visit to the institution is determined individually, taking into account specificity of the educational institution and the resources of the institution. In case if HEI implements the regulated medical academic higher education program, experts of fundamental biomedical sciences and/or students with a profile of clinical studies should be represented in the panel of experts. In addition, an international expert with the relevant field competence is included into the panel of experts holding the status of a co-chair.

The panel of experts is established by the order of the Director of the Center, which is then sent to the HEI. In the case of the conflict of interests between HEI and a member/members of the panel of experts, the HEI should inform the Center about their argumentative position within two working days since the acceptance of the Order. In the case of considering the aforementioned, the Center will replace the member of the panel of experts, whom the HEI had identified the existence of the conflict of interests with.

Authorization Evaluation Carried out by Expert Panel

Expert panel's assessment of HEI with regard to the compliance with the authorization standards includes three main stages: Study and analysis of the documents, site-visit to the HEI, preparation of authorization evaluation report by expert panel.

Desk Study of the Documents

Before the site-visit to the HEI, full documentation submitted by the HEI is sent to the panel of the experts. The panel of experts familiarizes themselves with the information publicly available about the HEI and its website. The panel of experts might require the delivery of additional documentation/information from the institution prior or during the site-visit.

Site-Visit at the HEI

The site-visit at the HEI represents the most significant stage of the assessment process. During the site-visit, the panel of experts checks the accuracy of the information indicated in the documents and self-assessment report on the basis of conducting meetings and interviews with the representatives of the HEI and the inspection of the resources of the HEI, assesses whether the regulations and mechanisms at the institutional level described in the documents are being implemented; also throughout the site-visit the panel of experts collects and clarifies the information that is necessary to compose a conclusion and determine the level of compliance of the HEI with regard to each of the standard component.

Technical specifics of the site-visit at the HEI

1. Each interview session should be attended by maximum 6-8 person.
2. For the interview sessions with the students, academic staff, invited staff and heads of the programmes participants are selected randomly, however representation of various programmes/departments should be ensured. Besides, in case, the expert panel wants to meet specific people, e.g. head of a specific programme, or representative of a specific department, targeted selection can also be used.
3. Considering the size of the university (number of buildings, labs, research institutes) the random selections can also be used while selecting the facilities which will be visited by the panel, or representatives of the research institutes or other administrative units.
4. Each interview session should be attended by the most relevant and key persons who are in charge of the discussed activity. However, wide participation of the university should be ensured and same people should not attend different sessions, if there is not an exceptional necessity for this.
5. The student, alumni and employer representatives should not be employed at the institution.
6. In case the translation will be needed during the interview sessions, NCEQE provides an independent translator.
7. Anyone whose attendance won't be agreed in advance with the Center will be asked to leave interview session.
8. HEI should provide nametags for all interviewees and expert panel members.
9. The panel should conduct the interviews in the meeting rooms that ensure confidentiality.
10. The HEI should provide the water, coffee and snacks in the meeting room and business lunch privately for the expert panel.

Agenda of the Site-Visit

The agenda of the site-visit is agreed with the HEI in advance. The agenda includes meetings with different stakeholders of the HEI: leadership of the HEI, academic and/or representative councils, representatives of the self-evaluation teams, representatives of the different administrative and support units, representatives of students, academic staff, invited staff, alumni and employer representatives and other relevant stakeholders.

In the table below you can find the template of the Site-Visit agenda, which is modified considering the structure and specifics of each HEI.

Authorization Site-visit agenda

Review Panel Members		Representatives of HEI	Representative of the NCEQE		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chair - Co-Chair - Member - Member - Member - Member (student representative) - Member (employer representative) 					
<i>DAY 1 [Date]</i>			Start	End	
1	Welcome and introduction	NCEQE Representative			
2	Process: background and goals				
3	Presentation and discussion of the key issues of authorization standards and evaluation procedure				
4	Expert evaluation report: structure, Site Visit Agenda, Open Questions				
	Lunch				
5	Discussion of the first impression on TSU gained from the review of documents	Expert Panel			
Site-visit at The HEI					
<i>DAY 2 [Date]</i>					Translation needed
1	Meeting with HEI Leadership		09:00	09:55	
2	Meeting with the Self-Evaluation Team		10:00	10:45	
	Break		10:45	11:00	
3	Meeting with the representatives of the Academic Council		11:00	11:50	
4	Meeting with the representatives of the Representative Council (Senate)		11:55	12:45	
	Lunch		12:45	13:30	
5	Meeting with the representatives of the Quality Assurance Office		13:30	14:20	
6	Meeting with the representatives of Learning Process Management Office		14:25	15:15	
	Break		15:15	15:30	
7	Meeting with Departments of Foreign Affairs		15:30	16:10	
8	Meeting with the representatives of Legal Office		16:15	17:00	
9	Meeting with HR Office		17:05	17:55	
10	Summary Meeting with Experts Panel		17:55	18:10	
<i>DAY 3 [Date]</i>					
1	Meeting with the Faculty Deans		09:00	10:00	
2	Meeting with the quality assurance representatives of the faculties		10:05	11:00	
	Lunch		11:00	11:45	
3	Meeting with the Heads of Programmes <i>Parallel sessions</i> Panel 1: 1. Faculty of A 2. Faculty of B		11:45	12:40	

	Panel 2: 1. Faculty of C 2. Faculty of D				
4	Meeting with the Academic Staff <i>Parallel sessions</i> Panel 1: 1. Faculty of A 2. Faculty of B Panel 2: 1. Faculty of C 2. Faculty of D		12:45	13:40	
	break		13:40	13:55	
5	Meeting with the Invited Staff <i>Parallel sessions</i> Panel 1: 1. Faculty of A 2. Faculty of B Panel 2: 1. Faculty of C 2. Faculty of D		13:55	14:45	
6	Meeting with the Students <i>Parallel sessions</i> Panel 1: 1. Faculty of A 2. Faculty of B Panel 2: 1. Faculty of C 2. Faculty of D		14:50	15:45	
	Break		15:25	15:40	
7	Meeting with the representatives of student career development center, and Culture & Sport Department		15:40	16:25	
8	Meeting with Student Self-Governance representatives		16:30	17:15	
9	Meeting with Alumni		17:20	18:00	
10	Summary Meeting with Experts Panel		18:00	18:15	
DAY 4 [Date]					
1	Meeting with Research Management Office		09:00	09:50	
2	Meeting with Scientific-Research Institute Representative				
	Break		10:45	11:00	
3	Meeting with Doctoral Student Supervisors <i>Parallel sessions</i> Panel 1: 1. Faculty of A 2. Faculty of B Panel 2: 1. Faculty of C 2. Faculty of D		11:00	11:45	
4	Meeting with Doctoral Students <i>Parallel sessions</i> Panel 1: 1. Faculty of A		11:50	12:35	

	2. Faculty of B Panel 2: 1. Faculty of C 2. Faculty of D				
	Lunch		12:35	13:20	
5	Meeting with support staff from different units on staff and organizational management issues		13:20	14:10	
	Break		15:00	15:15	
6	Meeting with Library and IT Office Representatives		15:15	16:00	
7	Meeting with Internal Audit Office		16:05	16:55	
8	Meeting with Employers and other relevant stakeholders		17:00	17:50	
9	Summary Meeting of the Expert panel		17:50	18:00	
DAY 5 [Date]					
1	Meeting with the representatives of Material Resources Management Office, Security Office		09:00	09:50	
2	Meeting with Department of Finance		09:55	10:40	
	Break		10:40	10:55	
3	Observing the HEI facilities (classrooms, labs, library, etc)		10:55	13:30	
	Lunch		13:30	14:15	
4	Expert Panel Meeting: Working on the key findings and evaluation report		14:15	17:45	
5	Meeting with the university leadership		17:45	17:55	
6	Presentation of the key findings	Audience from the University	18:00	18:15	

The expert evaluation report

After the site visit, the members of the expert panel work on the authorization evaluation report, which is the main outcome of the evaluation process. The authorization evaluation report presents the assessment of the applicant institution against the authorization standards. The expert assessment report will form the basis for the authorization decision made by the Authorization Council. The expert assessment report shall also serve as a source of information for the institution for its consolidation and further development.

The expert assessment report should include the following sections:

- General information on the educational institution;
- Overview of the site-visit;
- Overview of the HEI's compliance with standards;
 - Summary of Recommendations;
 - Summary of Suggestions;
 - Summary of the best practices;
- Summary table of compliance of HEI with each standard component;
- Assessment of the institution against each authorization standard component, which implies that each authorization standard component⁹ is discussed separately according to the experts' assessment report template, which should include the following:

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

Describe, analyze and assess institution's compliance with the standard component requirements (considering the relevant evaluation criteria) based on the information collected through self-assessment report, relevant enclosed documents and site visit; the analysis has to reflect problematic issues related to HEI's compliance with the requirements (by making reference to documents and/or meeting).

Evidences/indicators

Component evidences/indicators including the relevant documents and interview results;

Recommendation

Proposal(s), which should be considered by the institution to comply with requirements of the standard component

Suggestions

Non-binding suggestions for further development;

Best Practices (if applicable)

Practices, which prove to be exceptionally effective and which may become a benchmark or a model for other higher education institutions;

Assessment

Compliance of the institution with each authorization standard component is assessed based on 4-level scale:

Complies with the requirements - HEI is assessed as "compliant with the requirements" if its resources, established practice/system and achieved outcome (in case of a newly established HEI – expected outcome) fully meet the requirements of the standard component;

Substantially complies with requirements - HEI is assessed as "substantially compliant with the requirements" if its resources and established practice/system substantially meet the component requirements, and the HEI is able to demonstrate the respective outcome. However, HEI has weaknesses, although it is equipped with relevant resources

⁹ **Standard:** 1. Mission and strategic development of HEI

Standard component: 1.1 Mission of HEI
1.2 Strategic Development

and action plan and demonstrates readiness to overcome them in the short-term (no more than one year) period.

Partially complies with the requirements - HEI is assessed as “partially compliant with the requirements” if it basically meets the component requirements. However, HEI has weaknesses and to address them it requires allocation of significant resources. Still, HEI demonstrates readiness and is equipped with relevant resources and action plan to overcome the drawbacks in the mid-term (more than one year, but no longer than 3 years) period.

Does not comply with the requirements - HEI is evaluated as “non-compliant with the requirements” if its current resources or/and practice do not meet the basic requirements of the standard component.

Based on the assessment of each standard component compliance of the institution with each authorization standard is assessed as:

- Complies with the standard requirements - this assessment is made if:
 - No more than one component of the standard is substantially complied, while all other components are fully complied with the requirements;
- Substantially complies with the requirements –this assessment is made if:
 - No more than one component of the standard is partially complied with the requirements, and none of them is evaluated as “non-compliant”
- Partially complies with requirements - this assessment is made if:
 - More than one components of the standard are partially compliant with the requirements and none of the components are assessed as non-compliant with requirements;
 - No more than one component of the standard is non-compliant with the requirement. This statement does not refer to the components of the 3rd and 4th standards¹⁰.
- Does not comply with requirements – this assessment is made if:
 - More than one components of the standard are non-compliant with requirements;
 - One component of 3rd or/and 4th standards is assessed as “non-compliant with requirements”;

After expert panel elaborates the draft assessment report, it is sent to the applicant institution, which might give comments on the factual errors given in the draft report if it intends so. Within 10 calendar days, the applicant institution submits its position in the written form to the NCEQE which is then sent to the panel of experts, and relevant Authorization Board. After receiving arguments provided by the institution, the chair of the panel of experts, together with the other members of the panel, finalizes the experts’ assessment report, and submits it to the NCEQE.

Decision-making

The Authorization Council of higher education makes decisions on granting authorization, based on the authorization evaluation report of the panel of experts, documents and argument-based position of the institution, and oral hearing.

The members of the panel of experts and representative of the HEI participate in the oral hearing. During the oral hearing, the Chair of the Council is responsible for clarification of the issues that are necessary to make the decision. For the purpose of decision-making, the Council does not consider documents of the applicant HEI, prepared and/or submitted after the site visit. The Council makes one of the following decisions related to the HEI:

- a. The HEI is granted the authorization – if all standards are compliant with requirements;
- b. The HEI is granted the authorization, however the HEI shall submit the one year progress report to the NCEQE and the Authorization Board – if at least, one of the standards is substantially compliant with requirements;

¹⁰Standard 3: Educational Programmes
Standard 4: Staff of HEI

- c. The HEI is granted the authorization, however NCEQE shall carry out mandatory monitoring in 2-3 years period – if at least one of the standards are partially compliant with requirements (excluding the third and the fourth standards¹¹) and none of their components are assessed as non-compliant with requirements;
- d. The HEI is granted the authorization, however is not allowed to enroll students till the recommendations of the experts panel are not appropriately addressed – if the third or the fourth of the standards are partially compliant with requirements and/or no more than one component of other standards are non-compliant with requirements;
- e. The HEI is not granted the authorization, if one of the components of the third or fourth of standards or more than one components of other standards are non-compliant with requirements;

After the Authorization Board makes the decision, the assessment report, the protocol of the Board meeting and the decision of the Board are published on the NCEQE web-site.

Follow-up on the Evaluation Results

In order to ensure continuous development of higher education quality and consideration of the evaluation results NCEQE carries out the following follow-up procedures.

- Submission of self-evaluation report

In case the HEI is evaluated as fully in compliance with all authorization standards, the HEI is requested to submit a self-evaluation report after three years from receiving the authorization.

- Submission of self-evaluation progress report

In case, the HEI is evaluated as in substantial compliance with one of the authorization standards, the HEI is requested to submit a self-evaluation progress report, demonstrating the consideration of the expert panel or authorization council recommendations after one year from receiving the authorization.

- Monitoring of the HEI with expert-panel site visit

- a) In case, the HEI is evaluated as in partial compliance with one of the authorization standards (excluding the Standard 3 and Standard 4, and none of the standard component is evaluated as in non-compliance with requirements, the NCEQE carries out monitoring evaluation of the HEI, which also includes the expert panel site visit at the HEI in 2-3 year after receiving the authorization.
- b) In case, the HEI is evaluated as in partial compliance with one of the authorization standards (including the Standard 3 and Standard 4, and one of the standard component is evaluated as in non-compliance with requirements and the authorization council makes decision to restrict enrollment of students for this HEI, the HEI is allowed to submit the self-evaluation report after one year period. In this case, NCEQE carries out monitoring evaluation of the HEI, which also includes the expert panel site visit to define the level of compliance of the HEI against the authorization standards.

- Monitoring of the HEI with the desk-study of the documents

NCEQE is allowed to request documents from the HEI to monitor the compliance of the HEI with the authorization standards.

¹¹ Standard 3: Educational Programmes
Standard 4: Staff of HEI

Definitions of the terms

ⁱA higher education institution shall be established in the form of either a legal entity under public law or legal entity under private law. Forms of higher education institutions existing in the form of legal entities under private law are: limited liability company and non-business (non-commercial) legal entity.

ⁱⁱThe types of higher education institutions are: a) university; b) teaching university; c) college; d) other higher education institution, founded in accordance with the law.

ⁱⁱⁱ There are three levels of higher education: (I) Bachelor's, (II) Master's, and (III) PhD. Single-level higher educational program also exist (Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Medicine, Teachers' Education), the qualification of which equals to the second (Master's) level of higher education.

^{iv}Accreditation is an external quality assurance mechanism used for the determination of assessment of compliance with the accreditation standards of the educational program.

^vJoint higher educational program- an educational program that is implemented between Georgia's higher education institute(s) and/or the higher education institution recognized by the legislation of a foreign country, also between Georgia's higher education institute and an independent scientific-research unit/ legal entity of public law - the legal entity of public law under the university - a scientific-research institute/legal entity of public law - a scientific-research institute on the basis of the agreement on the implementation of a joint higher educational program and after the completion of which, a document/documents certifying the higher education in the manner prescribed by the statute of the higher education institution will be issued on the basis of the joint agreement on the implementation of the joint higher educational program.

^{vi}Exchange educational program- an educational program implemented on the basis of a contract on students exchange concluded between Georgia's higher education institution and a higher education institution recognized by the legislation of a foreign country, that aims to enable the students participating in the exchange educational programs to obtain a certain number of credits at the partner higher education institution;

^{vii}Academic personnel - professors, associate professors, assistant professors and assistants belong to the academic officials.

^{viii}Scientific personnel - the personnel of an independent scientific-research unit of HEI may be a scientist (including the senior scientific employee, main scientific employee, and scientific employee) and postdoctoral research fellow.

^{ix} Affiliation of academic personnel implies a formal written agreement between the HEI and an academic official, where each academic personnel member defines his/her affiliation with one HEI only, participates on behalf of the HEI in social development and knowledge sharing processes and performs the following in this HEI:

- main educational, research/scientific/creative/executive activity, whereas the results from the research/scientific/creative/executive activity are assigned to the mentioned HEI. Furthermore, the regulation for the distribution/scoring of the research/scientific activity results of different institutions based the consolidated resources are determined by an affiliate regulation and a written agreement concluded on its basis;
- is actively engaged into the educational/research/scientific/creative/executive and other processes of decision making with regard to other important issues;
- is actively engaged in students' advising process and supervision of students' research/scientific/creative/executive activities.

^x Administrative positions in the public higher education institutions are: Director of Higher Education Institution (Rector), Director of Administration, Director of Main Educational Unit (Faculties and Library) and Director of Independent Scientific-research Unit (Research Institutes), Director of Quality Assurance Service and Director of Quality Assurance Service of Main Educational Unit (Faculties). Furthermore, the HEI may determine another administrative position holder by its statute. All the other positions are assisting personnel.

Although, this division might be different in the private HEIs, very often assisting and administrative personnel are jointly considered to be administrative personnel.