

The conduct of the authorization process is based on the following principles derived from international good practices:

- The process aims at assessing the level of compliance of the applicant institution with the authorization standards;
- The process is evidence-based and is carried out by an independent experts;
- The information provided in the SER is assumed to be factually correct unless evidence points to the contrary;
- The process is a verification of information provided in the SER and other documents submitted by the applicant institutions, and study of any concerns that are omitted from the documents.

The Authorization process includes the following steps:

A. Submission of Authorization Application

An authorization application submitted by a HEI should be enclosed with:

- a) Authorization Self-Evaluation report of the applicant and the enclosed documents;
- b) Certificate of payment of the authorization application examination fee.

The documentation submitted by the HEI may be provided to the Center through an electronic document management system or in hardcopies. In case of submitting the hardcopies, documentation shall be provided to the Center via electronic data carrier.

B. Recognition of Educational Institution as an Applicant for Authorization

1. Within 3 working days the Center examines compliance of documentation attached to the authorization application with the requirements set in the Authorizations Charter (Article 15).
2. If the educational institution fails to submit to the Center one of the documents required by the Authorizations Charter (Article 15), the Center shall determine no less than 5 and no more than 15 working days term for educational institution to correct this deficiency.
3. In case if deficiency is corrected within the terms defined in the Authorizations Charter, the Center issues an individual administrative act on recognition of educational institution as an authorization seeker, while in case of failure to correct deficiency within the same period, an individual administrative act is issued about leaving application without examination.
4. The individual administrative act on recognition of HEI as an authorization seeker, is issued by the Center within 20 calendar days from the moment of submission of application, or from the moment of correcting deficiencies.
5. If the HEI does not pay the authorization fee within 15 calendar days after receiving the individual administrative act on recognition as an authorization seeker, the CENTER will issue individual administrative act on terminating the administrative proceedings.

C. Creation of Authorization Expert Panel

1. After the payment of authorization fee, within 60 calendar days the Center will issue individual administrative act on creating an authorization expert panel and site-visit to authorization seeking institution.

2. The expert panel incorporates an international expert, administrative/academic personnel of HEI, student, employer and others with relevant qualification. The organization of expert panel, number of experts and duration of site-visit are individually defined referring to the resources and profile of the HEI. If the HEI carries out regulated academic programs of medicine, the expert panel must include experts with profile in biomedical sciences and/or clinical studies. In case the HEI is a multi-profile institution that implements medical programs the panel is co-chaired by an international expert with relevant field competency.
3. In case if the authorization status-seeker conducts a vocational education programs, expert panel is created separately by the Center's individual administrative act. Expert panel must include an authorization experts of vocational and higher education institutions.
4. The panel of authorization experts is headed by the Chair.
5. Authorization expert must declare his/her self-recusal, if he/she has a conflict of interest with the authorization seeking institution where he/she must conduct a site-visit. Conflict of interest implies the existence of circumstances envisaged by the Article 92 of the General Administrative Code of Georgia.
6. Authorization seeking institution is allowed to file a motion for recusal against the authorization panel member(s) within 2 working days after familiarization with the individual administrative act on the creation of authorization expert panel.
7. The institution is required to justify a recusal against an authorization expert. Reasonable grounds for recusal can be conflict of interests of a chair and/or member of the authorization expert panel.
8. The Center should review recusal application within 3 working days. In case of satisfying recusal application, the Center makes decision on the amendment of the composition of the authorization expert panel. In case of not taking into consideration a recusal of authorization expert/experts, then the authorization expert panel should conduct a site-visit in original composition.
9. The duration of the site-visit and the number of members of authorization expert panel participating in the site-visit is defined by the Center, taking into consideration volume and specifics of the workload, in accordance with the „Rule of Authorization and Accreditation Experts' Selection and Activities and Termination of Membership of Expert Pool”.
10. The Center employee accompanies expert panel during the site-visit in order to ensure that authorization expert panel works effectively within the framework of legislation and that the evaluation process is conducted consistently.

D. Preliminary review of authorization self-evaluation report and attached documents by the authorization expert panel, and creation of the agenda for the site-visit

1. The Center sends the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and the annexed documents submitted by the HEI to the expert panel.
2. The Chair of the panel divides responsibilities among the members of the panel based on their competencies, with the purpose of ensuring the review of the self-evaluation report and additional documents to determine compliance with authorization standards.

The chair of the panel summarizes the mapping grid and participates in the development of site visit agenda and agrees it with the Center. The Center agrees the submitted agenda with the institution and considers their argumentative position on it.

3. Prior to the site visit, the members of the expert panel are expected to:

- Carefully study the SER and documents provided.
 - Based on the desk-study of the documents, identify key concerns, questions and remarks in the mapping grid (see annex 3) and use it to determine the main lines of enquiry for the site-visit and evaluation report, with main focus on the components of the standards assigned by the Chair to each panel member.
 - Send the mapping grid to the Chair of the panel.
 - Elaborate the preliminary draft report for the components of the standards assigned by the Chair to each panel member.
 - Familiarize with the publicly available information about the applicant institution, primarily its website and published documents.
4. The Center sends to the institution the final version of the agenda.

E. Authorization site-visit

1. During the authorization site-visit, expert panel is headed by the Chair who ensures distribution of tasks between the members of the authorization expert panel.
2. Authorization expert, based on the submitted site-visit agenda, is obliged to examine all the issues during the authorization site-visit in order to prepare authorization draft report, conduct interviews with stakeholders, request additional documentation if necessary, conduct visual inspection and also activities not envisioned by the site-visit agenda, when necessary.
3. The institution is required to assist authorization expert panel in the course of authorization site-visit and in preparation of respective report, present to them the documentation necessary for the authorization process and arrange experts' interviews with stakeholders named by the expert panel.
4. In case if the institution obstructs authorization expert group working process, or if the institution has changed the information reflected in the self-evaluation report or in the enclosed documentation or has submitted additional documentation to the Center after the deadline indicated in the authorization charter, the Center is authorized to issue individual administrative act about termination of administrative proceedings.

F. Elaboration of the draft evaluation report and submission to the Center

1. As a result of examination of completed self-evaluation report and attached documentation and authorization site-visit, authorization expert panel prepares a draft report and presents it to the Center. The expert evaluation report presents evaluation of the applicant institution against the authorization standards.
2. The information and conclusions provided in the expert evaluation report should be:
 - Comprehensive.

- Meaningful, clear and concise.
 - Fair, correct, based on arguments and evidence.
 - Using language which is correct and appropriate for the intended reader.
- For the compliance of the expert evaluation draft report with the above-mentioned requirements (if needed), the expert evaluation draft report is sent back to the panel of experts, and the chair of the panel makes the necessary corrections. As the next step, the draft report is sent to the applicant institution.

G. Submission of evidence-based position of the educational institution on the evaluation report to the Center

Within 10 working days after familiarization with draft report, authorization seeking institution shall submit to the Center an argumentative position in writing on factual errors stated in the draft report, which are sent to the authorization expert panel and the authorization council.

H. Development of the final version of the evaluation report by the expert panel, and submission to the Center and introducing the final evaluation report to the educational institution;

1. In case of presenting an argumentative position, after familiarization with it or in case an argumentative position is not presented in 10 working days, the chair of the panel of experts, together with the other members of the panel, finalizes the experts' evaluation report, and submits it to the Center.
2. The Center introduces the final evaluation report to the educational institution.

I. Authorization Council meeting - oral hearing, and decision-making

1. The Authorization Council of higher education makes decisions on granting authorization, based on the evaluation report of the panel of experts, documents and argument-based position on the evaluation report submitted by the institution, and oral hearing.
2. The members of expert panel and representative of the HEI participate in 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 Center and the Authorization Council – if at least, one of the standards is substantially compliant with requirements;
 - c. The HEI is granted the authorization, however Center 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 standards) and none of their

components are assessed as non-compliant with requirements;

d. The HEI is granted the authorization, however is not allowed to enrol students till the recommendations of the experts panel are not appropriately addressed – if third or fourth 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 standards or more than one components of other standards are non-compliant with requirements;

3. After the Authorization Council makes the decision, the evaluation report, the minute of the Council meeting and the decision of the Council are being published on the Center web-site.