

Higher Education Institution Authorization Experts' Final Report Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

Expert Panel Members

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Authorization Report Resume

General information on the educational institution

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (= TSU) was established in 1918 with one broad Faculty of Philosophy. It now has 7 faculties (Natural Sciences, Humanities, Economics and Business, Medicine, Social and Political Sciences, Law, and Psychology and Educational Sciences) and offers 218 accredited academic programs (67 Bachelor, 96 Master, 3 single-level, 50 PhD, 1 for Teacher Training, 1 in Georgian Language Learning), 12 joint international programs and 130 exchange programs. Total enrollment is 20005 students of active status and 7333 of suspended status. Total number of staff is 5453 of which 2413 are administrative and support staff. The language of instruction is Georgian, although the university also provides programs in English and bilingual programs in English, French, German and Russian. Next to its teaching task TSU is engaged in research units. Over the most recent authorization period close to 1000 research projects were carried out. A good number of them involved international collaborations.

Brief overview of the evaluation process for authorization: SER and Site visit

The self-evaluation process at TSU took place between September 2017 and March 2018. It included among others a number of program evaluations, surveys and the preparation of the self-evaluation report by a working group. The final report and a fair number of related documents were sent to NCEQE and have been received by the review panel in time and in good order. These documents were well organized and in almost all cases made available in an English translation as well.

On June 4-8, 2018 the review panel visited TSU and conducted 24 interviews in full sessions and 20 in parallel sessions with university leadership, staff, deans, faculty, research directors, (PhD) students, alumni, and some external stakeholders. The panel also visited a number of university buildings and facilities.

On June 8 the chair of the review panel orally presented key findings of the panel to the university.

The site visit was well organized by TSU and NCEQE, and went entirely according to plan. Good quality professional translation was provided for.

Overview of the HEI's compliance with standards

Summary of Recommendations

In view of the very recent re-wording of TSU's mission, values and vision it is recommended that the university engage in processes to ensure that the present mission and the values of the university become the shared convictions and commitments of all members of the university community.

It is recommended that the university develop a mature strategic planning methodology, sets up a robust system of performance monitoring and prioritizes the many actions it foresees in the action plan 2018-2020.

It is recommended that the university implement its ambition to modernize its organizational structure and management processes by structurally planning for change of management structure and work processes. Main drivers of modernization should be more efficiency and higher effectiveness of administration and management services in the interest of lower overhead expenses, a leaner bureaucracy and more room, time and budget for the university's primary processes of education and research. The representative bodies of the TSU should ensure a high degree of team cohesion and promote collaboration among its members to drive forward the strategic goals of the university as a whole.

It is recommended that the university sustain its efforts to intensify its quality assurance work towards establishing a wholesale quality culture for all processes, and above all feed the available performance data and assessment advice into the process of continuously developing and updating educational programs.

It is recommended that the university organize a promotional campaign and workshops for training purposes to raise awareness on academic honesty, to ensure that all faculty and students are well acquainted with academic norms and sanctions in case of violations, and to prevent such violations.

It is recommended that available data on student study progress be systematically used to identify students-at-risk and the need for individualized learning arrangements.

It is recommended that the faculty of medicine better integrate knowledge, skills and behavior into competences. More skills training is needed and especially procedural skills training including clinical reasoning and differential diagnosis skills, following the benchmarks document of 2018.

It is recommended that the university provide for timely and direct feedback to students on their test performance.

It is recommended that the university reconsider its policies, benchmarks and targets for succession planning to gradually work towards a much more age-balanced academic work force. It is recommended that provisions for student career support, student internships and foreign student information services be further developed and enhanced.

It is recommended that the university actively promote the use of best practices (in (inter)national research collaboration, knowledge transfer, PhD supervision and doctoral schools, linking research-education) to stimulate the growth of research activities in all faculties and fields. A targeted strategy for better integration of research institutes in TSU should be developed.

It is recommended that the new research assessment process take into account a wider set of research 'products' and their impact.

It is recommended that the university engage in long-term comprehensive asset planning and seek government commitment to fundamentally improve TSU's infrastructure for research and education.

It is recommended that all libraries be better prepared to serve international (non-Georgian speaking) students and staff. In general E-library resources should be used more intensively.

It is recommended that the university study the possibilities of modernizing its financial management system, preferably in cooperation with an international partner institution.

Summary of Suggestions

It is suggested that continuously and systematically modernizing educational programs be made a university-wide priority

It is suggested that more flexible basic credit units (rather than only 5 or 10) are introduced. Horizontal and vertical integration should be a more common feature in program planning.

TSU's internationalization strategy should be translated into pockets of international study programs, including already existing interdisciplinary programs.

It is suggested that the system of assessing learning outcomes be revised in order to make it more robust and less susceptible to dispute. Fair appeal procedures should include third party evaluation.

It would be advisable to reduce the relative share of teaching done by invited staff to increase the role and responsibility of academic staff.

It is suggested that the Research and Development Department assesses its effectiveness and re-prioritizes its activities accordingly in view of the very wide range of tasks set for a limited period of time. It is suggested that easy access for students with disabilities be made a priority. It is suggested that the university promote collaboration between the two main libraries.

It is suggested that in the interest of internationalization and a proper service to students with disabilities the functionality of IT services be re-assessed.

Webpage contents in Georgian and English should be both complete and identical.

Summary of the Best Practices

TSU is funding student projects, has a series of student journals for publishing results, and organizes and supports student conferences. This is a good way to demonstrate that at this research university students of all programs are being encouraged to be active in research.

Students benefit from generous and flexible schemes for paying tuition fees.

Summary Table of Compliance of HEI with Standards and Standard Components

	Standard	Complies with Requirements	Substantially complies with requirements	Partially Complies with Requirements	Does not Comply with Requirements
1.	Mission and strategic development of HEI		\boxtimes		
1.1	Mission of HEI		\boxtimes		
1.2	Strategic development			\boxtimes	
2.	Organizational structure and management of HEI			\boxtimes	
2.1	Organisational structure and management			\boxtimes	
2.2	Internal quality assurance mechanisms			\boxtimes	
2.3	Observing principles of ethics and integrity		\boxtimes		
3.	Educational Programmes		\boxtimes		
3.1	Design and development of educational programs	\boxtimes			
3.2	Structure and content of educational programs			\boxtimes	
3.3	Assessment of learning outcomes		\boxtimes		
4	Staff of the HEI		\boxtimes		

4.1	Staff management			\boxtimes	
4.2	Academic/Scientific and invited Staff workload	\boxtimes			
5	Students and their support services				
5.1	The Rule for obtaining and changing student status, the recognition of education, and student rights	\boxtimes			
5.2	Student support services		\boxtimes		
6	Research, development and/or other creative work		\boxtimes		
6.1	Research activities		\boxtimes		
6.2	Research support and internationalisation	\boxtimes			
6.3	Evaluation of research activities		\boxtimes		
7	Material, information and financial resources			\boxtimes	
7.1	Material resources			\boxtimes	
7.2	Library resources		\boxtimes		
7.3	Information resources	\boxtimes			
7.4	Financial resources			\boxtimes	

Signature of expert panel members

1. Sijbolt Noorda (Chair)

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2. Josette (Joke) Denekens (Co-chair)

- 3. Ketevan Kankava (Member)
- 4. Eka Lepsveridze (Member)
- 5. Tornike Guruli (Member)
- 6. Elene Jibladze (Member)
- 7. Maia Shishniashvili (Member)
- 8. Irma Manjavidze (Member)

9. Ketevan Kotetishvili (Member)

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Compliance of the Applicant HEI with the Authorization Standard Components

1. Mission and strategic development of HEI

Mission statement of a HEI defines its role and place within higher education area and broader society. Strategic development plan of HEI corresponds with the mission of an institution, is based on the goals of the institution and describe means for achieving these goals.

1.1 Mission of HEI

Mission Statement of the HEI corresponds to Georgia's and European higher education goals, defines its role and place within higher education area and society, both locally and internationally.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

TSU clearly and aptly describes its mission as a multi-branch research university in the Georgian cultural and scientific tradition (among others directed towards the promotion of national and universal values and the development of society, the creation and dissemination of new knowledge, student-oriented teaching and life-long learning), sharing the ideals of the Magna Charta Universitatum and aiming at becoming a higher educational and research center of international importance which will realize the harmonization of labor market demands with its educational programs, an increased research performance and the internationalization of its main processes by 2024.

At present the recently adopted mission statement is still very much a paper reality. The panel has not found that it already informs and steers the university community.

Evidences/indicators

The present updated wording of TSU's mission, values and vision has been approved by the Academic Council on February 26, 2018. It can be found in the SER. The review panel has discussed these statements in interviews with university leadership, staff, faculty and students.

Recommendations:

In view of the very recent re-wording of TSU's mission, values and vision it is recommended that the university engage in processes to ensure that the present mission and the values of the university become the shared convictions and commitments of all members of the university community.

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

 $\hfill\square$ Substantially complies with requirements

1.2 Strategic Development

- $\circ~$ HEI has a strategic development (7-year) and an action plans (3-year) in place.
- $\circ~$ HEI contributes to the development of the society, shares with the society the knowledge gathered in the institution, and facilitates lifelong learning
- $\circ~$ HEI evaluates implementation of strategic and action plans, and duly acts on evaluation results.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

TSU has strategic development and action plans in place for the required timeframes. These plans are updates of the 2016 versions. They were prepared by a special working group and adopted by the Academic Council on February 26, 2018.

The strategic plan 2018-2024 offers a comprehensive catalogue of 10 strategic goals, each of them with a good number of strategic tasks.

Taken as a whole it presents a broad indication of where the university wants to go. The description of the methodology, however, is rather short and mainly a description of the process of organizing the production of the plan.

The same is true of the description of the monitoring of the implementation. The SWOT-analysis is basically being presented without explanatory background information and is only partially linked to specific strategic goals. The review panel attributes these shortcomings to a lack of a good and mature strategic planning and monitoring methodology (of the PDCA-type or of a comparable model).

The action plan 2018-2020 presents an extensive overview of more than 150 specific measures and projects of widely different scope and size. The review panel misses any prioritizing, a clear indication of the type of commitment and engagements by the university community required for a successful attainment of the set goals, and a basic analysis of the present situation and the success or failure of earlier actions as relevant monitoring data and performance indicators are largely lacking.

The review panel therefore concludes that TSU has yet to build up a university wide practice of systematic planning and monitoring. It certainly shows the ambition to develop its strategic planning capacity, as also evidenced by its plan to invite a EUA/IEP strategic peer review by 2020 (action towards strategic goal 10). As a specific issue the review panel notes that the monitoring process and the strategic planning process best be organized under separate leadership, for maximum effect.

TSU clearly does contribute to the social development of the country, disseminates its knowledge and facilitates lifelong learning. Strategic Goal VII indicates that it plans to do more, in collaboration with external partners.

Faculty of Medicine

The dean of medicine proposed a new strategic development plan, which then was approved by the Medical Faculty in February 2018. In this plan directions for further development are being prioritized, such as research and innovation, education and teaching and institutional development. There are no explicit links between the central strategic development plan and action plans and the plan of the Faculty of Medicine as the faculty apparently enjoys great autonomy in deciding which action plans they will develop and which one they will not support. In interviews staff members and students did not appear to be familiar with the strategic plan of the faculty. Decision making is by the dean and the Faculty Council. Communicating and sharing decisions lag behind. Student involvement is not emphasized. But still, students seem satisfied with this situation (interview results). There is no system in place in this faculty to monitor the progress of the different action plans.

Evidences/indicators

Both the strategic plan and the action plan have been presented to the reviewers. The SER describes the production process of the strategic development plan and offers some comments on strengths and areas for improvement. The review panel has learned from interviews with leadership and staff that TSU is committed to realize its plans to the full.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the university develop a mature strategic planning methodology, sets up a robust system of performance monitoring and prioritizes the many actions it foresees in the action plan 2018-2020.

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

□ Partially complies with requirements

2. Organizational Structure and Management of HEI

Organizational structure and management of the HEI is based on best practices of the educational sector, meaning effective use of management and quality assurance mechanisms in the management process. This approach ensures implementation of strategic plan, integration of quality assurance function into management process, and promotes principles of integrity and ethics

2.1 Organizational Structure and Management

- $\circ~$ Organizational structure of HEI ensures implementation of goals and activities described in its strategic plan
- $\circ~$ Procedures for election/appointment of the management bodies of HEI are transparent, equitable, and in line with legislation
- HEI's Leadership/Management body ensures effective management of the activities of the institution
- $\circ~$ Considering the mission and goals of HEI, leadership of the HEI supports international cooperation of the institution and the process of internationalization.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

TSU is a large, complex and devolved organization, like most broad research universities in the world. Both at the central level and at faculty level primary processes of teaching and research on the one hand and administrative and support processes on the other hand are being organized along traditional lines, in accordance with current legislation and following proper procedures for election and appointment.

However, in its strategic plan TSU rightly indicates institutional development as one of its main strategic directions (strategic goal 10). Modernizing the university's management processes is seen as an important step towards greater efficiency and more effectiveness. TSU has recently sought external advice for this purpose.

In its SER TSU describes the present organizational structure. It is stated that the university structure is based on the audit report and major recommendations from PWC. It says that a first iteration of changes needed has been realized.

The review panel could not, however, find a clear assessment by the university leadership of the PWC recommendations and a plan for the implementation of a new management structure. The various sub-goals of strategic goal 10 do not refer to such a plan either. They rather report a number of isolated interventions (like in task X.6 on improvement of the management practice resulting in the separation of duties between the central and faculty administrations, and a result-oriented rather than process-oriented management system) without any indication how such a goal might be reached, which structural changes will be adopted and what the modernized process would be.

Moreover, although the SWOT analysis lists 'bureaucratic processes' as one of the weaknesses, it is very hard to find any action in the action plan that would change this.

Likewise, the benchmarks of the SER (p. 12) contain targets of a reduced overhead (like a better ratio of academic/scientific staff versus administrative/support staff and a lower portion of the total budget for administrative expenses) without any indication in the action plans how such targets might be reached.

From these observations the review panel concluded that TSU has a clear ambition to change its management structures and processes but still lacks clear and well-structured plans for the implementation of these changes. Reducing bureaucracy and increasing efficiency of management requires comprehensive strategic planning and very precise action plans.

An additional note on the faculty of medicine. It has its own statement, which regulates the working processes of the Faculty Council, of the dean, of the support units, and the responsibilities of the QA department for further development and improvement.

It has been reported to the panel that communication with the central units of TSU is better than before. The work on the self-evaluation report was a good instrument for enhancing cooperation and communication between central units and those of the faculty.

Finally, it should be mentioned that representative bodies did not respond to the review panel in line with their university-wide mandate of ensuring that strategic goals of the whole university are pursued in a coordinated manner throughout the institution. For instance, academic council members rather highlighted their particular faculty interests than any common initiatives or topics of council as a collaborative body. The review team has gathered a similar impression with regards to the senate. Their members seem to perceive their role as a body for accountability purposes, mainly to elect university management representatives. The representative bodies did not impress the panel as key platforms for fostering university-wide QA culture, i.e. as spaces to promote overall involvement of the university in improvement processes.

Evidences/indicators

The SER describes the present structure and management, presents a number of very detailed data on its office work and document turnover, and indicates it follows current regulations. The Strategic Plan indicates the ambition to change and institutional development. In its interviews with university leadership and staff the review panel has discussed these topics.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the university implement its ambition to modernize its organizational structure and management processes by structurally planning for change of management structure and work processes. Main drivers of modernization should be more efficiency and higher effectiveness of administration and management services in the interest of lower overhead expenses, a leaner bureaucracy and more room, time and budget for the university's primary processes of education and research. The representative bodies of the TSU should ensure a high degree of team cohesion and promote collaboration among its members to drive forward the strategic goals of the university as a whole.

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

□ Partially complies with requirements

2.2 Internal Quality Assurance Mechanisms

- Institution effectively implements internal quality assurance mechanisms. Leadership of the institution constantly works to strengthen quality assurance function and promotes establishment of quality culture in the institution.
- $\circ~$ HEI has a mechanism for planning student body, which will give each student an opportunity to get a high quality education.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

TSU has a well-developed Quality Assurance Service in place, centrally and at faculty level. This office has a wide responsibility for evaluation, development and accreditation of educational programs as well for institutional development and authorization. Recent decisions have defined new procedures for the assessment of educational programs scheduled to begin in the spring semester of 2017-18. Also the results of surveys will be taken into account in the process of improving the learning process as well as standards of educational programs (which the SER identifies as one of the points for improvement of the Quality Assurance System at TSU).

In general, TSU demonstrates a laudable ambition to intensify its quality assurance processes and help to establish a true quality culture, which would indeed be of great importance not only for education and research but for the entire management process as well. However, as many interventions are of recent date, much remains to be done, not the least in terms of using collected data and advice for a robust feedback cycle. Such feedback is also crucial for performance development of academic and administrative staff. The panel could not ascertain that this is already done in a systematic way.

Another aspect that the panel would like to highlight is the relative weight of (student) surveys. However useful these are they cannot and should not replace the systematic analysis of the quality of education and research based upon performance data.

TSU has a solid procedure in place for the planning of the student body.

Some additional observations on the faculty of medicine. According to staff and students quality assurance works well. Student surveys started in 2012. The results of the surveys are being discussed in faculty meetings. They have been followed up by a wide range of changes (examples: infrastructure, new skills lab and library, changes in the content of some courses (chemistry)). Some courses, which were considered unnecessary by the students were re-assessed and removed from the program. Most of the (technical) problems (computers, multimedia, papers, books etc...) have been solved before the start of the academic year.

Evidences/indicators

SER, Strategic Plan (Strategic Goals 5 and 10), Action Plan. Interviews with relevant staff and heads of programs.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the university sustain its efforts to intensify its quality assurance work towards establishing a wholesale quality culture for all processes, and above all feed the available performance data and assessment advice into the process of continuously developing and updating educational programs in the interest of better study progress and job market successes.

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

□ Partially complies with requirements

2.3. Observing Principles of Ethics and Integrity

- $\circ~$ HEI has developed regulations and mechanisms that follow principles of ethics and integrity. Such regulations are publicly accessible.
- \circ $\;$ Institution has implemented mechanisms for detecting plagiarism and its prevention.
- \circ $\;$ HEI follows the principles of academic freedom.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

TSU protects academic freedom in the interest of accessibility and openness, transparency of management and the prohibition of discrimination. Its Code of Ethics regulates the behavior of staff and students in accordance with university values and state legislation. A Commission on the violation of disciplinary and ethical norms (ruled by a specific set of regulations) is in place. The commission regularly meets whenever the need (16 times in 2017). From its reports it is clear that relatively many cases have been under review. This indicates that the commission functions well. Yet at the same time a high number indicates that awareness of ethical norms and values among students and staff should be better.

Plagiarism is one of the violations explicitly condemned by the Code of Ethics. TSU is engaged in international collaboration to raise awareness on honesty and provide plagiarism prevention and detection training and software tools. Meanwhile interviews showed that awareness and prevention at present are not very well developed. E.g. in the medical faculty students are not familiar with the Code of Ethics. Plagiarism is not always recognised and sanctions are unclear or unknown.

Evidences/indicators

SER. Strategic Plan (task I.1). Interviews with relevant staff, students and faculty.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the university organize a promotional campaign and workshops for training purposes to raise awareness on academic honesty, to ensure that all faculty and students are well acquainted with academic norms and sanctions in case of violations, and to prevent such violations.

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

□ Substantially complies with requirements

3. Educational Programs

HEI has procedures for planning, designing, approving, developing and annulling educational programs. Program learning outcomes are clearly defined and are in line with the National Qualifications Framework. A program ensures achievement of its objectives and intended learning outcomes

3.1 Design and Development of Educational Programs

HEI has a policy for planning, designing, implementing and developing educational programs.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

TSU has a policy in place for planning, implementing and updating educational programs. The panel could not, however, ascertain that modernizing programs is a university-wide priority.

A positive development is the recent introduction of a good number of partly external field committees that review program updates while taking into account i.a. labor market requirements, employer's feedback and student performance results. The SER also offers some good examples of the advice of external experts (like in the case of the Faculty of Law). However, labor market analysis in the interest of program development is not being practiced in a systemic way. It is rather based on individual consultations with individual labor market representatives. Here the panel clearly sees room for improvement. More in general, employer involvement in program development is mostly informal, not well structured. It should be more regular and uniform to allow investigation of the progress. The new field committees should take the responsibility to involve stakeholders in curriculum innovation in a proactive way.

The SER presents a number of examples of amendments made to educational programs in the period 2011-17 as well as an overview of syllabus assessment results of 2017-18.

At the Faculty of Medicine there are 9 programs implemented and an innovative curriculum for medical doctors in preparation (Georgian language; including 10 credits for clinical skills, 8 credits for research skills and 2 for biostatics). Arrangements for clinical practice have been made with 52 hospitals, clinics and outpatient departments. The laboratory for clinical skills is not working yet but it will be in operation next academic year. At present clinical practice with simulations is provided for by a contract with the Medical Center "Mediclub Georgia".

Evidences/indicators

SER. Interviews with relevant staff, heads of programs, students, alumni, employers.

Recommendations:

Suggestions:

It is suggested that continuously and systematically modernizing educational programs be made a university-wide priority

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

 \Box Complies with requirements

3.2 Structure and Content of Educational Programs

- Program learning outcomes are clearly stated and are in line with higher education level and qualification to be granted
- With the help of individualized education programs, HEI takes into consideration various requirements, needs and academic readiness of students, and ensures their unhindered involvement into the educational process.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

TSU is offering 218 accredited programs for which it has regulations in place as to program description (including learning outcomes), credit attribution, and syllabus construction and assessment. Recently the Academic Council approved a procedure for individualized study plans. Student surveys produce a great number of relevant feedback data on the learning process, the program content and the teaching provisions. It has not become clear to the panel to which extent such data have direct impact on program change, teaching innovations and/or the students' learning process. The call for more interactivity in teaching and learning, more practical forms of learning and more skills training is also presented by surveys among employers. In combination these signals present a strong argument for program adaptations.

More in general TSU's explicit mission to be a student-oriented institution should be translated into clear policies to promote flexibility in student learning trajectories and to use available data on student performance for early identification of students-at-risk (requiring additional tutoring and/or individualized programs). Moreover, 'student tracking' is a useful instrument to find and identify hurdles in study programs.

The panel understands that in almost all faculties basic units of 5 or 10 credit points are standard. It thinks that instead more flexibility should be standard.

Some faculty members appear to have a poor understanding of the why and how of horizontal and vertical integration in educational programs and in some cases the examples they provide (like integration of language courses into the programs) do not really represent integration. Similarly learning outcomes are not well understood by some faculty members. Most of the students have no idea about learning outcomes before or during studying a course. It seems that learning outcomes and their role in planning the educational process are not well understood by all.

TSU offers few interdisciplinary programs (e.g. MA in gender studies that is the only one in the region), yet they gain very little recognition or visibility.

While TSU's strategic plan includes internationalization as one of its priorities, the review team failed to find such future priorities in the program offering of the university beyond the present number of joint and mobility programs.

The faculty of medicine offers a mix of teaching and learning activities. Most of them, even the seminars, are teacher-centered. Students are rather passive. Some teachers are trained in PBL and CBL. Teachers want to be better prepared for new teaching approaches and wish to activate students more. Students

are not really involved in patient management. Their seminars are dedicated to theoretical discussion or observation. Students say they might stay extra hours at the hospital to attend operations, which suggests that not all of them would do it, as it is not obligatory. Practical skills are not seen as learning outcomes to be assessed. Invited staff try to involve students more in clinical examinations at the bedside and to give them feedback on their performance.

Evidences/indicators

SER. Interviews with relevant staff, faculty, students, alumni and employers.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that available data on student study progress be systematically used to identify students-at-risk and the need for individualized learning arrangements.

It is recommended that the faculty of medicine better integrate knowledge, skills and behavior into competences. More skills training is needed and especially procedural skills training including clinical reasoning and differential diagnosis skills, following the benchmarks document of 2018.

Suggestions:

It is suggested that more flexible basic credit units (rather than only 5 or 10) are introduced. Horizontal and vertical integration should be a more common feature in program planning.

TSU's internationalization strategy should be translated into pockets of international study programs, including already existing interdisciplinary programs.

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

□ Partially complies with requirements

3.3 Assessment of Learning Outcomes

HEI has law-compliant, transparent and fair system of learning outcomes assessment, which promotes the improvement of students' academic performance.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

TSU has a well-developed system of student learning assessment in place. Students are well informed about the assessment process, which is centralized to a high degree. A good majority finds it a transparent and well-organized process. The main concern of students is about the lack of direct and/or individualized feedback.

The reported relatively high number of appeals and revisions of exam scores may be related to the absence of a direct feedback opportunity. It may also be explained by a lack of professionalism in test design. It would be beneficial if the examination center would support teaching staff to this end.

Moreover, the appeal procedure is not streamlined, as the reassessment of the disputed grade/assignment is done by the same academic staff, rather than by a third party. This easily compromises fair assessment.

Evidences/indicators

SER. Interviews with staff, heads of programs, students.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the university provides for timely and direct feedback to students on their test performance.

Suggestions:

It is suggested that the system of assessing learning outcomes be revised in order to make it more robust and less susceptible to dispute. Fair appeal procedures should include third party evaluation.

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

□ Substantially complies with requirements

4. Staff of the HEI

HEI ensures that the staff employed in the institution (academic, scientific, invited, administrative, support) are highly qualified, so that they are able to effectively manage educational, scientific and administrative processes and achieve the goals defined by the strategic plan of the institution. On its hand, the institution constantly provides its staff with professional development opportunities and improved work conditions.

4.1. Staff Management

- HEI has staff management policy and procedures that ensure the implementation of educational process and other activities defined in its strategic plan.
- HEI ensures the employment of qualified academic/scientific/invited/administrative/ support staff.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

In terms of fair, equitable and transparent process TSU has adequate regulations and procedures in place for managing human resources. Recruitment in general and selection for academic positions in particular are governed by university-wide procedures. The same appears to be the case for rules of affiliation, health insurance, personal data protection, benefits, bonuses and rewards. The SER identifies the system of appraisal of staff as an area for improvement (see Strategic goal 10).

There seem to be two issues that require careful consideration and remediation. One is clearly identified by the SER: payroll policy needs to be revised as it now differentiates not only on the basis of task and position, but on the basis of workplace as well. Funding variety between faculties is being translated into salary variety between members of faculty. See also Strategic task I.11.

The other issue is about the composition of the academic and scientific (invited) staff. The data clearly show an imbalance in age distribution. See SER, p. 144. In SWOT-analyses the need to rejuvenate is clearly indicated (among weaknesses 'lack of young staff involved in teaching and scientific research' is being mentioned). Student surveys indicate complaints about outdated teaching. Yet it is not among the key strategic directions to remediate this. A clear strategic academic succession planning is absent. Only at X.2 the Strategic Plan mentions the plan to set up a specific foundation to attract young staff for specific targets include a very high retention rate for academic staff. This is a clear indication that a larger turnover that would make room for new recruitments is not being sought for. On top of this the Academic Council has recently voted in favor of a policy that allows for 65+ candidates to participate in competitions for academic positions.

To increase the chances that younger staff be recruited it is important that recruitment procedures be open to all, transparent and fair. Job openings should be widely announced and be real (meaning that these definitely should not be basically a formal means to select an already identified candidate).

Evidences/indicators

SER. Strategic Plan. Interviews with university leadership, relevant staff and faculty.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the university reconsiders its policies, benchmarks and targets for succession planning to gradually work towards a much more age-balanced academic work force.

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

□ Partially complies with requirements

4.2. Academic/Scientific and Invited Staff Workload

Number and workload of academic/scientific and invited staff is adequate to HEI's educational programs and scientific-research activities, and also other functions assigned to them

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

Although the distribution across the university is uneven the student/staff ratio on average is quite satisfactory. This indicates that in general number and workload are adequate. It would, however, be advisable to reduce the relative share of teaching done by invited staff to increase the role and responsibility of academic staff. For research the data were not available to the panel. The SER (p. 85) says that scientific workload is "not countable data". This implies that no general assessment can be made. The development of research workload will depend on faculty specific development of research projects and portfolios.

The panel finds it remarkable that in interviews several staff members indicate that they are not (fully) aware of workload requirements.

Evidences/indicators

SER and related documents. Interviews with staff.

Recommendations:

Suggestions:

It would be advisable to reduce the relative share of teaching done by invited staff to increase the role and responsibility of academic staff.

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

 $\hfill\square$ Complies with requirements

5. Students and Their Support Services

HEI ensures the development of student-centered environment, offers appropriate services, including career support mechanisms; it also ensures maximum awareness of students, implements diverse activities and promotes student involvement in these activities. HEI utilizes student survey results to improve student support services

5.1. The Rule for Obtaining and Changing Student Status, the Recognition of Education, and Student Rights

- For each of the educational levels, HEI has developed regulations for assignment, suspension and termination of student status, mobility, qualification granting, issuing educational documents as well as recognition of education received during the learning period.
- HEI ensures the protection of student rights and lawful interests.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

TSU has the required regulations and procedures in place for student status and all necessary elements of the educational processes. It protects student rights in an adequate way. Like in most universities student surveys indicate that students are not always (fully) aware of the information they might need. The SER and the Strategic Plan (VIII and IX) show that the university continuously works on further enhancement.

A specific issue is the need for information and communication to international students in the English language. Although students report they are coping (by using informal contacts or translation apps), the present situation is not fit for purpose in a university with clear international ambitions and status.

Evidences/indicators

SER. Interviews with students.

Recommendations:

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

 \Box Complies with requirements

5.2 Student Support Services

- $\circ~$ HEI has student consulting services in order to plan educational process and improve academic performance
- HEI has career support service, which provides students with appropriate counselling and support regarding employment and career development
- HEI ensures students awareness and involvement in various university-level, local and international projects and events, and supports student initiatives
- HEI has mechanisms, including financial mechanisms to support low SES students

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

TSU basically has all essential student support services in place, evaluates their functioning and plans for further improvement and expansion. Career support and provisions for international students (especially those who do not read Georgian) are among the services that should be developed further. The university recognizes these needs. At the same time student surveys indicate that it not easy to get students well informed about what is available already. So constant upgrading is welcome. The SER and Strategic Plan show that the university is well aware of this.

At the faculty of medicine students are not aware of support services, career support service, ombudsman and student self-government. They seem to be very little involved in student life. Yet they easily find help when they need it. There is a manager for students at faculty level. Students with problems can go there to talk about their problems.

International student body is not addressed. Often information is only available in Georgian language (web-page, library). International students use Google translate to understand the Georgian information.

Evidences/indicators

SER. Strategic Plan IX. Interviews with relevant staff, students.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that provisions for student career support, student internships and foreign student information services be further developed and enhanced.

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

Students benefit from generous and flexible schemes for paying tuition fees.

Evaluation

□ Substantially complies with requirements

6. Research, development and/or other creative work

Higher Education Institution, considering its type and specifics of field(s), works on the strengthening of its research function, ensures proper conditions to support research activities and improve the quality of research activities

6.1 Research Activities

- HEI, based on its type and specifics of its fields, carries out research/creative activities.
- Ensuring the effectiveness of doctoral research supervision
- HEI has public, transparent and fair procedures for the assessment and defense of dissertations which are relevant to the specifics of the field

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

In line with its mission as a research university TSU has made research and innovative activities its first strategic direction, aiming at the promotion of research activities, international collaborations and publications, high quality standards, a post-doctoral system and knowledge transfer in various forms. In a fair number of disciplines TSU already shows considerable research strength, while in other cases the existing potential has yet to be realized. To this end TSU has identified many strategic tasks (Strategic Goals I to IV) for improved infrastructure, more internationalization, better integration of research in educational processes, and rewarding payroll and scholarship arrangements.

In recent years 16 national research institutes were merged into TSU. The university recognizes the great potential of this merger, yet it notes that inflexible regulations and limited funding stand in the way of a full benefit.

TSU is in almost all cases the most successful competitor for national research and PhD grants. In a number of fields international funding plays an important and stimulating part already.

Surveys among faculty show that the lack of adequate research infrastructure in many cases is felt to be a most pressing problem.

PhD students are a key focus of TSU. Yet only a limited number of scholarships are available. Most doctoral students are de facto part-timers; many have suspended status. This explains very low completion rates. Recently regulations for PhD supervision have been altered (i.a. by introducing a maximum of 5 candidates for each supervisor and a minimum of 1 article in a peer-reviewed international journal). Further changes are being foreseen (see SER, 135).

It should be noted that the further development of research at TSU to a large degree depends on government policies of funding and deregulation. Although commercialization and collaboration with for-profit and not-for-profit partners in society are very welcome indeed, they should not be seen as an alternative for public funding. In the short run such activities often cost more than they bring.

The integration of the national research institutes in university research and teaching is still in its early phases. The panel has not found a clear vision on future development. It is clear, however, that both sides can and should benefit more.

At the faculty of medicine it appeared that most PhD candidates are being hand picked by supervisors on the basis of their earlier performance. More in general supervision is a rather individual working

relationship of supervisor and candidate. Little ambition shown to modernize tutoring and training of PhD candidates. The PhD track isn't seen as an option for MDs without residency. Also in medicine completion rate is very low (32%). This is solely attributed to student performance and/or student life preferences.

The new curriculum foresees a vertical track for research skills (reading skills, writing skills, biostatistics, research methodologies etc.) This track may help to enhance the quality of the master theses. These are now very similarly structured (based on literature review and surveys) with little individuality.

Evidences/indicators

SER, Strategic Plan. Interviews with university leadership, faculty, independent research units, relevant staff, PhD students.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the university actively promote the use of best practices (in (inter)national research collaboration, knowledge transfer, PhD supervision and doctoral schools, linking research-education) to stimulate the growth of research activities in all faculties and fields. A targeted strategy for better integration of research institutes in TSU should be developed.

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

□ Substantially complies with requirements

6.2. Research Support and Internationalization

• HEI has an effective system in place for supporting research, development and creative activities

- Attracting new staff and their involvement in research/arts-creative activities.
- \circ $\;$ University works on internationalization of research, development and creative activities.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

TSU has a good system for supporting research and development by a wide variety of services. Its adapted salary model (50% for research) is expected to be the standard by 2021. International collaboration and grant seeking are actively promoted and supported. The creation of post-doc position is another strong stimulus. The review panel sees all of this as signals of a strong ambition towards improving conditions for research and enhancing attractiveness for young and/or international researchers. The need to rejuvenate academic staff has been underlined before (at standard 4). As noted at 6.1. providing for an adequate infrastructure is crucial. A robust national grant system to create and modernize research infrastructure is very welcome.

At the same time it remains important that all researchers, including PhD candidates, timely receive all relevant information about grants and get the support they need to write proposals and/or reports. The panel has found this not yet to be the case.

Evidences/indicators

SER, Strategic Plan. Interviews with university leadership, faculty, independent research units, relevant staff, PhD students.

Recommendations:

Suggestions:

It is suggested that the Research and Development Department assesses its effectiveness and reprioritizes its activities accordingly in view of the very wide range of tasks set for a limited period of time.

Best Practices (if applicable):

TSU is funding student projects, has a series of student journals for publishing results, and organizes and supports student conferences. This is a good way to demonstrate that at this research university students of all programs are being encouraged to be active in research.

Evaluation

 $\hfill\square$ Complies with requirements

6.3. Evaluation of Research Activities

HEI has a system for evaluating and analyzing the quality of research/creative-arts activities, and the productivity of scientific-research units and academic/scientific staff.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

According to the SER a new procedure for assessing academic and scientific research activities has recently been approved by the Academic Council. This new procedure includes self-assessment reporting and a wide range of performance data. It is, however, advisable to not over-concentrate on publications. The impact of good research is by no means limited to publications for peers. The use in the educational process, for study program design, towards social innovation and business creation, as well as for the development of professional standards and practices in society are just as important.

Evidences/indicators

SER. Interview with relevant staff.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the new research assessment process take into account a wider set of research 'products' and their impact.

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

 $\hfill\square$ Substantially complies with requirements

7. Material, Information and Financial Resources

Material, information and financial resources of HEI ensure sustainable, stable, effective and efficient functioning of the institution, and the achievement of goals defined through strategic development plan.

7.1 Material Resources
 The institution possesses or owns material resources (fixed and current assets) that are used for achieving goals stated in the mission statement, adequately responds to the requirements of educational programs and research activities, and corresponds to the existing number of students and planned enrolment.

- HEI offers environment necessary for implementing educational activities: sanitary units, natural light possibilities, and central heating system.
- \circ $\;$ Health and safety of students and staff is protected within the institution.
- \circ $\;$ HEI has adapted environment for people with special needs

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

Outdated infrastructure is listed as one of the weaknesses of the SWOT-analysis in the Strategic Plan. Surveys among students and faculty indicate that insufficient infrastructure is seen as one of the key challenges for TSU. No wonder the theme is repeatedly addressed in the Strategic Plan (IV, VIII, X). New labs, rehabilitation of existing ones, modern equipment, renovated learning environments, adequate IT and media facilities to support the learning process, infrastructure adapted to students with special needs, a long-term policy for the management of university property – this is the essential catalogue in the Strategic Plan of what must be done to get the infrastructure TSU needs.

The review panel can only underwrite this assessment. Both education and research require good quality infrastructure and facilities, not as a luxury article, but as a foundation. The Action Plan contains a good number of actions towards the various strategic goals on material resources. Many of them are about making a plan for rehabilitation or updating parts of the infrastructure, some provide for actual expenditure on renovation and development with relatively large amounts of money. Specific projects (like central heating, evacuation exits and provisions for people with special needs) are among these planned actions for 2018-2020. It is clear, however, that this period will be much too short to realize everything the strategic plan identifies as pressing needs.

The review panel understands that available funding schemes do not allow for the implementation of all priorities that have been identified by the university. It would, however, be advisable to prepare for a comprehensive infrastructure and facilities development plan that would include a long-term restructuring and renovation scheme in combination with an assessment and rationalizing of the present asset portfolio. On the basis of such a long-term approach the university could then seek a comprehensive and long-term commitment on the part of the national government to enable its leading research university to fully perform its mission, in the interest of the nation and national development.

The faculty of medicine offers a good example of what can be accomplished once the required budgets are being made available. The Laboratory of Clinical skills will be operational in the academic year 2018 – 2019. All material resources are new and already in place. There are various labs in the "Basic Corpus": Laboratory of Experimental Modeling (experimental surgery) - fully equipped; Laboratory of Experimental Modeling (microsurgery) fully equipped; PCR laboratory (for genetical investigations); Laboratory of Biochemistry and Nanoparticles' Research; Laboratory for Cells Culture (ready for installation);Laboratory of Neural System Research - the collaborative unit of the Laboratory of Stem Cells Research of Lund's University (ready for installation); Laboratory of histopathology (histology, immunohistochemistry, histochemistry).

Evidences/indicators

SER. Strategic Plan. Action Plan. Interviews with relevant staff.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the university engage in long-term comprehensive asset planning and seek government commitment to fundamentally improve TSU's infrastructure for research and education.

Suggestions:

It is suggested that easy access for students with disabilities be made a priority.

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

□ Partially complies with requirements

7.2. Library Resources

Library environment, resources and service support effective implementation of educational and research activities, and HEI constantly works for its improvement.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

TSU owns extensive library resources, offers a range of services to teaching & learning and to research activities, including access to international digital databases, and plans for updating and enriching its resources (Strategic Goal IV.5-7). Surveys of users show acceptable degrees of satisfaction, apart from student opinions on book borrowing, the availability of foreign materials and access to online resources. The correlation between syllabus references and library stock is quite high.

The review panel misses plans for close collaboration between the university library and the National Scientific Library. It furthermore noted that international students without Georgian language are not well served.

Training students and staff on how to fully use e-library resources so far only serves rather low numbers. Better advertising the possibilities and structurally monitoring the use made of these e-library resources may help to attract more users and to improve service.

Evidences/indicators

SER. Strategic Plan. Action Plan. Interviews with relevant staff and students.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that all libraries be better prepared to serve international (non-Georgian speaking) students and staff. In general E-library resources should be used more intensively.

Suggestions:

It is suggested that the university promote collaboration between the two main libraries.

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

□ Substantially complies with requirements

7.3 Information Resources

- $\circ~$ HEI has created infrastructure for information technologies ~ and its administration and accessibility are ensured
- Electronic services and electronic management systems are implemented and mechanisms for their constant improvement are in place
- HEI ensures business continuity
- \circ $\;$ HEI has a functional web-page in Georgian and English languages.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

TSU has a good infrastructure for IT and offers adequate services to staff and students. Its business processes are well supported by digital systems. Updates and modernizations are part of the action plan 2018-20. Services to international students should be a priority. Webpage contents in English and Georgian are not always identical.

Evidences/indicators

SER. Action Plan. Interviews with relevant staff and students.

Evaluation

 \Box Complies with requirements

Recommendations:

Suggestions:

It is suggested that in the interest of internationalization and a proper service to students with disabilities the functionality of IT services be re-assessed.

Webpage contents in Georgian and English should be both complete and identical.

Best Practices (if applicable):

7.4 Financial Resources

- Allocation of financial resources described in the budget of HEI is economically achievable
- Financial standing of HEI ensures performance of activities described in strategic and mid-term action plans
- $\circ~$ HEI financial resources are focused on effective implementation of core activities of the institution
- \circ $\;$ HEI budget provides funding for scientific research and library functioning and development $\;$
- o HEI has an effective system of accountability, financial management and control

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

TSU operates a financial system that is in line with current legislation and government regulations. Its budgets enable the university to carry out its present and planned activities. However, the self-evaluation and the strategic planning process have identified a number of issues (i.a. payroll improvement, young staff recruitment, research growth, infrastructure and facilities rehabilitation and modernization) that can only partly be addressed within present budgets. This logically means that financial resources delimit what the university can accomplish in terms of ambitions and levels of quality performance.

Measuring TSU's financial operations to international standards of university budgeting and planning the review panel observes that the present system does not allow a cost and performance based budgeting, reviewing and reporting practice. It essentially is rule and authorization based accounting. This limits the use of financial tools at central as well as faculty level for devolved planning and performance oriented university management and governance.

Evidences/indicators

SER. Strategic Plan. Action Plan. Interview with relevant staff.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the university study the possibilities of modernizing its financial management system, preferably in cooperation with an international partner university.

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

□ Partially complies with requirements