განათლების ხარისხის განვითარების ეროვნული ცენტრი
NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

# Final Report on the Branch of Webster University, Inc. in Georgia

Expert Panel Members
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Tbilisi
2021

# Authorization Report Resume

## General information on the educational institution

Webster University, with its main campus in St. Louis, Missouri, USA, was founded in 1915 as a private non-profit university. The institution has multiple branch locations across the United States and countries across Europe, Asia, and Africa, where it offers undergraduate and graduate programmes in various disciplines, including the liberal arts, fine and performing arts, teacher education, business and management. In 2019, Webster University enrolled 9,966 students. The university is committed to providing a high quality learning experience that transforms students to achieve global citizenship and individual success.

In the framework of internationalization, in order to expand its global network, as well as share existing experiences and cooperation, Webster University established in 2020 a branch in Georgia, with a legal status of non-profit, non-commercial, which is planned to be the basis for access to quality education in the Caucasus region. The Georgian branch aims to offer bachelors and masters programmes in the fields of business, marketing and media.

### Brief overview of the authorization site visit

The authorisation process of Webster University - Georgia was conducted by the panel nominated by NCEQE, and took place online between 11-12 October 2021. The agenda of the online visit was drafted jointly by the institution and NCEQE. During the online visit, the experts confirmed the information provided by the institution in the self-evaluation report and other documentation, and explored in meetings the perceptions of the internal and external stakeholders; based on these main aspects, the panel assessed the compliance of the branch of the university with the NCEQE institutional authorization standards.

First and foremost it is important to clarify that the scope of this panel is to assess the compliance of Webster University - Georgia with the NCEQE standards as if the branch were to open its doors tomorrow, as well as to evaluate the clarity of the systems, policies and procedures that the institution has put in place in order to support the implementation of its plans and strategic goals. However, the panel was very surprised to observe little alignment of Webster University branch to the Georgian national legislation and the NCEQE standards for authorisation partly due to the fact that not all Webster University representatives appeared to have had visibility and awareness of such expectations (which we understood was the role of the local partner), and partly because some other Webster University representatives were of the *opinion* that such alignment will be operated after the decision of authorisation. It is important to note that the authorisation decision is based on the compliance of the institution with the authorisation standards at the time of the online visit specifically and, as it can be expected, the panel cannot base its judgments on plans and assumptions. The panel noted that this view of the leadership representative was underlined as a *personal view*, which unfortunately has no standing in an authorisation process where the criteria as well as procedure to be followed are objective, transparent and predictable, not bending to personal opinions.

Secondly, the poor quality of the SER represented quite a challenge for the panel to conduct its work; sometimes the report was providing no real self-assessment against the NCEQE standards; in other parts, the report was heavily narrative with no self-criticism, other parts barely presented the institution, using one paragraph or less to introduce an entire sub-standard; therefore, the panel has only learnt of some practices from the interviewees, without having the chance to confirm the information from any other formal document in order to triangulate the data. We were also conflicted by the inconsistent use of titles, for both individuals and units (e.g. Department of Education, Department of Training, Training Department or Learning Department - all used for the same unit; or Head of Administration and Operations Manager used for the same position; or the usage of both Chancellery and student services coordinator, as well as Case Management and student services coordinator; Marketing Coordinator sometimes called Marketing Coordinator - Consultant, etc), which made it very confusing for the panel. The aspect of severe messiness was further confirmed in the lack

of structure in the rest of the documents submitted to the panel - these were characterised by a general sloppiness in appendices, numbering and references - depositing the same annex multiple times under different titles or no title, using counter-intuitive titles, numbering and cataloguing, among others.

Third, we underline that the panel assessed the applicability of the Webster University policies specifically for the Georgian branch; we have noted some good practice when interviewing internal stakeholders of the institution, but that cannot constitute evidence for the present authorisation process since it referred entirely to the other Webster University branches and there was no formal evidence to confirm that the same would apply to the Georgian branch.

Lastly, the panel wishes to underline that it had received and explored thoroughly all documents the institution has submitted in different stages of the authorisation processes; however, since they were on multiple occasions indicating lack of compliance with the authorisation standards (examples are provided throughout this report), the panel continued to extend further requests, with more specific wordings, in order to provide the institution with all avenues to submit relevant documentation that would actually evidence its compliance. This was interpreted as an omission from the panel to consider previously submitted documentation and even accusations that the NCEQE representative has been withholding documentation from the panel. We, therefore, want to once again confirm that we have received all documents the institution has submitted (as specifically demonstrated in the indicators that informed the compliance assessment for each standard), but we wished the institution understood the supplementary documentation requests more constructively and tried to read, with attention to detail, what has not been considered satisfactory in the first place, so that it supports the panel in its assessment.

**Overview of the HEI's compliance with standards**

The mission statement of Webster University is *to ensure high quality learning experiences that transform students for global citizenship and individual excellence;* the mission is that of Webster global network and has also been presented as the mission of the branch in Georgia. The text takes into consideration the role of higher education in knowledge creation and dissemination, facilitating students personal development and developing active members of the society, in alignment to the authorisation standards, but it does not define the role the university aspires to have locally and/or internationally, and does not include the profiles it wishes to include in its work (profiles of its study programs). The panel is concerned that, with the lack of measurable KPIs in the Strategic and Action Plans, the institution will be unable to evaluate the progress of its actions, if they are heading in the right direction, with the right speed and, most importantly, to determine when the institution has achieved its goals.

The functions and responsibilities of structural units of the administration of Webster University - Georgia are clearly defined. However, the panel cannot confidently state that the units and individuals are placed on the organisation chart in a logical manner to ensure effective achievement of the institutional goals, and we did not find evidence that the governance has been appointed in accordance to clear, transparent and predefined requirements, as defined in the authorisation standards. The institution has established a quality assurance unit, and has defined its roles and responsibilities; however, these do not currently cover the whole range of institutional activities and are rather limited in remit; in order to expand them, the institution would need to supplement the resources, both material and human, allocated to the quality assurance unit.

Webster University – Georgia is planning to offer six programs that have been adapted to the local formal requirements (ECTS) and aligned with the NQF. The efficiency and sustainability of the educational programmes have been demonstrated at the HQ and university branches around the globe; the university staff have a certain degree of flexibility to adapt programmes' content to the local context, such as introducing Georgian cases in the delivery of the programmes. In order for programme development to be considered a participatory process, students, alumni and labour market representatives should be involved in the programme development process in the future. The same is applicable for the process of changing the educational programmes, where the panel thinks that the

involvement of local stakeholders while contextualizing the programmes to the local needs is of crucial importance.

In spite of the assessment system information lacking in the syllabi, the panel noted that students can gain access to full information about the assessment system and required learning resources through the LMS system – the demonstration provided to the panel during the online visit of the LMS (Canvas) has shown that enrolled students will have access to all relevant information, including specific evaluation system of a given course, literature, academic calendar, etc. The panel noted that the assessment system is not described in the syllabi, however detailed information about the assessment methods for specific courses is available for enrolled students through the LMS system, as it was demonstrated to the panel during interviews. The system for the learning outcomes assessment is regulated in *Academic Policies and Information* and *Student Learning Assessment.* However, the local context is yet to be taken into account, particularly considering the specifics of a newly established branch and the potential language issues of students, supporting mechanisms in order to promote the improvement of students' academic performance. According to the interviews conducted by the panel, language courses will also be provided specifically for freshmen.

The panel did not identify any evidence of recruitment, selection and hiring of the academic staff specifically for the branch in Georgia, which is the entity that has applied for authorization and obtaining the status of HEI. The institution provided Letters of Consent signed by the Rector of the University and by the prospective instructors which are currently working for different branches of Webster University; however, the panel underlines that these letters do not indicate a selection and appointment of the academic staff according to the Georgian legislation, as defined in the authorisation standards and in the Law of Georgia on Higher Education, nor do they reflect a transparent, equitable, accessible and fair selection, as the institution has defined in its *Charter* and the *Personnel Management Policy*.

Webster University – Georgia has developed and generally implemented a transparent procedure for selecting and hiring the administrative and support staff, which envisages the identification of qualification, an announcement of open competition, identification and approval of selection criteria, selection commission etc. by a special decree of the Rector, promoting the vacancies on specialized web pages, interviews with short-listed applicants etc. However, the panel noticed that the branch did not implement the policy in a consistent way.

The rights and obligations of the students are included in the contract the institution has put in place to be signed with the upcoming students. In addition to the contract, the institution is informing and instructing students about their rights and obligations through the *Code of Conduct* that is included in the *Student Handbook*; the Handbook also includes the procedures and sanctions in case of conduct breaches. The Handbook is only partially fit for purpose, and the institution should increase its contextualisation efforts.

As demonstrated throughout the report, the student support services in place at Webster University - Georgia - academic counselling, career support, employer management - are unfit for a higher education institution. Also, the institution is severely understaffed in the area of student support services and the very few staff members the institution has allocated in this direction have foggy roles and responsibilities that do not provide assurances that the institution can offer fit for purpose support services. Furthermore, we have not identified any substantial planned developments in this regard through the Strategic and Action Plans, including relevant budgetary allocations to indicate evident improvements from the current status-quo.

As a teaching university, Webster University – Georgia' main focus is not on fundamental research. In spite of that, research is present in the institutional preoccupations in different forms: research is a compulsory component of master programs, Research Methods, as well as Research Ethics courses are offered in all programs, students are encouraged to conduct research projects and academic staff is expected to be involved in research activities since this is one of the criteria for staff performance evaluation. The university plans to use research for marketing and promotional purposes, such as identifying needs and attracting more students from the region, as stated in the 3 year action plan. The university has a research budget of 10 000 USD which the panel sees as suitable for covering conference participation costs, etc.

Webster University - Georgia has presented a sub-lease agreement with its local partner, Business and Technology University (BTU), which includes both fixed and liquid assets. According to the sublease agreement, both immovable and movable assets are to be used solely for educational activities for a duration of 6 years, as of May 2021. Taking into account the rented space at the time of the authorisation visit, as well as the 1080 students that Webster University - Georgia has included in its application for authorisation, the panel noted that the current facility provides a 0.59 sq.m. per student in the teaching areas, while the international best practice considers that the optimal space for teaching a student is 2.5 sq.m. The educational and auxiliary spaces of the institution are separated, as reflected in the internal measurement drawings of the premises included in the sublease agreement. While the facility rented by the institution includes most of the compulsory sections, the panel is not sure that, as it stands now, the distribution of various units supports the effective implementation of the educational and administrative process.

The physical resources and space available currently at the library are insufficient for 1080The online learning resources, while rich, are not accessible for the Branch students and staff at the time of the authorisation visit. The same is applicable to most of the software information technology – platforms available for both administration and academic activity. The physical hardware is also insufficient for 1080 students.

The panel found the financial planning unsustainable, lacking transparency and misaligned to national legislation; there is no financial risk assessment in place or business continuity planning.

**Summary of Recommendations**
- Revisit the text of the mission statement so that it takes into consideration the role of higher education in ensuring students competitiveness on the labour market, it defines the role the university aspires to have locally and/or internationally, and it includes the profiles it wishes to include in its work (profiles of its study programs);
- Ensure the actual implementation in practice of the Rules and Methodology for Development, Updating and Responding of a Seven-Year Strategy and a Three-Year Action Plan;
- Revisit the strategic plan in order to include other aspects which are vital to the operation of an institution, such as institutional development, quality assurance, student body planning, research, human and material resources, infrastructure, internationalisation, community engagement service and research;
- Ensure consistency between the common components of the Strategic and Action plans so that they do not contradict each other;
- Revisit the current strategic goals structure to ensure that all components of a goal are reflected in the broken down tasks; reconsider the phrasing of all tasks (or consider further breaking them down into activities) so that they are detailed enough to support the Strategic Plan cascade at team and individual level within the organisation;
- Determine more specific timeframes for the implementation of each strategic task/activity in order to support the institution to determine its priorities on a monthly basis and successfully monitor the achievement of its strategic goals;
- Ensure that the strategic and action plan determines the specific material, financial, and human resources needed for the implementation of the goals and tasks;
- Elaborate measurable KPIs to each strategic task/activity in order to support the institution in the implementation and monitoring of the strategic priorities;
- Ensure that strategic planning is a participatory process that actively involves academic and administrative staff, students, employers and other stakeholders of the institution;
- Incorporate in the strategic priorities of the institution and support the implementation of activities that contribute to the development of the society and knowledge dissemination;
- Expand the provisions of the strategic planning methodology in terms of the monitoring and reporting of the strategic plan implementation, regularity and task division of this process, as well as how monitoring results lead to changes;
- Clarify the status of the institutional chart and ensure that the most recent version is formally adopted, signed and dated;
- Formally adopt an organisation chart based on higher education management best practice that would support the institution ensure effective implementation of activities defined in its strategic plan, and achievement of its goals;
- Expand the capacity and capability of the administrative staff of the Branch;

- Ensure that the *Branch Activities and Management* include the functions and responsibilities of different units exhaustively, and that they communicate effectively to other institutional regulations;
- Develop and adopt transparent and equitable criteria and election/appointment procedure for the institutional management, and in line with legislation; ensure that all management individuals and units are elected/appointed based on the predefined requirements, and based on the discussion of candidates' vision and plans;
- Revisit the composition of decisional, consultative and executive bodies so as to ensure student representation, as full members, at all levels; ensure that student engagement in decision making is implemented in accordance to the ESU pillars of the student movement;
- Develop and adopt a plan which ensures continuity of all major business processes taking place at the institution and takes into account all possible risks, mechanisms for their prevention and a strategy for risk mitigation in case the prevention is not possible;
- Align the internationalisation strategy to the regional (Caucasus) objective the institution has defined for itself and ensure that relevant human and financial resources are allocated to pursue this agenda;
- Revise the roles and responsibilities of the Quality Manager so that it has a formal contribution on all relevant areas, such as staff performance review, supporting evidence based decision making, strategic management monitoring, etc, while redirecting other responsibilities less fit to other organisational units; ensure all responsibilities assigned to the Quality Manager through other regulatory documents are in sync with the unit description;
- Ensure that every unit of the institution is effectively involved in the implementation of internal quality assurance mechanisms, and such roles are formally regulated; ensure the engagement of other internal and external stakeholders in quality assurance;
- Allocate appropriate human, information and material resources to enable the Quality Assurance unit to meet its responsibilities effectively, including a qualified Manager; revisit the position of the unit in the organisation chart for the same purpose;
- Ensure that the Georgian branch is provided with contextualised, fit for purpose regulatory documents that accurately reflect the branch activities and organisational structure;
- Expand the remit of the internal quality assurance mechanisms in order to cover the continuous assessment and development of all institution's activities and its resources, including areas such as: staff performance review, supporting evidence based decision making, strategic management monitoring, satisfaction assessment of internal stakeholders other than students, external stakeholders, etc, are omitted altogether;
- Ensure a direct link between the quality assurance system and the strategic and operations management so that the quality assurance system supports the leadership of the institution in making evidence based decisions;
- Revisit the target indicators of the *Internal Quality Mechanisms* so that they are more comprehensive and fit for purpose and ensure that there are dedicated and effective tools to capture each of them;
- Finalise all surveys and data collection tools and ensure that they are statistically valid, as well as detailed enough to inform improvement in a targeted manner and ensure that evaluation results can be utilized for further improvement;
- Revisit the performance review system of all staff with a view of giving it a 360 approach that includes the views of students and peers, as well as expanding it to topics other than strategic planning and job descriptions, but transversal contributions to the academic community: leadership, ethics, professionalism, organisational development contribution, society contribution, etc.);
- Reconsider the system for programme evaluation and development so that it is more data-informed and engages the whole range of stakeholders;
- Ensure the implementation in practice of the *Methodology for student contingent planning and determining the number of staff*, in accordance to the actual resources available;
- Ensure that the Code of Ethics includes the applicable sanctions in case of breaches in the conduct expectations defined by the institution;
- Revisit the provisions regarding the implementation of Turnitin in order to ensure consistency, standardisation and predictability in its use by the faculty body;

- Regulate the institutional understanding of conflict of interest and ensure its implementation in practice in order to ensure adherence to principles of ethics and integrity;
- Publish the Code of Ethics on the institutional website;
- Increase the involvement of stakeholders, including students, alumni and employers, in the development of educational programs;
- Ensure that adjustments and amendments to the structure and content of programmes are operated in order to better fit them to the needs of the local labour market and societal context;
- Ensure evidence-based decision making in the case of programme establishment and development;
- Revisit the structure and content of the syllabi for all programmes in order to ensure all available information is available to students, including the learning materials/literature to support the delivery of the programme, as well as the assessment methods;
- Clarify the responsibilities for students' guidance on individualized learning journeys in order to ensure that relevant support is in place and fit for purpose;
- Ensure that the assessment system is clearly described in the syllabi;
- Substantially revise the appeals system in order to iron out its deficiencies and ensure that it is fair and fit for purpose;
- Align the *Rules and Conditions for Holding an Academic Position*, in terms of both criteria and procedure, with the Georgian legislation; ensure the consistent implementation throughout the branch;
- Recruit academic staff for the Webster University – Georgia through an open, transparent and objective selection procedure according to the requirements of the Georgian legislation;
- Implement the provisions for the recruitment of administrative/support staff in a consistent way and with consideration to defined criteria;
- Create the premises for academic and scientific staff engagement in decision-making processes;
- Ensure a coherent connection between the student satisfaction results and the professional development strategy;
- Revisit the nature of academic staff line management in order to foster their growth and development;
- Ensure that the professional development of administrative staff also benefits of institutional prioritization and resources;
- Define more comprehensive professional development strategy as part of the strategic management component of the branch and ensure that relevant budget is allocated for its implementation;
- Clarify the objective grounds for remuneration and encouragement and ensure the coherent connection of this system with the staff performance review;
- Develop the procedure for ensuring the integration of new employees into work environment and their efficient involvement into the working process;
- Ensure the accuracy and consistency of the statistical data related to personnel management in order to best support strategic and operations management, as well as day-to-day activities of the administration;
- Define internal relevant benchmarks for individual units and roles to measure their own success and excellence drawn from the strategic and operational plans;
- Ensure compliance of the rules for affiliation of academic staff with the Georgian legislation;
- Ensure that the dissemination of student policies is consolidated and easy to navigate for its main audience so that they meet their purpose;
- Implement an alternative to the current Student Handbook in order to make sure that the students enrolled on the Georgian campus are accurately guided by regulations that are fit for their needs and context, with relevant national legislation and referencing administrative units that actually exist;
- Update the institutional website to include information on all student support services, as well as the roles, responsibilities and contact information of each relevant unit and individual;
- Revisit the organisational structure, roles and responsibilities in the area of student support to ensure that this area benefits of the necessary human and financial resources to provide all types of supports students will need; ensure that strategic planning and budgeting support such developments;

- Establish the position of programme coordinator for each of the six programmes to support the students in planning of the education process and improvement of academic performance;
- Establish a standalone unit/person responsible for career support services at branch level to provide students with professional orientation and other information events regarding employment and career development;
- Ensure that responsibilities in the area of employer management - finding information on potential employers, facilitating employers' involvement in the creation and implementation of educational programmes, implementation of internship and practice corresponding to educational programmes, as well as creating employer database and constantly inform students and alumni on employment opportunities/vacancies – are properly catered for;
- Establish the provisions for the development and implementation of surveys for student and alumni regarding their personal, professional and academic development;
- Revisit the responsibility allocation regarding extracurricular activities, sports, arts, educational activities and supporting student initiatives, as well as operationalisation specifics to ensure that students are catered for in this areas as well;
- Develop branch specific financial aid that fits the national, regional and local context, in particular referring to low-SES students; ensure such information is made publicly available and is included in the Student Handbook;
- Ensure that the available fixed and liquid assets suffice for an effective educational process for 1080 students; this includes allocating the necessary number of sq.m. for students to feel safe, comfortable and have an environment conducive to learning;
- Revisit the *Methodology for student contingent planning and determining the number of staff* and ensure its fitness for purpose;
- Revisit the sublease agreement so that it covers the whole authorisation period;
- Reconsider the space allocated for administrative staff, taking into consideration the actual and future organisational developments;
- Reconsider the space available for professor offices, where professors provide counselling to students, in addition to conducting their own individual academic, research and administrative work;
- Ensure more fit for purpose division of the spaces dedicated to serve as recreation space, area for students to mingle and socialize, group work and foyer;
- Install a central heating system;
- Align the emergency exits to the authorisation standard requirement; ensure English language translations for the fire extinguishers usage instructions;
- Ensure that the IT services of the institution benefit of the necessary human resource to support its effectiveness, and implement in practice the structure proposed in the institutional chart;
- Revisit the library space to ensure that it is equipped with both individual reading, as well as areas for group work;
- Expand on the library stock to ensure coverage of the main literature necessary for the delivery of the programme, in sufficient copies for 1080 students;
- Ensure that students of the Georgian branch have proper access to the all Webster university library resources;
- Set-up an electronic search system;
- Ensure the availability of a full time librarian with appropriate competence in library sciences including competences to provide assistance with using international library databases;
- Substantially increase the financial allocations to ensure that the upcoming 1080 student benefit from both the hardware and the software infrastructure to effectively support their learning experience;
- Iron out the link between EDocument with the central Webster University systems and ensure effective usage of systems to support the governance and administration of the institution locally, including through on-site transfer methods;
- Conduct the relevant assessment to inform the IT risk assessment that allows the institution to prepare business continuity planning that effectively covers the Information Technology resources and infrastructure;

- Elaborate and adopt an IT policy that regulates IT risk management and data protection, in particular to ensure alignment of the American-based system to the European GDPR regulations;
- According to the Institutional Budget and Balance Sheet, Webster University - Georgia is not planning significant investments in IT infrastructure, proportional to its number of students, nor are substantial developments recorded in the Strategic and Action Plans;
- Upgrade the institutional website contents for full alignment with the authorisation standards.
- Ensure that the budgeting process is transparent, participatory and aligned to national legislation;
- Align the institutional budget with the strategic and action plans;
- Develop and implement budget monitoring procedures, a financial accounting policy and procedures for financial analysis and reporting systems;
- Revisit the *Business process continuity, financial management, and control system* and ensure its implementation in practice so that it ensures a functional managerial accountability, financial management and control system, and provide for lawful, transparent, economical, efficient, and productive use of resources for the achievement of the strategic and action plans.

**Summary of Suggestions**
- Consider adopting a more expanded Quality Assurance Policy that describes the institutional quality assurance system, its processes, mechanisms, instruments, reporting, data collection, timeframes, quality cycle, responsibilities of all individuals and units involved in these processes;
- Revisit the philosophy behind the financial aid regulations so that they are fit for purpose for each targeted area: reduce socio-economic inequalities, motivate academic performance, reward community service and outstanding leadership.

**Summary of the Best Practices**
- The opportunities the Webster University global network has the potential to open to the students enrolled in the Georgian branch in terms of international mobility and activities.

## Summary Table

| | Standard | Complies with Requirements | Substantially complies with requirements | Partially Complies with Requirements | Does not Comply with Requirements |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Mission and strategic development of HEI** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☒ |
| 1.1 | Mission of HEI | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☒ |
| 1.2 | Strategic development | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☒ |
| **2.** | **Organizational structure and management of HEI** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☒ |
| 2.1 | Organizational structure and management | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☒ |
| 2.2 | Internal quality assurance mechanisms | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☒ |
| 2.3 | Observing principles of ethics and integrity | ☐ | ☐ | ☒ | ☐ |
| 3. | **Educational Programmes** | ☐ | ☒ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3.1 | Design and development of educational programmes | ☐ | ☒ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3.2 | Structure and content of educational programmes | ☐ | ☒ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3.3 | Assessment of learning outcomes | ☐ | ☒ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4 | **Staff of the HEI** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☒ |
| 4.1 | Staff management | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☒ |
| 4.2 | Academic/Scientific and invited Staff workload | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☒ |
| 5 | **Students and their support services** | ☐ | ☐ | ☒ | ☐ |
| 5.1 | The Rule for obtaining and changing student status, the recognition of education, and student rights | ☐ | ☒ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5.2 | Student support services | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☒ |
| 6 | **Research, development and/or other creative work** | ☒ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6.1 | Research activities | ☒ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6.2 | Research support and internationalization | ☒ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6.3 | Evaluation of research activities | ☒ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 7 | **Material, information and financial resources** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☒ |
| 7.1 | Material resources | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☒ |
| 7.2 | Library resources | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☒ |
| 7.3 | Information resources | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☒ |
| 7.4 | Financial resources | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☒ |

## Signature of expert panel members

1. Anca Prisacariu (Chair)

2. Irine Darchia (member)

3. Lika Glonti (member)

4. Eka Gegeshidze (member)

5. Salome Dzagnidze (member)

# Compliance of the Authorization 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 the 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 describes 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**<br><br>According to the Charter of Webster University - Georgia, the mission statement of the institution is *to ensure high quality learning experiences that transform students for global citizenship and individual excellence.* The panel noted that this is the mission statement of Webster University as a whole, which is shared by all internal stakeholders interviewed by the panel; however, no adaptation for the Georgian branch and context has been made. According to the senior management representatives interviewed by the panel, no contextualisation is necessary.<br><br>The text of the mission statement takes into consideration the role of higher education in knowledge creation and dissemination, facilitating students personal development and developing active members of the society, but less so in regards to ensuring their competitiveness on the labour market. The mission does not define the role the university aspires to have locally and/or internationally, nor does it include the profiles it wishes to include in its work (profiles of its study programs).<br><br>While the panel was preparing for the authorisation process, the institution did not have a functional website; this was finalised one day before the online visit. The mission statement is now included on the website, which will support its dissemination amongst the internal and external stakeholders. |
| **Evidences/indicators**<br>● Charter of Webster University - Georgia;<br>● Self-evaluation report;<br>● Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process;<br>● Institutional website. |
| **Recommendations:**<br>Revisit the text of the mission statement so that it takes into consideration the role of higher education in ensuring students competitiveness on the labour market, it defines the role the university aspires to have locally and/or internationally, and it includes the profiles it wishes to include in its work (profiles of its study programs). |
| **Suggestions:**<br>N/A |

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|---|
| **Best Practices (if applicable):**<br>N/A |

| |
|---|
| **Evaluation**<br>        ☐ Complies with requirements<br>        ☐ Substantially complies with requirements<br>        ☐ Partially complies with requirements<br>        ☒ Does not comply with requirements |

## 1.2 Strategic Development

- o HEI has a strategic development (7-year) and an action plans (3-year) in place.
- o HEI contributes to the development of the society, shares with the society the knowledge gathered in the institution, and facilitates lifelong learning
- o 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**

Webster University - Georgia has defined the *Rules and Methodology for Development, Updating and Responding of a Seven-Year Strategy and a Three-Year Action Plan*, which provides the details and steps for the drafting, reporting and updating the Strategic and Action Plans. The panel finds that not all of its content has been reflected in practice, as evidenced throughout the analysis of compliance below.

The institution has elaborated a Strategic Plan for the timeframe 2022-2028, which includes 5 strategic goals, as follows:
1. Introduce a personalized approach to teaching through small groups, close relationships with branch staff, and focus on student life;
2. Developing educational programmes that join theory and practice, provide an international perspective, encourage creativity and literacy;
3. Foster a lifelong desire to learn and actively serve communities and the world;
4. Creating an environment accessible to individuals of diverse cultures, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds and instilling in students a respect for diversity and an understanding of their own and others values;
5. Promoting the activities of the branch in the Transcaucasian region, attracting interested persons for teaching or cooperation and integrating them into the branch space.

Generally, the defined goals are achievable and based on the institutional mission and priorities; in particular, the commitment to *ensure high quality learning experiences* is reflected (though insufficiently detailed) in the strategic goals 1 and 2. However, the strategic plan covers insufficiently or not at all aspects which are vital to the operation of an institution, including institutional development, quality assurance, student body planning, research, human and material resources, infrastructure, internationalisation, community engagement service and research, all of which are key to institutional development and enable the institution to pursue its mission statement. Furthermore, the strategic plan leaves out areas that according to the institutional strategic planning methodology should have been included, specifically *the development of Webster Branch resources; social, cultural, economic, environmental, LLL promotional activities; involving Webster Branch staff in discussing important topics for the public; providing expert and consulting services.*

The university also adopted an Action Plan for the timeframe 2022-2024 that describes future activities, sets timeframes for their implementation, indicators and evidence, responsible and auxiliary structure/unit, as well as material resources and sources of funding needed for their implementation. The Action Plan also introduces 2 new strategic goals that have not been previously presented in the Strategic Plan 2022-2028, and which are different for each of the implementation years, as follows:
2022
Goal 6 - Improving Webster Branch Management
Goal 7 - Strengthening Webster Branch Academic Staff

2023
Goal 6 - Expansion of the Webster Branch
Goal 7 - Human Resources development of the Webster Branch
2024
Goal 6 - Expanding Webster Branch Area and Inventory
Goal 7 - Human Resources development of the Webster Branch

When assessing the Strategic and Action Plans the panel was able to observe the following:
- each of the strategic goals has been allocated 1 to 3 tasks in the strategic plan; however, not all components of a strategic goal are further broken down into tasks, leaving out some key aspects that could have been detailed in an exhaustive manner. For example, goal 2 aims at developing educational programmes that join theory and practice, provide an international perspective, encourage creativity and literacy; however, no specific task or activity shows how the international perspective will be provided, such as benchmarking programme structure against comparable institutions, supporting outgoing international mobility for students and staff, employment of highly international faculty, support activities conducted by foreign practitioners, etc. Another example is goal 4, which aims to create an environment accessible to individuals of diverse cultures, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds and instilling in students a respect for diversity and an understanding of their own and others values; however, no specific task or activity is allocated to financial programmes for students coming from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (scholarships or fee waivers), support mechanisms to attract students of all ages (day care centre within the premises of the institution, work-study balanced programme structures, etc);
- some of the tasks are subsequently broken down into 1 or 2 activities in the Action Plan, some are not. Trying to understand how tasks communicate to activities is generally very confusing because: in some cases the only activity associated with a particular task covers a very small component of the respective task, leaving out so many other potential areas of development (e.g. task 1.1 aims at *the development of student services*, but its associated activities throughout all 3 years refer to the use of e-services); other tasks do not communicate very logically with their associated activity (e.g. task 3.1. the *implementation of the project(s) with the participation of students and staff beyond the curriculum* has the following associated activity for 2022 *3.1.1. Identifying the project to be implemented, making a decision on its implementatio*n, which gives no clarity if a/any project does in fact exist and gives no guarantee of the commitment for its implementation); some tasks and their associated activity are not sufficiently detailed to support them cascade at team and individual level within the organisation (e.g. task *1.3. Identification students' individual needs* has its only associated activity in 2023 *1.3.1 Responding to the needs identified by the research conducted*, without giving further details;
- the period allocated to the implementation of the strategic tasks is in some cases very general, which the panel believes is a missed opportunity in supporting the institution to determine its priorities on a monthly basis and successfully monitor the achievement of its strategic goals (e.g. 1.2., 3.1., 3.2., 4.1.);
- the indicators allocated to the strategic tasks and activities are not meeting the purpose of KPIs because they are not sufficiently measurable; the specific point when the strategic goals, tasks and activities can be declared achieved cannot always be determined by the panel (or by the institution itself!) considering that none of the indicators are measurable. None of the indicators in the Strategic and Action Plans provide actual measurements to be achieved, in the sense of percentages or numbers (such as the number of participants in a workshop, the number of conferences and projects, the number of countries targeted by marketing, the percentage of increase in enrolment, etc). Therefore, the panel fears that, with the lack of measurable KPIs, the institution will be unable to evaluate the progress of its actions, if they are heading in the right direction, with the right speed and, most importantly, to determine when the institution has achieved its goals. The matter of providing measurable KPIs as a benchmarking for success of strategic actions is insufficiently addressed in the institutional strategic planning methodology as well;
- finally, the material resource and source of funding are totally omitted from the Strategic Plan and very vaguely described in the Action Plan, using only notions such as *existing material resource, current cost, current source of funding or budget*, with no other specifics being provided. Likewise,

the human resources needed for the implementation of the goals are omitted from the Strategic Plan, while the Action Plan seems to rather indicate the person accountable for a certain activity, as well as other auxiliary units involved, as opposed to taking account of the total human resources necessary for the successful completion of the activity. According to the strategic planning methodology, the *need for other people, resources to be involved in achieving the task/activity*, is a component of the procedure for updating strategy and action plan (Article 2), but cannot be found under the drafting stage.

Based on this evidence, the panel is concerned that, as it stands now, the strategic and operational plans do not provide the prerequisites for a successful achievement of the institutional goals.

According to the Strategic Plan, the document *was developed with the participation of representatives of Webster University Headquarters, Webster University Rector of Georgia and members of the Academic Council, as well as a working group within the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding between Webster University and the University of Business and Technology*, the composition of which the panel has noted*.

Also according to the Strategic Plan, *the strategy, mission and goals of Webster University (head) were taken into account during the development of the strategy, at the same time the focus was specifically on the needs and specifics of branch development in Georgia.* According to the interviews conducted by the panel, secondary data was used in this initial stage informing decisions such as the choice of programmes to be delivered, but field research is planned for the future. Furthermore, it transpired during the interviews that the institution had outsourced the drafting of the strategic plan to an external consulting company, a fact that has not been introduced in the short text the university had provided in the SER about its strategic planning and management, or in any other supporting documentation.

The panel found no evidence that the drafting of the strategic plan involved students (even from the other branches) as well as administrative and academic staff other than governance of the Branch. The panel learnt that the institution has presented its general priorities to different labour market representatives from Georgia which we have met during the online visit; however, the external stakeholders were unable to refer to specific inputs and contributions that they provided in relation to the strategic plan, nor could they refer to the actual content of the plan. According to the institutional strategic planning methodology, *the draft strategy and action plan will be developed by the persons/group/commission determined by the order of the Rector, including Webster Branch student, Webster Branch administration and training department representatives, Webster Branch partner organization (s), and possibly additional person (s);* this has not been implemented in practice.

Given that the institution has not yet commenced its operations, the panel cannot yet assess the contribution of the university to the development of the society, but only assess what the institution plans to do in this regard. The strategic plan does not reflect specifically how the institution will contribute to Georgian society development, nor does it make reference to the areas included in the NCEQE standards, such as: social, cultural, economic, environmental and other programmes and events; activities facilitating lifelong learning; HEI's academic and scientific staff participates in the discussion of important social issues, offers expert and consultation services, and conducts research for different institutions. While some of these were originally included in the institutional strategic planning methodology as components that will be referred to in the plan, none were actually reflected in the strategic plan itself.

In regards to monitoring and reporting, Article 3 of the strategic planning methodology details the procedure for the reporting on the implementation of the action plan: those responsible for the activities defined in the action plan describe at the end of each quarter the actions taken in accordance with the activity and the results achieved, using a provided template; subsequently, each Webster Branch Administration and Training Department staff member is required to produce at the end of the year an annual report on the implementation of the Action Plan activities, using a provided template. Each of the templates is asking the authors to provide descriptions of both quantitative and qualitative performance indicators to measure the implementation of their activities, in spite of the Action Plan not having provided measurable KPIs. According to the same methodology, reports prepared by the

administration staff will be submitted to the Head of Administration, and each staff member of the Training Department will submit them to both the Academic Council and the Rector. However, Article 3 of the strategic planning methodology makes no reference to the strategic plan monitoring and reporting, by whom to whom and how often. The accountability of the Rector in the implementation of the Strategic Plan is also unclear, as further detailed under Standard 2.

Article 2 provides the procedure for updating the strategic and action plans. The section makes no indication that changes are operated based on the monitoring results, reflecting thus no impact of the monitoring and reporting on the adjustments made to the strategic plan.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Rules and Methodology for Development, Updating and Responding of a Seven-Year Strategy and a Three-Year Action Plan;
- Strategic development plan 2022-2028;
- Action Plan 2022-2024;
- Self-evaluation report;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

**Recommendations:**
- Ensure the actual implementation in practice of the Rules and Methodology for Development, Updating and Responding of a Seven-Year Strategy and a Three-Year Action Plan;
- Revisit the strategic plan in order to include other aspects which are vital to the operation of an institution, such as institutional development, quality assurance, student body planning, research, human and material resources, infrastructure, internationalisation, community engagement service and research;
- Ensure consistency between the common components of the Strategic and Action plans so that they do not contradict each other;
- Revisit the current strategic goals structure to ensure that all components of a goal are reflected in the broken down tasks;
- Reconsider the phrasing of all tasks (or consider further breaking them down into activities) so that they are detailed enough to support the Strategic Plan cascade at team and individual level within the organisation;
- Determine more specific timeframes for the implementation of each strategic task/activity in order to support the institution to determine its priorities on a monthly basis and successfully monitor the achievement of its strategic goals;
- Ensure that the strategic and action plan determines the specific material, financial, and human resources needed for the implementation of the goals and tasks;
- Elaborate measurable KPIs to each strategic task/activity in order to support the institution in the implementation and monitoring of the strategic priorities;
- Ensure that strategic planning is a participatory process that actively involves academic and administrative staff, students, employers and other stakeholders of the institution;
- Incorporate in the strategic priorities of the institution and support the implementation of activities that contribute to the development of the society and knowledge dissemination;
- Expand the provisions of the strategic planning methodology in terms of the monitoring and reporting of the strategic plan implementation, regularity and task division of this process, as well as how monitoring results lead to changes.

**Suggestions:**
N/A

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
N/A

**Evaluation**
- ☐ Complies with requirements
- ☐ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☐ Partially complies with requirements
- ☒ Does not comply 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 |
|---|
| o Organizational structure of HEI ensures implementation of goals and activities described in its strategic plan<br>o Procedures for election/appointment of the management bodies of HEI are transparent, equitable, and in line with legislation<br>o HEI's Leadership/Management body ensures effective management of the activities of the institution<br>o 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**

According to the Charter of the Branch of Webster University Inc. in Georgia, the General Assembly (GA) is the supreme governing body of the branch, and is composed of three members, appointed and dismissed by the founders of Webster University, the head office of the University of Missouri, in the United States of America. The Charter states that the three members of the General Assembly are the President of Webster University, the Chief Financial Officer of Webster University, and the Dean of the George Herbert Walker School of Business and Technology at Webster University. However, the SER states that the members of the General Assembly are *elected* by the founders of Webster University. The panel is therefore unsure if this appointment comes with the role of its members (ex-officio) or is it a de-facto election. The current GA members were not elected/appointed in accordance with predefined requirements, or based on a procedure that is transparent, equitable, and in line with legislation.

The General Assembly is entitled to:
a. Make decisions on the amendment on the Charter of the Branch;
b. Make a decision on the liquidation of the Branch;
c. Appoint and, if necessary, dismiss the Rector;
d. Appoint and, if necessary, dismiss the Academic Council;
e. Approve the annual budget of the Branch, the seven-year strategy and the three-year action plan upon the recommendation of the Rector.

The Branch Manager is the Rector, appointed and dismissed by the General Assembly, based on an open search competition, as per the institutional Charter. The document makes no further reference to the criteria or process to be followed when electing the Rector. The current rector was not elected/appointed in accordance to predefined requirements, or based on a procedure that is transparent, equitable, and in line with legislation; the rector was not appointed by the GA either, as regulated in the institutional charter, but by the Board of Trustees. According to the leadership of the institution, the Rector was asked to take the role and did not go through an interview, a discussion of the proposed plans for development, nor is there evidence of the Board of Trustees having considered other candidates. The formal resolution of the Board of Trustees appoints the current rector without making any reference to the procedure of criteria that have led to this decision.

The responsibilities assigned to the rector are as follows:
a. Manages the activities of the Branch and represents the Branch in relation with third parties, including administrative agencies and commercial banks;
b. Enters into various transactions on behalf of the Branch;

c. Delegates or assigns any function of the Branch to a member of the Webster University Community;

d. On behalf of the Branch enters into agreements, issues Powers of Attorney, opens and closes accounts in banks in national and foreign currencies, signs financial and other documents with the approval of the General Assembly;

e. Makes a decision on the creation/abolition of a structural unit of the Branch, accordingly determines and approves the structure of the Branch, in which it envisages administration as a structural unit. Appoints and dismisses the heads of the structure, as well as other staff and issues orders related to their activities;

f. Defines and approves the internal regulations for the rules of selection and admission-dismissal of administrative and support staff;

g. With the involvement of the representative(s) of the Branch administration, develops the budget of the Branch and submits it to the General Assembly for approval;

h. With the involvement of the Academic Council, develops a seven-year strategy and three-year action plans which are submitted to the General Assembly for approval;

i. Enters into labour and service contracts after the approval of the General Assembly;

j. Independently, creates and dissolves the working group(s), committee(s), advisory commission(s)/board(s) as needed;

k. In agreement with the Academic Council, issues an order for the search of academic position(s) indicating the terms and conditions. Manages the search process. Manages the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms;

l. Approves the rules for using the library;

m. Enters into a transaction for the audit of the Branch and periodically (once in three years) submits the audit report/description to the General Assembly;

n. Recommends rates for tuition and fees for approval of the General Assembly;

o. Follows the internal and external mechanisms for appealing issues related to the activities of the Branch in order to protect the rights and interests of students, academic and administrative staff;

p. Follows internal and external mechanisms on enrolment, termination/restoration/recognition of enrolment, mobility, status of the educational programmes of students;

q. On the basis of the recommendation of the Academic Council and with the approval of the General Assembly, issues an order of diplomas to graduates;

r. Performs other functions based on the day-to-day operations of the Branch.

The collegiate body of Webster University - Georgia is the Academic Council, composed of minimum 3 and maximum 5 members appointed and dismissed by the General Assembly from within the Webster University Community; the Rector may not be a member of the Academic Council. The Charter or Regulation make no further reference to the criteria or process to be followed when appointing the Academic Council. The current members of the Academic Council were not elected/appointed in accordance with predefined requirements, or based on a procedure that is transparent, equitable, and in line with legislation. According to the documentation submitted by the institution, the rector submitted a notice for Academic Council appointments which included three names, all of which were unanimously approved by the GA, as evidenced by meeting minutes. The rector's notice presents as criteria for nomination *academic credentials and relevant experience*, while the GA minutes indicate that the three candidates *must hold senior academic or administrative rank*. None of the quoted requirements are further detailed in any other internal regulation, nor is any procedure referenced as grounds for the nomination and appointment. When addressing this matter during the online visit, it appeared that the senior leadership of the institution was unsure if the criteria was mentioned somewhere, and they were uncertain about the procedure for nomination and appointment.

According to the leadership of the institution interviewed during the online visit, it is planned that the last two spots on the Academic Council, currently vacant, will be occupied by local representatives from the Branch in Georgia; however, according to the GA minutes, the membership will include *representatives from Webster St. Louis and other locations.* This should therefore be regulated and implemented with consistency.

The responsibilities of the Academic Council are as follows:

a. Together with the Rector, defines the components related to quality education and related issues in the seven-year strategy and three-year plan that meet the requirements of the General Assembly;
b. Develops and submits to the Rector for approval the rules for the development, implementation, modification and cancellation of educational programmes, quality assurance act(s) of the Georgian quality assurance system for approval by the General Assembly;
c. Initiates the Rector to recommend to the General Assembly implementation, addition, teach-out of the educational program(s) and / or other program(s);
d. Develops and submits to the Rector for approval the selection criteria, rules and conditions for holding an academic position that meet the requirements of the General Assembly;
e. Develops and submits proposals to the Rector regarding the introduction and implementation of the research component, including the financing of the same component;
f. Supports with Rector the General Assembly's policies regarding ethics, conditions on plagiarism, academic freedom and good faith;
g. Submits proposals (s) to the Rector on forms of student research, conferences, academic and/or other projects or activities;
h. Makes recommendations on awarding qualifications to graduates, to the Rector for approval by the General Assembly; Periodically holds various meetings with academic and invited staff, in the planning and implementation of which, if necessary, the Branch administration facilitates/provides.

In summary, none of the management bodies and positions were elected/appointed in accordance with predefined requirements, or based on a procedure that is transparent, equitable, and in line with legislation. According to the senior leadership representatives interviewed by the panel, the appointments to date were operational in nature; according to the same interviewees, Webster University did deliberately not follow local requirements in regards to appointments/elections of its governance because the institution is not yet authorised to function.

The panel has received an institutional structure of the university that was underdeveloped as it included only five boxes; we have subsequently requested for an expanded one to reflect in greater detail both the administrative and academic components. An elaborated organisation chart (unsure if it was produced for the panel, and its approval status is uncertain) was provided as supplementary documentation. Based on these two versions of the institutional structure, as well as other references made to the branch management, the panel is concerned that the organizational structure of the institution might not ensure effective implementation of activities defined in its strategic plan, and achievement of its goals. We note the following observations:
- The rector appears to be sitting on the same management line of the organisation chart with the Academic Council, which does not seem to accurately reflect the division of responsibilities where, according to the Webster Branch charter, the Academic Council submits to the Rector for approval a number of things within its area of responsibility; when addressing this matter during the online visit, the panel learnt from senior administrators that this was an error;
- Throughout the documentation received by the panel, there are multiple names inconsistently used for specific units on the chart which makes the panel wonder if the institution is referring to the same units/individuals or simply it did not make up its mind about the titles to be used. e.g. Department of Education, Department of Training, Training Department or Learning Department; the same applies to the Head of Administration, Marketing Coordinator, Student Services Coordinator, etc;
- The Financier, the Translator, the Material and Information Technology Coordinator, the Personnel Management Coordinator, the Case Management and Student Services Coordinator, the Medical Services Coordinator, the Sanitary hygiene specialist - are sitting one under the other on the organisation chart, with reporting lines cascading between them. In practice, they should all be sitting on the same management line under the Head of Administration; an identical situation is to be found on the Training Department side, where the Quality Manager, the Librarian, and the Marketing Coordinator-Consultant sit one under the other even though it is evident that, for example, the librarian does not report to the Quality Manager. Likewise, when addressing this matter during the online visit, the panel learnt that this too was an error. We are

therefore, questioning the institutional capability to produce a well thought-through and logical organisation chart, and which reflects the intended reporting lines;

- The panel was presented with a document that includes the responsibilities of the Career Planning and Development Centre. However, this is nowhere to be found on the organisation chart; hence, the panel is unsure if the chart is incomplete or outdated;
- The Quality Manager is placed under the Training Department; the panel is concerned that this presents a major difficulty in enabling the service to cover the quality assurance of administrative aspects (such as material resources, electronic services, personnel management, etc), which would demand a more independent, overarching position in the organisation. According to the Internal Quality Mechanisms, the quality assurance system includes the assessment of non-academic aspects too, and yet placing it under the Training Department, the Quality Manager is in fact responsible for things outside of its span of control and authority. When addressing this matter during the online visit, the acting Quality Manager did not seem to have had previous awareness of the QA position on the organisation chart and acknowledged how this may present itself as a challenge;
- According to the Personnel Management Policy, the *Head of Administration and Human Resources Management Coordinator provide a review of administration and training department staff self-assessments and written summary feedback to staff quarterly*. However, there does not seem to be a correspondent for academic staff, which, according to the institutional charter, is each individually accountable to the Academic Council, and there does not seem to be any line manager such as Dean, Head of Department, or Programme Coordinator;
- According to the SER, *the Rector and the Academic Council are responsible for managing the activities and development of the processes in the Webster Branch, and are accountable to the General Assembly, both independently and jointly*. The panel is therefore unclear what is the accountability of the Rector with the General Assembly in the implementation of the strategic planning and if the Rector can be held accountable in case of poor strategic management performance;
- The panel is very concerned about the capacity and capability of the entire administrative staff team in place at the time of the online visit. Barely any of the administrative staff interviewed by the panel was able to communicate in English language, in spite of having student-facing roles in an institution that plans to recruit international students as well, and which plans to recruit almost exclusively international academic staff (this matter is further detailed under Standard 4). Secondly, roles such as the IT specialist, Doctor, Inventory Management Specialist are outsourced to the local partner (BTU). Thirdly, some roles are currently merged to the extent to which they are virtually impossible to be managed properly, such as International Relations, Admissions Counsellor, Career Planning and Development Centre, Case Management and Student Service Coordinator - all currently filled by the same one individual. Also, in preparation for the online visit agenda, the institution's representative declared that the Marketing Coordinator and Student Service Coordinator are the same person; in fact, during the meeting organised by the panel, two different people claimed to hold these roles separately. The aspiration of the senior administration of the institution to have a 1:20/30 ratio of administrative staff to students is unrealistic with the team currently in place;
- Most importantly, the panel is very conflicted to observe that Webster University has made no arrangements and commitments to equip itself with human resource capability as a standalone institution would (this is the status of the Branch as far as the authorisation standards are concerned); the staff arrangements in place for the entire branch are mostly divided into: recycled academic staff from the Webster global network that did not go through transparent and objective procedures for hiring at the Branch in Georgia but were attached to the Branch via signed consent letters, recycled senior management that already holds high leadership positions in other campuses (the Academic Council members in Georgia are, at the same time, the Deputy Academic Director in Thailand, the Rector in Thailand and the Vice-Rector for Administration in Tashkent), recycled administrative staff of the local partner in which case the panel is wondering how fairly the recruitment process went since most of the administrative team presented during the online visit hold positions at BTU, or parachuted staff that did not seem to have been part of the recruitment process (as per the documentation submitted by the institution) but hold positions they are not qualified for from both the experience and qualifications perspective (Quality Manager).

For these reasons, the panel states very confidently that units and individuals at Webster University - Georgia are not placed on the organisation chart in a logical manner to ensure effective implementation of activities defined in the strategic plan, and achievement of the institutional goals, nor is the team equipped with sufficient, qualified individuals to meet the roles they are called to fulfil. The panel is also concerned to have learnt during the online visit that the organisation chart was developed feeding from the international experience of Webster and the Rector presented it to the GA; it is alarming that none of these filters has observed the fundamental irregularities in the chart.

The functions and responsibilities of structural units of the institution are defined and divided in the Webster University, Inc. Georgia Branch Activities and Management; however, the panel is not yet able to state whether functions are implemented effectively and in a coordinated manner because the institution is not yet operating. We could note, however, that the functions listed under the Branch Activities and Management are not always in sync with other institutional regulations which continue to add new responsibilities.

There is no student representative in any governance body at Webster Branch - Georgia, even if that would mean, temporarily, representation from other locations of the Webster network. This comes in direct contradiction with the Webster Student Handbook, which claims that students have the right to participate in University governance through the Student Government Association, other student organizations, and through University-wide committees. Furthermore, the specifics and scope of student representation is vague as all the submitted documentation, including the SER, university charter, strategic plan, action plan, and inputs from the interviews fail to bring more clarity on how this right is implemented in practice.
We would therefore like to remind the institution that, according to Article 43 of Chapter 6 of the Law on Higher Education of Georgia, "students have rights to elect a representative and be elected as a member of the students' self-government body, as well as of the management bodies of the higher education institution and its main educational units on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot". Furthermore, according to the European Ministers responsible for Higher Education described (in their Prague Communique, 2001) students as "competent, active and constructive partners" in the establishment and shaping of the European Higher Education Area. The panel is saddened to find that, in most of the documentation submitted by the institution, not only that students are not reflected in the spirit of partnership, but are referred to as *customers, training subjects, and consumers*.

When addressing the student representation matter during the online visit, the panel learnt that student engagement too was planned to be operationalised after the authorisation decision as it is usual practice at Webster University that students at different locations are not involved this far in advance. Additionally, the panel also underlines the need for the operational details of student representation so that it is organized as reflected in the pillars of the student movement published by the European Students Union (ESU):
- independently - by the students themselves, without the involvement of the institution;
- openly - with all current students having the right to vote and be elected, regardless of their academic performance or any other discriminatory criteria;
- democratically - the representatives should be elected by all the students at the corresponding level – e.g. Students in the Academic Council to be elected by all the students at institutional level;
- with precise regulations that ensure the formality and transparency of the process – adopt a formal document (drafted by the students themselves) that provides the exact rights, responsibilities and obligations for students' representatives, the length of the mandate for each position, mentions the exact percentage students have in all decision making bodies, etc.

The panel is not yet able to assess if the decisions of the management body related to academic, scientific and administrative issues, are made in a timely and effective manner given that the institution is not operational; based on the establishment stage it reached up to this point, there is no evidence to suspect otherwise.

The *Rules of Procedure* includes the regulations for document processing within the institution; the system for document processing is carried out through the means of an electronic system, automatic procedure management – the electronic programme for proceeding – E-document, which implies the reflection of all stages of the proceeding in the programme from the receipt of the document or the creation to its final execution/sending. Accordingly, during the proceedings an electronic signature, an electronic stamp is used.

According to the *Branch Activities and Management*, the following systems are in place at the Webster University network and will support the process management work of the Branch:
- Webster Human Resources portal powered by ADP;
- Electronic system for receiving applications and questions from entrants;
- Student Enrolment provided by Slate Technologies CRM "Slate";
- Electronic system for academic, invited staff applications (e.g., application for programme addition or change initiation);
- There are two different portals: CX-Web and Concourse (web-based portal);
- Student Services and informing electronic system;
- CX Web, Webster SharePoint Portal powered by Office 365 nestled in Connections;
- Qualification-Diploma Issuing electronic system;
- National Clearing House (US-wide portal);
- Staff Assessment electronic system;
- Strategy execution monitoring electronic system;
- Library electronic services, resource usage monitoring;
- EBSCO host, ProQuest, Avon, Gale, MOBIUS;
- Obtaining statistical data (students, undergraduates, short-term, use of resources, the performance of working hours-violations, etc.);
- Students data is in CX Web Portal;
- Staff and Faculty data: SharePoint/Human Resources Portal in connections.

However, the panel learnt during the online visit that Webster University - Georgia staff will only receive access to these systems and platforms after the positive authorisation decision; according to the interviews conducted by the panel, other than E-document dedicated to the document processing system, there is currently no other MIS that supports the governance and administration of the institution. This is further detailed under Standard 7.

As the university is not authorized yet, it is not able to register on EMIS (Education Management Information System) and update the status of its programmes.

The institution has developed a Business process continuity, financial management, and control system, which notes that the business continuity approach includes the gradual development of the branch, the announcement of small vacancies for entrants/students each year, with the increase in the number of students, the relevant decision is made regarding the analysis of material and technical resources and the expansion of the number of staff and academic/invited personnel. The document lists the principles of business process continuity and financial management-control; *the business continuity process is based on an analysis developed by the Quality Manager and the Head of Administration and presented to the Academic Council and the Rector every two years. The role of the quality manager is to assess issues related to business continuity in the teaching-learning, research, and socio-cultural-environmental-creative process. The head of administration considers the administration of material-technical, financial, international relations, and various other issues.* According to the same document, *the analysis should include the following information: a brief description of Webster Branch structure, staffing, personnel functions, number of students in the past year/years, including enrolment, outflows and expectations, description of problematic issues identified through internal quality assurance mechanisms, including student services. Description of career planning initiatives by Webster Branch staff (if any), analysis of financial assets and opportunities, risks to business continuity, and ways/recommendations to eliminate them.* An analysis that meets these requirements has not been made available to the panel. When addressing this matter during the online visit, the panel learnt that the analysis mentioned above has not yet been produced, and the institution does not currently have a plan which ensures continuity of all major business

processes taking place at the institution and does not take into account all possible risks, mechanisms for their prevention and a strategy for risk mitigation in case the prevention is not possible.

The existing network of international campuses and the strong global partnership, as well as international staff create solid preconditions for internationalization of academic activities. However, when referring to the internationalization strategy for the Georgian Branch specifically, this mostly relies on the existing experience and it does not actually reflect the specifics of the Caucasus region; the panel is rather surprised by this fact taking into account that the very establishment of the Branch in Georgia is, according to the SER, *planned to be the basis for access to quality education in the Caucasus region*. From an administrative perspective, the panel also notes that, at the time of the online visit, no staff was allocated to cover the internationalisation portfolio and no specific budget can be identified in relation to the internationalisation area; the panel also believes that the internationalisation priority is insufficiently reflected in the Strategic Plan taking into consideration the regional aspirations the institution has defined for itself. Finally, considering that the institution has not yet commenced its activities, the panel cannot yet assess the effective utilization of internationalization results in the work of the institution.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Charter of the Branch of Webster University Inc. in Georgia;
- Charter Governing Activities of Webster Branch in Georgia;
- Notice for Academic Council Appointments;
- General Assembly Meeting Minutes;
- Resolutions of the Webster University Board of Trustees;
- CVs of administrative staff;
- Organisation Chart;
- The Career Planning and Development Centre;
- Internal Quality Mechanisms;
- Personnel Management Policy;
- Law on Higher Education of Georgia;
- Prague Communique;
- Rules of Procedure;
- Branch Activities and Management;
- Webster Student Handbook;
- Business process continuity, financial management, and control system;
- Internationalization Policy of Webster University, Inc. Branch in Georgia;
- Strategic development plan 2022-2028;
- Self-evaluation report;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

**Recommendations:**
- Clarify the status of the institutional chart and ensure that the most recent version is formally adopted, signed and dated;
- Formally adopt an organisation chart based on higher education management best practice that would support the institution ensure effective implementation of activities defined in its strategic plan, and achievement of its goals;
- Expand the capacity and capability of the administrative staff of the Branch;
- Ensure that the *Branch Activities and Management* include the functions and responsibilities of different units exhaustively, and that they communicate effectively to other institutional regulations;
- Develop and adopt transparent and equitable criteria and election/appointment procedure for the institutional management, and in line with legislation; ensure that all management individuals and units are elected/appointed based on the predefined requirements, and based on the discussion of candidates' vision and plans;
- Revisit the composition of decisional, consultative and executive bodies so as to ensure student representation, as full members, at all levels; ensure that student engagement in decision making is implemented in accordance to the ESU pillars of the student movement;

- Develop and adopt a plan which ensures continuity of all major business processes taking place at the institution and takes into account all possible risks, mechanisms for their prevention and a strategy for risk mitigation in case the prevention is not possible;
- Align the internationalisation strategy to the regional (Caucasus) objective the institution has defined for itself and ensure that relevant human and financial resources are allocated to pursue this agenda.

**Suggestions:**
N/A

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
N/A

**Evaluation**
☐ Complies with requirements
☐ Substantially complies with requirements
☐ Partially complies with requirements
☒ Does not comply with requirements

## 2.2 Internal Quality Assurance Mechanisms

o 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.

o HEI has a mechanism for planning the 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**

According to Branch Activities and Management, the role of a Quality Manager has been set up to undertake the following responsibilities:

1. Establish – develop internal quality ensuring mechanisms in Georgian branch, coordinate processes, analyse and report, coordinate exam process;
2. Coordinate credit/study outcomes acknowledgement and mobility processes;
3. Ensure creation of individual study plans;
4. Consult students concerning components of study programmes, evaluation systems, credit acknowledgement, mobility, exchange programmes, drafting individual study schedule, mobility and career development;
5. Participate in student employment and career development issues;
6. Participate in extracurricular activities;
7. Participate in field research, identify labour market requirements in region or/and Georgia, coordinate processing information and reporting;
8. Assist the integration of people with special educational needs and people with disabilities in Branch of Webster;
9. Participation in preparing/developing strategic and 3-year action plans, carry out the activities under plans or/and be co-participant, reporting on their performance;
10. Assisting integration of foreign and mobility students in the learning process;
11. Coordinate academic board meetings and documenting them;
12. Inform academic board about awarding of a qualification, coordinate follow up processes;
13. Identify development activities on issues within competence, initiate proposals from time to time to academic board;
14. Coordinate external quality enhancement mechanisms stated under the Georgian legislation;
15. Coordinate/participate in meeting of students and employers;
16. Coordinate/participate in various trainings, seminars, work meetings;
17. Involvement in creating - development process of study programmes, moreover, within the competence, initiate changes in and / or participate in the development of various regulatory acts of the branch;
18. Coordinate formation of students' portfolio;

19. Gather information on the issues within the competence, process statistical data, report quarterly and annually, participate in preparing nomenclature development, participate in forming the documents for archive;
20. Provide teaching-learning related information to the participants of study programme, as required by the legislation of Georgia, if needed;
21. During performing duties, besides tight cooperation with staff of Georgian branch, cooperation with the staff of international net of Webster University, exchange of information within competence, inform them regarding mobility, credit acknowledgment, addition/development of study programmes, thematic research processes, coordinate their participation if needed;
22. Initiate the development of learning, material resources of study programme, as needed;
23. Coordinate publishing relevant information on issues within the competence on web-page, send information to corporate emails if needed;
24. Self-evaluation and participation in professional development.

The panel believes that some of these responsibilities are not best fitted with a quality assurance service, in particular looking at numbers 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 15, 18, which seem to belong in other units better. The institution is urged to re-assess if all the responsibilities above are effectively placed with the Quality Manager or should sit under different structural units. On the other hand, the Quality Manager does not appear to have a formalised contribution in areas where normally it should: staff performance review, supporting evidence based decision making, strategic management monitoring, etc.

Furthermore, responsibilities that are attributed to the Quality Assurance Manager according to the *Strategic Planning Methodology*, or *Business process continuity, financial management, and control system*, are not included in this document, evidencing that the list of tasks is not exhaustive.

The panel cannot observe if every unit of the institution is effectively involved in the implementation of internal quality assurance mechanisms because on the one hand, the Internal Quality Mechanisms do not describe the organisation of the quality assurance system - the responsibilities of all organisational units as well as those of institutional leadership individual staff members and students with respect to quality assurance - and, on the other hand, the institution is only now being established and has not yet reached the implementation stage of the QA tasks.

Furthermore, the panel is concerned to note that the quality assurance service is insufficiently equipped from the human resources perspective to meet such a comprehensive role with expanded responsibilities. More importantly, the current position holder - the Quality Manager which prefers to be introduced as *Acting* Quality Manager - does not have the relevant experience or qualifications that would enable him to meet the responsibilities of this role. Also, as per the documentation submitted by the institution, three candidates were shortlisted during the recruitment process, none of which is the current position holder. It is therefore unclear how this role was occupied, in addition to the demonstrated pattern of recycled existing Webster University Staff (in this case, the Vice-Rector for Administration in Tashkent).

Lastly, as noted under Standard 1, if the Quality Manager is called to meet non-academic responsibilities as well, the institution should reconsider its position in the organisation chart to ensure a more overarching scope.

One of the principles included in the Business process continuity, financial management, and control system is as follows:
*Quality Culture - The quality assurance policy of the branch defines the main directions of quality development and the main priorities that the branch will adhere to for all stakeholders. Quality management policy in the branch, the development of branch activities is implemented based on and through the quality assurance system, personnel management policy and strategic, action plan methodology.*
However, the panel was unable to locate a quality assurance/management policy/system at the level of the Branch, which raises the question of applicability and contextualisation of this document to the Georgian context. Furthermore, when the panel addressed this matter with the relevant staff, it

seemed that they had difficulties relating to the term or grasping at least a general understanding of what quality culture may mean at the Webster University - Georgia.

The university defines its quality assurance plans in a regulatory document called *Internal Quality Mechanisms*, according to which, the implementation of the internal quality mechanism is a means to achieve the goals of the Webster branch and is two-component: a review of ongoing process satisfaction (Student Satisfaction Survey) and an assessment of competency-based learning (Competency Assessment). As mentioned previously, this is a very restrictive understanding of directions of quality development, as areas such as staff performance review, supporting evidence based decision making, strategic management monitoring, satisfaction assessment of internal stakeholders other than students, external stakeholders, etc, are omitted altogether. From this perspective, there is no indication that the quality assurance system supports the leadership of the institution in making decisions based on the results of quality assurance.

Firstly, according to the Internal Quality Mechanisms, the satisfaction survey is to be conducted amongst all students, while the target indicators for measuring the quality of teaching-learning are:
a) Teaching-learning appropriate environment and accessibility;
b) Teaching-learning relevant learning resource;
c) Teaching-learning relevant administrative services;
d) Achieving the learning outcomes defined by the educational program;
e) Employment of graduates in the relevant position, career achievements.

For the implementation of these targets, a document called *Instruction* was made available to the panel; this includes a collection of closed questions, as well as guidance on future elements of the survey template: answer options for closed questions, instructions for open-ended questions and for the additional notes. A final survey template is not yet available. As is stands now, not all target indicators defined in the Internal Quality Mechanisms are attended to:
- the employment component is not captured; the panel argues that the career achievements of the graduates is not a matter of student satisfaction, but collection of objective data that gives a screenshot of the student trajectory after the graduation; in this case, the target indicator should not be aimed to be covered through this specific tool.
- likewise, the achievement of the learning outcomes defined by the educational programme is not captured in the survey questions but in this case as well, the panel argues that this should rather be informed by objective assessment data collected through a different tool (such as the competency assessment).
- the target indicators on the administrative services, learning resources, environment and accessibility are in fact so broadly phrased that fail to indicate a specific area in need of improvement. For example, the statement „the library resources are available at any time" does not provide sufficient detail so as to support the institution in its quality enhancement; a „I completely disagree" answer from a student does not tell the university if the dissatisfaction refers to opening hours or attitude of staff, to quality of books or the number of copies of resources therefore the institution cannot use the answer in improving a service in particular. Or the statement „the administration responds to my application in a timely manner" does not tell the university what the dissatisfaction is about, about which application, submitted to which of the student services, so as to inform improvement in a targeted manner. Hence, the evaluation results may not always be fit to be utilized for further improvement.
- The Internal Quality Mechanisms mentions that student service, environment, and accessibility should be evaluated each semester, which the panel is concerned that will lead to an over-saturation of the student population given that in best practice these matters are only assessed once per year;
- even though no target indicator has been defined to capture the student satisfaction with the teaching and learning experience and, in particular, the individual performance of the teacher, this component has been integrated in the closed questions already defined in the Instruction; however, the panel cannot identify any connection between the student satisfaction with the teacher performance and the staff performance review system, as observed in the Personnel Management Policy;

- as far as satisfaction is concerned, it is quite limited to only capture the views of students and leave out the satisfaction of academic and non-academic staff with the employment conditions and working environment, the satisfaction of graduates with their programme, the satisfaction of employers, etc. These too should be captured by the quality assurance system. The Internal Quality Mechanisms mentions that learning outcomes related to the achievement of learning outcomes defined by the educational programme should be assessed as mandatory by students and implementing staff, and it also mentions that the survey of the employers should be conducted at least once every two years - however these statements are contradicted in the same document that also presents the only satisfaction assessment to be conducted with the students.

From these perspectives, the panel cannot confidently state that the quality assurance mechanisms ensure the continuous assessment and development of the institution's activities and its resources.

Secondly, according to the Internal Quality Mechanisms, competency research aims to *analyse student achievement in relation to defined learning outcomes, evaluate the effectiveness of competency testing, review and improve the institution's teaching policy*.

The assessment system at the Webster Branch - Georgia includes, according to the Student Learning Assessment, for each learning outcome: a) what artifacts will students create to demonstrate their learning, b) what tools (e.g., a rubric) will be used to evaluate the artifacts to determine the extent to which the outcomes were achieved, and c) how this data will be collected and aggregated from all faculty in all locations teaching related courses. According to the SLO Assessment Cycle, the institution is planning that the achievement of outcomes is assessed and the results are used to inform next steps. However, the panel is unable to observe the implementation of this policy in practice considering that the institution does not yet have any educational delivery.

The institution has developed a performance evaluation system for its staff (academic, scientific, invited, administrative, support) based on: the performance assessed against the strategic and action plans, appraisal, and self-assessment. The system is summarily presented in the *Personnel Management Policy*, which is cross-referencing the *Strategic Planning Methodology*, as well as the *Internal Quality Mechanisms*. The panel is concerned with the efficacy and efficiency of this system, noting the following:
- as mentioned under Standard 1, measuring the progress in terms of strategic planning will be extremely difficult given that the indicators for success in both the strategic and action plan are not sufficiently measurable;
- the staff performance appraisal, normally conducted by the line manager, might face difficulties in situations where line management is either not clear or lists an overwhelming number of direct reports to a manager (e.g. Training Department);
- the self-assessment is conducted, according to the *Personnel Management Policy*, against the functions of each role and should include a list of duties and the action taken along each assignment in a particular month accompanied with the supporting evidence;
- none of the tools allow for the staff performance review (by manager or self) to include matters outside of the job description (e.g. leadership, ethics, professionalism, organisational development contribution, society contribution, etc.);
- the panel was unable to find any other component that feeds into the staff performance review in order to ensure a 360 approach, such as peer review or student satisfaction.

As mentioned previously, the two tools planned by the institution to be used for internal quality assurance purposes are the satisfaction survey and competence research, which have been detailed previously in this section. Additionally, for purposes of programme level quality evaluation and improvement, educational programmes must, according to the Student Learning Assessment:
- Have a standing, five-year assessment plan (due December 2020);
- Submit an annual assessment plan each September;
- Submit an annual assessment report each June.

While the institution has not reached the implementation stage of this policy, the same document prescribes what the content of each of those documents will be. The panel notices little to no usage of data to inform improvement: there does not seem to be any engagement of academic/invited/scientific staff other than the course lead, nor is there any student and external stakeholders (employers, alumni, etc.) involvement. There is no reference to usage of assessment results or other statistics, including outcomes from the satisfaction survey and competence research, as defined in the *Internal Quality Mechanisms*.

Webster University – Georgia has developed the *Methodology for Student Contingent Planning and Determining the Number of Staff*, according to which the human and material resources of the Branch, specifics of educational programmes, principles of student centred education etc. should be taken into account. The interviews conducted by the panel revealed that this methodology has not been taken into consideration when determining the marginal number of students requested by the institution through the authorization process, the number of staff or the material resources necessary for the delivery of the six programmes (this is further explained in Standards 4 and 7). Furthermore, the individuals that are theoretically responsible for the implementation of this methodology were not informed about this regulation and they could not explain the rationale behind the planned student body.

**Evidences/indicators:**
- Branch Activities and Management;
- Organisation Chart;
- Strategic Planning Methodology;
- Business process continuity, financial management, and control system
- Organisation Chart;
- Internal Quality Mechanisms;
- Instruction;
- Personnel Management Policy;
- Student Learning Assessment;
- SLO Assessment Cycle;
- Methodology for student contingent planning and determining the number of staff;
- Self-evaluation report;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

**Recommendations:**
- Revise the roles and responsibilities of the Quality Manager so that it has a formal contribution on all relevant areas, such as staff performance review, supporting evidence based decision making, strategic management monitoring, etc, while redirecting other responsibilities less fit to other organisational units; ensure all responsibilities assigned to the Quality Manager through other regulatory documents are in sync with the unit description;
- Ensure that every unit of the institution is effectively involved in the implementation of internal quality assurance mechanisms, and such roles are formally regulated; ensure the engagement of other internal and external stakeholders in quality assurance;
- Allocate appropriate human, information and material resources to enable the Quality Assurance unit to meet its responsibilities effectively, including a qualified Manager; revisit the position of the unit in the organisation chart for the same purpose;
- Ensure that the Georgian branch is provided with contextualised, fit for purpose regulatory documents that accurately reflect the branch activities and organisational structure;
- Expand the remit of the internal quality assurance mechanisms in order to cover the continuous assessment and development of all institution's activities and its resources, including areas such as: staff performance review, supporting evidence based decision making, strategic management monitoring, satisfaction assessment of internal stakeholders other than students, external stakeholders, etc, are omitted altogether;
- Ensure a direct link between the quality assurance system and the strategic and operations management so that the quality assurance system supports the leadership of the institution in making evidence based decisions;

- Revisit the target indicators of the *Internal Quality Mechanisms* so that they are more comprehensive and fit for purpose and ensure that there are dedicated and effective tools to capture each of them;
- Finalise all surveys and data collection tools and ensure that they are statistically valid, as well as detailed enough to inform improvement in a targeted manner and ensure that evaluation results can be utilized for further improvement;
- Revisit the performance review system of all staff with a view of giving it a 360 approach that includes the views of students and peers, as well as expanding it to topics other than strategic planning and job descriptions, but transversal contributions to the academic community: leadership, ethics, professionalism, organisational development contribution, society contribution, etc.);
- Reconsider the system for programme evaluation and development so that it is more data-informed and engages the whole range of stakeholders;
- Ensure the implementation in practice of the Methodology for student contingent planning and determining the number of staff, in accordance to the actual resources available.

**Suggestions:**

Consider adopting a more expanded Quality Assurance Policy that describes the institutional quality assurance system, its processes, mechanisms, instruments, reporting, data collection, timeframes, quality cycle, responsibilities of all individuals and units involved in these processes

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
N/A

**Evaluation**
- ☐ Complies with requirements
- ☐ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☐ Partially complies with requirements
- ☒ Does not comply with requirements

## 2.3. Observing Principles of Ethics and Integrity

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

**Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements**

Webster University – Georgia has developed the *Code of Ethics for students and staff*, based on three guiding principles of: academic freedom, freedom of conscience, and the right to choose. The document also regulates the procedures to be followed in case of an alleged breach in the *Code of Ethics* provisions: a special commission investigates the case and advises the Rector on measures to be taken, who then *decides on the action based on internal norms*. The *Code of Ethics* does not proceed to elaborate further what the respective internal norms specifically refer to, leaving therefore unclear what are the applicable sanctions; the panel underlines that any measures to be taken after a demonstrated breach in the *Code of Ethics* should be clear, transparent, predictable and commensurate with the gravity of the misconduct.

The *Code of Ethics* also includes the mechanisms for prevention, detection and addressing plagiarism, describing the relevant procedure to be followed - a special commission appointed by the Rector investigates and demonstrates academic fraud and, if confirmed, it will advise the rector, who will decide for one of the following sanctions to be imposed:
a) Give a written warning;
b) Challenge all articles by the author and check for plagiarism or falsification;
c) Establish special monitoring of future activities/learning process;
d) Terminate labour contract/student status.

The panel notes that Webster University headquarters (HQ) actively applies the software Turnitin, which is also planned to be implemented at branch level; however, its use is optional as each individual faculty member has the liberty to decide if the student assignments are processed through the software or not. Furthermore, the institution has not determined through any of its institutional policies what is the maximum acceptable percentage in the similarity score identified by the software. The panel understands that, based on the assessment type (multiple choice, essay, etc) some differences apply, and recommends that institutional regulations make distinct clarifications to ensure consistency and standardisation amongst its faculty body.

The *Code of Ethics* does not make any reference to the notion of conflict of interests, which should be safeguarded as a principle of ethics and integrity. In fact, the panel noted that there currently are situations in which individuals in the organisation are involved in multiple interests, financial or otherwise, where serving one interest could involve working against another; this refers to a few members of the administration (that in some cases even hold top management positions) that are staff members of both Webster University - Georgia and its local partner BTU; the two partners have entered a financial agreement where it is possible that staff members working for both organisations face a position of conflicting interests. According to the interviews conducted by the panel, there has been no formal undertaking to preserve the integrity of actions and decisions from the conflict of interest perspective (such as signing a statement or waiver).

As the institution did not commence its operations, the panel cannot yet assess the measures taken by the administration to promote the ethical code and conduct norms. However, we have observed the *Webster Student Handbook*, which the institution is planning to use in order to disseminate its expectations amongst students, and which provides clear definitions of cheating, fabrication, plagiarism and academic dishonesty, provides a statement of ethics and establishes clear conduct expectations. The Handbook also provides clear procedures and disciplinary actions in cases of students breaching the defined conduct expectations. However, the document is a grave need of contextualisation, as further explained under Standard 5.

The Code of Ethics has not been made publicly available on the institutional website.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Code of Ethics;
- Webster Student Handbook;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

**Recommendations:**
- Ensure that the Code of Ethics includes the applicable sanctions in case of breaches in the conduct expectations defined by the institution;
- Revisit the provisions regarding the implementation of Turnitin in order to ensure consistency, standardisation and predictability in its use by the faculty body;
- Regulate the institutional understanding of conflict of interest and ensure its implementation in practice in order to ensure adherence to principles of ethics and integrity;
- Publish the Code of Ethics on the institutional website.

**Suggestions:**
N/A

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
N/A

**Evaluation**
☐ Complies with requirements
☐ Substantially complies with requirements
☒ Partially complies with requirements
☐ Does not comply with requirements

# 3. Educational Programmes

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

| **3.1 Design and Development of Educational Programmes** |
|---|
| HEI has a policy for planning, designing, implementing and developing educational programmes. |
| **Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements**<br><br>Webster University – Georgia is planning to deliver six programmes developed at the HQ, namely:<br>● Business Administration (BSc);<br>● International Relations (BA);<br>● Mass Communication (BA);<br>● International Relations (MA);<br>● Media Communications (MA);<br>● Business Administration (MBA).<br><br>Webster University has been granted institutional accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) in the USA; according to the local quality assurance arrangements, Webster University does not need to undergo individual programme accreditation for any programme at any of its locations, locally or internationally, provided that it submits a notice to the HLC in relation to the establishment of new programmes. Therefore, it should be clarified that the six programmes are not accredited locally in the US because no such expectation is in place for the institution once it secured institutional accreditation. However, the institution plans to submit the six programmes to NCEQE for accreditation in the future.<br><br>The efficiency and sustainability of the educational programmes have been demonstrated at the HQ and university branches around the globe; the university staff have a certain degree of flexibility to adapt programmes' content to the local context, such as introducing Georgian cases in the delivery of the programmes. By the time of the authorisation visit, no adjustments have been made in the content and structure of the programmes besides shifting them into the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), that is used across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA); also, the information about programmes, available online at www.webster.edu.ge, copies the HQ *Undergraduate Studies Catalogue/Graduate Studies Catalogue*.<br><br>The university has developed the *Rules for Development, Modification and Cancellation of Undergraduate and Graduate Educational Programmes* which defines programme volume in ECTS, programme structure, grading system, learning outcomes, etc. mostly repeating rules of the HO. The document also defines how curricular changes could be implemented: *the Academic Council is authorized to apply to the Rector of the Webster Branch with an initiative to add to the curriculum being implemented at the Head Office. The Rector shall issue an order on the implementation of the relevant educational programmes with the consent of the Curriculum Committee of the Head Office.*<br><br>According to the *Rules for Development, Modification and Cancellation of Undergraduate and Graduate Educational Programmes* university partner organizations or interested legal entities, alongside university staff could initiate the development of the educational programmes. The panel found that the Webster Branch *commits to provide transparency about possible changes to the curriculum and/or existing changes, informing students within a reasonable time frame, and facilitating students' decision-making about learning objectives, taking into account their interest*; while this evidences that the university is planning to take into consideration students' interest, the panel believes that in order for programme development to be considered a participatory process, students, alumni and labour market representatives shall be involved in the programme development process more actively. The |

same is applicable for the process of changing the educational programmes, where the panel thinks that the involvement of local stakeholders while contextualizing the programmes to the local needs is of crucial importance.

As previously mentioned, according to the interviews conducted by the panel, the six programmes planned to be offered by the university have been chosen based on secondary data, while field research is planned for the future to define further academic offers. The labour market research is defined as also one of the basis for initiating a new educational programme - this echoes university statements about research for marketing and promotional purposes, but currently, since the university has not yet commenced its activities, the panel cannot yet assess the efficiency of mechanisms for the development of a new curriculum at Webster Georgia Branch.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Rules for Development, Modification and Cancellation of Undergraduate and Graduate Education Programs;
- Self-evaluation report;
- Strategic development plan 2022-2028;
- Action Plan 2022-2024;
- Education programmes - Undergraduate Studies Catalogue / Graduate Studies Catalogue;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

**Recommendations:**
- Increase the involvement of stakeholders, including students, alumni and employers, in the development of educational programs;
- Ensure that adjustments and amendments to the structure and content of programmes are operated in order to better fit them to the needs of the local labour market and societal context;
- Ensure evidence-based decision making in the case of programme establishment and development.

**Suggestions:**
N/A

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
N/A

**Evaluation**
- ☐ Complies with requirements
- ☒ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☐ Partially complies with requirements
- ☐ Does not comply with requirements

### 3.2  Structure and Content of Educational Programmes
- o Programme learning outcomes are clearly stated and are in line with higher education level and qualification to be granted
- o With the help of individualized education programmes, 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**

The study programmes, proposed for delivery at Webster University – Georgia, have been developed at the HQ and are successfully implemented in a number of other campuses. All programmes have clearly defined learning outcomes that correspond to the Georgian National Qualifications Framework education levels. The programmes are structured logically and feature a grading scale, assessment system, course descriptions, learning process organization and syllabi. Timeframe of programmes, as well as volume of programme components reflect specifics of the field and are oriented on students with average academic performance. Students have possibility to elect non-compulsory subjects from the comprehensive programme catalogues, published on the university website.

The programmes syllabi have a standardized format, but lack a detailed description of learning outcomes evaluation - all syllabi have the same statement: *Internal and external assignments and assessments based upon Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation standards (in case of BBA - Internal and external assignments and assessments based upon Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and Accreditation Council for Business Schools and programmes (ACBSP) accreditation standards)*. The panel considers that this statement is not enough for students to understand how their performance in specific courses will be evaluated and what kind of assignments and assessments will be used. When the study programmes syllabi were initially submitted to the panel in preparation for the authorisation process, they also lacked the learning resources/literature; the syllabi were modified during the submission of additional materials and now specific textbooks have been named in most of the syllabi, although in some cases it is only indicated *"Academic Resource Centre/Webster University Library" (MBA program)*.

In spite of the assessment system information lacking in the syllabi, the panel noted that students can gain access to full information about the assessment system and required learning resources through the LMS system - the demonstration provided to the panel during the online visit of the LMS (Canvas) has shown that enrolled students will have access to all relevant information, including specific evaluation system of a given course, literature, academic calendar, etc.

As stated in the SER, "*each educational programme is focused on small groups of students, the programmes define the requirements and individual needs of the students, therefore the programmes include forms for the development of such a plan*". More specific information can be found in *Academic Policies and Information*, defining degree options and requirements, as well as internships. During the interviews conducted by the panel it was underlined that students will have individual consultations in order to better navigate their learning experience on the study programmes; also during the meetings conducted on the visit, the panel learnt that student orientation will be ensured *by the career service and programme leaders*. However, this may not be very accurate in the case of Georgia branch since the position of the programme leader does not exist and the career service will be provided partly by the marketing coordinator and partly by the student services; the panel fears that the consultations for individualized learning journeys on the educational programmes cannot be efficiently ensured by the existing academic and administrative infrastructure in place (this is approached more extensively in Standard 5).

**Evidences/indicators**
- Rules for Development, Modification and Cancellation of Undergraduate and Graduate Education Programs
- Self-evaluation report;
- Student Learning Assessment;
- Academic Policies and Information;
- Seven-Year Strategic Development Plan;
- Three-Year Action Plan;
- Education programmes - Undergraduate Studies Catalogue/Graduate Studies Catalogue;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

**Recommendations:**
- Revisit the structure and content of the syllabi for all programmes in order to ensure all available information is available to students, including the learning materials/literature to support the delivery of the programme, as well as the assessment methods;
- Clarify the responsibilities for students' guidance on individualized learning journeys in order to ensure that relevant support is in place and fit for purpose.

**Suggestions:**
N/A

| **Best Practices (if applicable):** |
| --- |
| N/A |

| **Evaluation** |
| --- |
| ☐ Complies with requirements |
| ☒ Substantially complies with requirements |
| ☐ Partially complies with requirements |
| ☐ Does not comply 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**

Webster University – Georgia has the same system of learning outcomes assessment as at the HQ, which is based upon Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation standards and which the panel found as fair, transparent and in line with legal acts of Georgia - a student's performance in each of their courses is determined by a combination of results of assignments, attendance, examinations, and/or other assigned work as described in the course syllabus, as per the *Undergraduate Studies Catalogue 2021-22 / Graduate Studies Catalogue 2021-22*. The grades are available to all students at the end of each scheduled term. Students have the possibility to repeat a course for a higher grade, and the relevant procedure in this regard is provided in the catalogues.

The panel noted that the assessment system is not described in the syllabi, however detailed information about the assessment methods for specific courses is available for enrolled students through the LMS system, as it was demonstrated to the panel during interviews. The system for the learning outcomes assessment is regulated in *Academic Policies and Information* and *Student Learning Assessment.* However, the local context is yet to be taken into account, particularly considering the specifics of a newly established branch and the potential language issues of students, supporting mechanisms in order to promote the improvement of students' academic performance. According to the interviews conducted by the panel, language courses will also be provided specifically for freshmen.

As the university has not yet commenced its activities, the panel cannot yet assess the efficiency neither of learning outcomes assessment nor the supporting mechanisms for improvement of students' learning.

The system for grade appeals available to students is described in the *Student Handbook*: the institution recommends that grade disputes should be resolved between the student and the instructor in the first instance; should that not yield satisfactory results any student may submit an appeal *if they believe that their grade is arbitrary or assigned for non-academic reasons*, in which case *the matter is discussed with the appropriate chair in St. Louis, or the site director at extended campuses*. If the grade dispute is not resolved within three months, the student may appeal the grade to the appropriate dean to review the procedures the instructor used in determining the grade.

While the panel is not in position to assess the effectiveness of the Appeals procedure as of now, we have noted that there are a few challenges from the policy and procedure perspective:
- the document does not clarify if the appellation system is available for all types of assessments (multiple choice tests, oral exams, projects, etc);
- the panel finds that the grounds the students can base their appeals on are very restrictive and question the very openness and fairness of the procedure in the first place. It is common practice for students to also be able to lodge appeals for grounds such as: the relevant assessment criteria have been met but not acknowledged, the assessments were not conducted in accordance with the institutional policy and/or syllabi, the assessment procedures, including examinations, were not conducted fairly, there were medical or other extenuating circumstances

of which the instructor was unaware when assessment decisions were being made, there was unfairness or impropriety on the part of the instructor, the student was unjustifiably excluded from an examination or an assessment opportunity, etc.

- the assigned individuals that an appeal may be submitted with is also subject to improvement as it refers to the roles of *site director* and *appropriate dean*, none of which are included in the organisational chart for the Georgian branch;
- the timelines included in the procedure are not always quite reasonable. The procedure does not provide clarity of a specific deadline by when appeals might be submitted, but only requires that they are addressed in a *timely manner*, not later than one academic year. The same applies to the time available for resolution, which in the first instance of appeal is of 3 months; the panel considers this an unnecessarily long waiting time;
- the procedure gives students the possibility to escalate the request if it wasn't addressed in a timely manner; and yet, the end goal of this endeavour *is that the appropriate dean will review the procedures the instructor used in determining the grade*; this seems un fit for purpose;
- the short provision on grade appeals fails to reassure students that they can argue the assessment judgment without fear of repercussion.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Self-evaluation report;
- Student Handbook;
- Student Learning Assessment;
- Academic Policies and Information;
- SLO Assessment Cycle;
- Guidelines for Curriculum Maps;
- Strategic development plan 2022-2028;
- Action Plan 2022-2024;
- Education programmes - Undergraduate Studies Catalogue / Graduate Studies Catalogue;
- HLS Policy: Criteria for Accreditation/Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

**Recommendations:**
- Ensure that the assessment system is clearly described in the syllabi;
- Substantially revise the appeals system in order to iron out its deficiencies and ensure that it is fair and fit for purpose.

**Suggestions:**
N/A

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
N/A

**Evaluation**
- ☐ Complies with requirements
- ☒ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☐ Partially complies with requirements
- ☐ Does not comply 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

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

**Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements**

Webster University – Georgia has developed and approved the *Personnel Management Policy* which is based on the following principles: selection of staff with transparent criteria, staff performance appraisal and self-assessment, staff development. The document provides the general principles and rules for staff management from selection, appraisal and self-assessment to development.

The institution has also developed the *Rules and Conditions for Holding an Academic Position*, according to which academic positions are occupied through open competition, and all interested parties are given the opportunity to ensure a transparent, equitable, accessible and fair selection. The document also regulates that the procedure for holding an academic position consists of three stages – submitting the application, shortlisting the applicants for interview, interviewing them and making the decisions.

The selection criteria for academic staff, as identified in the *Rules and Conditions for Holding an Academic Position,* are in compliance with the Georgian Legislation, as follows:
  a) Professor - a person with a doctorate or equivalent academic degree, who has at least 6 years of experience in scientific and pedagogical work;
  b) Associate Professor - a person with an academic degree of Doctor or an equivalent degree with at least 3 years of experience in scientific pedagogical work;
  c) Assistant Professor - A person with an academic degree of Doctor or an equivalent degree;
  d) A doctoral student may be elected to the position of Assistant.
However, some statements in the *Rules and Conditions for Holding an Academic Position* are not in compliance with the national legislation, namely: *holding an academic position in the Webster branch, granting the relevant status, is possible in a different way from this rule for persons holding an academic position in the Webster International Network. The decision on this shall be made in agreement with the General Assembly by the Rector and the Academic Council. As a result of which the order of the Rector of the Webster Branch is issued regarding the granting of the academic status defined by the legislation of Georgia to the person (s)*. This text implies that the rule can be put on hold in the case of current Webster employees, where other rules may apply and no local legislative compliance is ensured.

After careful examination of the documents provided by the Webster University – Georgia and after having conducted different interviews during the online visit, the panel did not identify any evidence of recruitment, selection and hiring of the academic staff specifically for Webster University - Georgia, which is the entity that has applied for authorization and obtaining the status of HEI. The panel did have the opportunity to meet highly qualified, experienced and motivated staff, but they were employees of the Webster global network, which is not the object of this authorisation process and of this panel.

The institution provided the so-called Letters of Consent, that is, *Eligibility for Instruction* signed by the Rector and by the prospective instructors which are currently working for different branches of Webster University; however, the panel underlines that these letters do not indicate a selection and appointment of the academic staff according to the Georgian legislation, as defined in the authorisation standards, nor do they reflect a transparent, equitable, accessible and fair selection, as the institution has defined in its *Charter* and the *Personnel Management Policy*. The respective letters provide information about the position, area of specialization, duration and start of instruction, duties, remuneration of the personnel and start with the following text: *This document serves as notice for teaching eligibility at Webster University – Georgia. Upon review of your curriculum vitae, academic and professional experience, you have been credentialed in the following capacities*. The steps quoted in the respective paragraph - reviewing the CVs, academic and professional experience - cannot be

considered selection of the staff *after an open, transparent and objective legal procedure* as required by the Georgian legislation.

*The Charter - Governing Activities of Webster Branch in Georgia* regulates the transparent and objective procedure for selecting/hiring invited staff according to the Georgian legislation, but the panel was not able to assess the implementation of this regulation, as the institution does not have any invited personnel yet.

Webster University – Georgia has developed and generally implemented a transparent procedure for selecting and hiring the administrative and support staff, which envisages the identification of qualification requirements (e.g. HE degree, at least two years of professional experience relevant to the vacancy, knowledge of English etc.), announcement of open competition, identification and approval of selection criteria, selection commission etc. by a special decree of the Rector, promoting the vacancies on specialized web pages, interviews with short-listed applicants etc. However, the panel noticed that the branch did not implement the policy in a consistent way; for example, according to the Internal Regulations, knowledge of English on B2 level is required, but the administrative/support staff needed an interpreter during the interviews conducted by the panel during the authorisation visit, and are also planning to use translators when interacting on a daily basis with future students and staff. Furthermore, as previously mentioned under Standard 2, the panel is wondering how fairly the recruitment process was conducted for the administrative staff since most of the team presented during the online visit either hold positions at the local partner - BTU, or are staff that were not part of the recruitment process (as per the documentation submitted by the institution) but hold administrative positions, some of which they are not qualified for.

The institution has developed the *Rules for Affiliation of Academic Staff*, according to which a written agreement is made between the branch and the person selected on the basis of the *Rules for holding academic positions*. However, the academic staff has not been selected according to the above mentioned procedure. It should also be mentioned that part of the affiliation regulation of the Branch is not in compliance with the Georgian legislation as it considers affiliated academic staff of Webster University HQ involved in the branch educational programmes as affiliated academic staff of the Webster University – Georgia.

The *Charter - Governing Activities of Webster Branch in Georgia* and the *Rules for Development, Modification and Cancellation of Undergraduate and Graduate Education programmes* define the main duties of the academic staff as participating and/or leading teaching and learning, research activities, initiating and/or participating in curricula design and development. The panel was not able to find any document that reflects the principles of involvement of academic and scientific staff in decision-making processes. In fact, we believe that it would be challenging for any academic staff to be engaged in decision making processes considering that none of the roles in the governance bodies are based on elections and their appointment is not grounded on a transparent and predictable process (see Standard 2). According to the *Webster University Policy Handbook*, involvement in the university, academic and professional communities' activities is one of the criteria that will be used in making the initial status determination and for continuing status periodic reviews.

The approach of the institution in regards to the staff professional development is regulated in the *Personnel Management Policy* and in the *Staff Productivity Assessment System,* which presents continuous learning as an institutional core value. In this sense, faculty are expected to initiate and maintain their continuous learning in order to:
1. Remain current in their discipline;
2. Enhance current courses;
3. Meet licensure requirements;
4. Mentor graduate students;
5. Increase understanding of how students learn;
6. Foster innovation.

The Measures of Performance of professional development at Webster University - Georgia are structured in discovery, integration, application and teaching.

According to the *Personnel Management Policy* Webster's human resources development and training departments identify and design professional development programmes in response to employee evaluations and requests. Written application should address the Head of Administration and be documented within the Human Resources Department. None of the documents clarify if and how student feedback informs professional development, neither is it clear to the panel who and how often will approach individual staff members for developmental and growth individual support; particularly, the panel points out that in the organisation chart proposed by the Webster University - Georgia, academic staff members do not seem to have line managers, there is no position of Programme Head/Lead/Coordinator. According to the same chart, all academic staff are placed under the Academic Council, with no individual direct report; it is therefore concerning to the panel that staff do not have the right human infrastructure in place to foster their growth and development.

Between the two documents regulating the staff professional development, the focus is rather on academic and invited staff, while the references to administrative staff are limited to mostly one paragraph.

The Action Plan 2022-2024 envisages that in terms of staff professional development the institution will:
- Conduct workshops with the Webster Branch staff on the use of the portal for the introduction of e-services;
- Conduct a seminar for students and Webster staff on human behaviour and the relationship between the physical world;
- Identifying staff development needs - interviewing staff;
- Implementation of activities / project / seminar according to identified needs, etc.

These activities are planned to achieve Goal 3 - Foster a lifelong desire to learn and actively serve communities and the world; and Goal 7 - Human Resources development of the Webster Branch. The panel finds these specific activities rather limited as they do not cover the whole range of opportunities for staff professional development. Likewise, the indicators for success determined for the activities give no indication of the institutional commitment for professional development and will present a challenge from the metrics perspective (as detailed in Standard 1).

The *Internal Regulations of Webster University – Georgia* defines the forms and general principles of remuneration and encouragement, where it is envisaged that the following forms of incentives may be applied to Webster Branch personnel:
a) Thanking in writing;
b) Granting monetary reward;
c) Rewarding with a valuable gift;
d) Career advancement or temporary increase in the amount of remuneration;
e) Removal of existing (current) disciplinary sanction.

However, even if the documents argue that the incentives are granted *for exemplary performance of official duties, conscientious service, special difficulty, or important tasks and in case of other objective grounds,* the panel was not able to find the respective *objective grounds,* as they are neither regulated specifically, nor are they referenced in the performance review system, as described in the *Staff Productivity Assessment System, Personnel Management Policy* and the *Strategic Planning Methodology.*

Webster University – Georgia did not develop a procedure to ensure the integration of new employees into the work environment and their efficient involvement into the working process.

The statistical data regarding the employed staff provided in the SER - 40 academic staff, 57 Scientific Staff, 35 Affiliated Academic Staff - did not match with the documents and information provided by the Personnel Management Coordinator. Therefore, the panel asked the institution to provide the updated data, according to which there are 57 members of academic staff (36 professors, 4 associate Professors, 17 lecturers, 35 affiliated academic staff) in Webster University – Georgia, but as it has been already mentioned, they are not hired according to the national legislation.

The *Personnel Management Policy*, the *Strategic Planning Methodology* and the *Staff Productivity Assessment System* make reference to the staff performance review system, as further detailed under Standard 2. According to these documents, the system is informed by both staff appraisal, as well as student satisfaction surveys. However, as the institution has not started its activities yet, the panel cannot assess the actual utilization of data collected from these tools in the process of staff management.

The panel was not able to find internal benchmarks defined by the institution for their staff and the work completed by them in order to effectively manage the institution's activities. In fact, the overarching institutional goals and aspirations are formulated in a manner that makes it difficult for individual units and roles to cascade the indicators defined in the Strategic and Action Plan to measure their own success and excellence (see Standard 1).

**Evidences/indicators**
- Personnel Management Policy;
- Rules and Conditions for Holding an Academic Position;
- Letters "Eligibility for Instruction";
- Announcements of vacancies for administrative and support staff on jobs.ge;
- Schedule of interviews with the applicants for administrative and support positions;
- Rector's Order on extension of deadline to the Commission for selecting administrative and support staff;
- Applications for competition;
- Minutes of the Meeting of the Commission for selecting administrative and support staff;
- Evaluation of applicants by the Commission Members;
- CVs of the selected administrative and support staff;
- Rector's Order on filling the vacancies (quality manager, librarian, marketing coordinator – consultant, financier, interpreter, coordinator of material and informational technologies), human resources coordinator, chancellery and student service coordinator);
- Rules for Affiliation of Academic Staff;
- Charter - Governing Activities of Webster Branch in Georgia;
- Rules for Development, Modification and Cancellation of Undergraduate and Graduate Education Programs;
- Internal Regulations of Webster University – Georgia;
- Webster University Policy Handbook - Staff Productivity Assessment System;
- Strategic planning methodology;
- Strategic development plan 2022-2028;
- Action Plan 2022-2024;
- Institutional budget;
- Sample of the agreements with academic, invited and administrative staff;
- Statistical data provided during the authorization visit;
- Self-evaluation report;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

**Recommendations:**
- Align the *Rules and Conditions for Holding an Academic Position*, in terms of both criteria and procedure, with the Georgian legislation; ensure the consistent implementation throughout the branch;
- Recruit academic staff for the Webster University – Georgia through an open, transparent and objective selection procedure according to the requirements of the Georgian legislation;
- Implement the provisions for the recruitment of administrative/support staff in a consistent way and with consideration to defined criteria;
- Create the premises for academic and scientific staff engagement in decision-making processes;
- Ensure a coherent connection between the student satisfaction results and the professional development strategy;
- Revisit the nature of academic staff line management in order to foster their growth and development;

- Ensure that the professional development of administrative staff also benefits of institutional prioritization and resources;
- Define more comprehensive professional development strategy as part of the strategic management component of the branch and ensure that relevant budget is allocated for its implementation;
- Clarify the objective grounds for remuneration and encouragement and ensure the coherent connection of this system with the staff performance review;
- Develop the procedure for ensuring the integration of new employees into work environment and their efficient involvement into the working process;
- Ensure the accuracy and consistency of the statistical data related to personnel management in order to best support strategic and operations management, as well as day-to-day activities of the administration;
- Define internal relevant benchmarks for individual units and roles to measure their own success and excellence drawn from the strategic and operational plans.

**Suggestions:**
N/A

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
N/A

**Evaluation**
    ☐ Complies with requirements
    ☐ Substantially complies with requirements
    ☐ Partially complies with requirements
    ☒ Does not comply 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 programmes and scientific-research activities, and also other functions assigned to them

**Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements**

The workload scheme of the academic personnel is defined by the *Internal Regulations of Webster University – Georgia* and the respective agreement with the staff members. According to these documents, the working hours of a full-time employee should not exceed 36 hours per week and the working hours of a part-time employee should not exceed 20 hours per week. The remuneration of the employee should be related to the implementation of the educational programme, in particular the hourly workload, which is determined by the relevant educational programme and the academic calendar. The hourly workload may increase or decrease in each semester. Part of the employee's salary may be related to their participation in social, cultural, environmental, economic and/or various activities or projects at the Webster branch. In case of employee affiliation, the parties individually agree on additional remuneration.

As Webster University – Georgia has not selected and hired any academic staff in accordance with the Georgian legislation, there is no staff that the panel can consider when assessing if their workload is sufficient to ensure proper implementation of educational programmes.

Webster University – Georgia has developed the *Methodology for Student Contingent Planning and Determining the Number of Staff*, according to which the human and material resources of the Branch, specifics of educational programmes, number of current students, principles of student centred education etc. should be taken into account; however, this methodology has not been taken into consideration while determining the number of students, staff and resources for authorization purposes (see Standard 2 and 7).

The panel was not able to find internal benchmarks defined by the institution for their staff and the work completed by them in order to effectively manage the institution's activities; this too has been addressed under Standard 4.1.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Rules for Affiliation of Academic Staff;
- Methodology for Student Contingent Planning and Determining the Number of Staff;
- Internal Regulations of Webster University – Georgia;
- Sample of the agreements with academic, invited and administrative staff;
- Self-evaluation report;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

**Recommendations:**
- Implement in practice the *Methodology for Student Contingent Planning and Determining the Number of Staff*;
- Ensure compliance of the rules for affiliation of academic staff with the Georgian legislation.

**Suggestions:**
N/A

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
N/A

**Evaluation**
☐ Complies with requirements
☐ Substantially complies with requirements
☐ Partially complies with requirements
☒ Does not comply with requirements

## 5. Students and Their Support Services

HEI ensures the development of student-centred 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**

o 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.
o HEI ensures the protection of student rights and lawful interests.

**Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements**

Webster University - Georgia has developed relevant regulations for student enrolment, mobility, recognition of education, as well as student status termination/suspension; these are transparent, fair, in line with current legislation, and made publicly available on the institutional website. The grounds for termination/suspension of student status are provided through the Student Handbook and the institutional Charter, and the latter also includes branch-specific rules for suspending/terminating student status. However, for more clarity and student-friendly information provision, consolidating those two sources could be useful.

The rights and obligations of the students are included in the contract the institution has put in place to be signed with the upcoming students. In addition to the contract, the institution is informing and instructing students about their rights and obligations through the *Code of Conduct* that is included in the *Student Handbook*; the Handbook also includes the procedures and sanctions in case of conduct

breaches. Given that the institution has not yet commenced its operations and therefore has not enrolled students, the panel is not able to assess whether the university ensures effective and timely implementation of the respective procedures in order to protect student rights and lawful interests.

The panel was informed that the *Student Handbook* is a common document for all Webster University campuses; this comes with a few challenges, of which we underline:
-   the document makes approximately 25 specific references to the St. Louis campus, creating confusion regarding what would apply for the Webster branch in Georgia;
-   there are references to organisational units and roles that are not present on the organisational chart of the Webster branch in Georgia;
-   there is confusion on the credit hours used in the document, as the American system and the ECTS one used in Georgia are not the same;
-   there are references to the USA legislation and institutions that are not applicable to the Webster branch in Georgia.

While the panel understands the need for consistency and standardisation across the Webster global network, the institution is urged to implement an alternative in order to make sure that the students enrolled on the Georgian campus are accurately guided by regulations that are fit for their needs and context, with relevant national legislation and referencing administrative units that actually exist.

According to the Student Handbook, students have the right to submit appeals related to the work of academic and administrative bodies. In particular, such opportunities are given in the case of decisions that may be impacting students regarding: disciplinary actions, suspension, temporary suspension, dismissal, grade appeals (further detailed in Standard 3), academic dishonesty, and financial aid suspension. The procedures are transparent and clear in the Handbook, however, as stated above some challenges may come up in the implementation of these provisions in Georgia as the appeals processes make reference to units and roles that do not exist in the branch.

Finally, even though some important documents are made publicly available for all interested parties, the panel believes that the institutional website could be more student-friendly in structure and attractivity, as well as provide the contact details of relevant administrative staff.

**Evidences/indicators**
-   Procedure for enrolment, mobility and learning outcomes in the educational programme on the basis of the Unified National Exams/Common Master's Exams;
-   Enrolment without Taking Unified National Exams/Unified Master Exams;
-   Charter of the Branch of Webster University Inc. in Georgia;
-   Student Handbook;
-   Strategic development plan 2022-2028;
-   Action Plan 2022-2024;
-   Self-evaluation report;
-   Institutional website;
-   Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

**Recommendations:**
-   Ensure that the dissemination of student policies is consolidated and easy to navigate for its main audience so that they meet their purpose;
-   Implement an alternative to the current Student Handbook in order to make sure that the students enrolled on the Georgian campus are accurately guided by regulations that are fit for their needs and context, with relevant national legislation and referencing administrative units that actually exist;
-   Update the institutional website to include information on all student support services, as well as the roles, responsibilities and contact information of each relevant unit and individual.

**Suggestions:**
N/A

| **Best Practices (if applicable):** |
| --- |
| N/A |

| **Evaluation** |
| --- |
| ☐ Complies with requirements |
| ☒ Substantially complies with requirements |
| ☐ Partially complies with requirements |
| ☐ Does not comply with requirements |

| **5.2 Student Support Services** |
| --- |
| o HEI has student consulting services in order to plan educational process and improve academic performance |
| o HEI has career support service, which provides students with appropriate counselling and support regarding employment and career development |
| o HEI ensures students awareness and involvement in various university-level, local and international projects and events, and supports student initiatives |
| o HEI has mechanisms, including financial mechanisms to support low SES students |

**Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements**

The student support services at Webster University - Georgia are distributed between the Training Department and the Administration.

1. The Training Department covers the following student support services internal quality management, including ECTS recognition, planning of examination processes, creation of individual study plans, consultations on learning-teaching processes, ensuring qualification granting processes; conducting meetings with employers, internship providers, professional orientations with potential students; Organizing student and employer meetings; Conducting various types of training, seminars, marketing projects, as well as various types of short term programmes; Organizing and implementing creative, socio-cultural events; Participating in the development of the educational programmes. Also, participating in the development of various legal acts/regulations of the Webster branch; Forming a student portfolio; and other functions related to marketing, public relations etc.

   The department is equipped with the Quality Manager - one staff unit, Librarian - two staff units, Marketing coordinator - one staff unit. The latter is the role where most of the administrative student support is concentrated and it has the following responsibilities:
   - Consult interested persons on admission to relevant programmes in Webster University - Georgia, fee of study, characteristics of learning, mobility rules;
   - Manage Branch of Webster's web-page, ensure update of information;
   - Plan – carry out marketing projects, ensure participation of Branch of Webster or/and representatives of international net of Webster;
   - With quality manager's involvement, coordinate – inform students regarding participation in exchange programs;;
   - Inform, assist students on usage of portal;
   - Plan – carry out - participate in extracurricular activities;
   - Ensure organizing of "open days" for interested persons;
   - Assist cooperation with employers, internship provider companies, organize meetings;
   - Administer and record the information regarding alumni's employment;
   - Coordinate conducting thematic research;
   - Coordinate performance of various trainings, seminars, projects;
   - Spread information regarding activities of Branch of Webster, its events, projects, cooperate with media;
   - Gather information on the issues within the competence, process statistical data, report quarterly and annually, participate in preparing developing nomenclature, participate in forming the documents for archive;
   - Self-evaluation and participation in professional development;
   - Participation in preparing/developing strategic and 3-year plans, carry out the activities under plans or/and be co-participant, reporting on their performance;

- Within competence, assist the integration of people with special educational needs and people with disabilities;
- Within competence, initiate amendments in or/and participate in development of relevant regulatory acts;
- During performing duties, besides tight cooperation with staff of Georgian branch, cooperation with the staff of international net of Webster University, exchange of information within competence;
- Send information regarding marketing projects, events, training and other activities to business mail.

2. The Administration covers student support services through a position named *Case Management and Student Services Coordinator*. There are other staff members in the Administration, which will not be mentioned due to standard-specific interests. The main responsibilities of the Case Management and Student Services Coordinator are as follows:
- Based on rules of procedure, ensure clerical work of Branch of Webster with electric system;
- Administer archive, coordinate the gathering of relevant documents in cooperation with personnel of Branch of Webster;
- Identify development activities on issues within competence, initiate proposals from time to time in front of head of administration;
- Gather information on the issues within the competence, process statistical data, report quarterly and annually, participate in preparing nomenclature, participate in forming the documents for archive;
- During performance of duties, besides tight cooperation with staff of Georgian branch, cooperate with the personnel of international net of Webster University, exchange information within competence;
- Inform the personnel of Branch of Webster on clerical work regulatory issues, send information to business mails in case of change in them;
- Provide student services – ensure feedback on application, issue notices, receive documentation, forward to relevant persons;
- Self-evaluation and participation in professional development;
- Monitor, assist and consult on carrying out unified clerical work approaches by structural and permanent personnel;
- Control execution of documents, concluding and executing them in given periods;
- Coordinate the proposals, applications and claims of customers and citizens;
- Develop nomenclature, ensure document preservation and active usage of documentary information;
- Administer registry of students and alumni.

The panel noted a gap when it comes to student academic counselling to make the right educational choices and better navigate their educational journey and learning experience. As briefly mentioned under Standard 3, the panel noted that other Webster branches have established the role of programme coordinator, which is lacking in the Georgian branch. While individual meetings and consultations with instructors could also provide academic support, that would be limited to that one discipline, whereas the programme coordinator could provide academic counselling with an overarching view of the whole programme and support the students in planning of education process and improvement of academic performance.

The panel also noted that Webster University - Georgia does not have a standalone unit/person responsible for career support services to provide students with professional orientation and other information events regarding employment and career development. The career support is centrally managed by the Career Planning and Development Centre from Webster University HQ. Some career advising activities at the Georgian branch are divided among the Training Department through the Marketing Coordinator and the Administration. Even though there are certain activities planned in the direction of student career development, the panel is concerned that there is a lack of capacity of the branch to provide thorough, individual career advising and coaching to the potential students as well as finding and providing possibilities for internships based on specific programme scopes.

In regard to the employer management - finding information on potential employers, facilitating employers' involvement in the creation and implementation of educational programmes, implementation of internship and practice corresponding to educational programmes, as well as creating employer database and constantly inform students and alumni on employment opportunities/ vacancies - the panel found that the institution is planning to organise these services in a centralized way by Webster University, as there is no specialised unit/individual at branch level; also, we have noted that all external stakeholder engaged with the authorisation process were in fact borrowed from the local partner - BTU.

Considering the above-mentioned information, the panel considers that the student support services in place at Webster University - Georgia - academic counselling, career support, employer management - are unfit for a higher education institution. Also, the institution is severely understaffed in the area of student support services and the very few staff members the institution has allocated in this direction have foggy roles and responsibilities that do not provide assurances that the institution can offer fit for purpose support services. Furthermore, we have not identified any substantial planned developments in this regard through the Strategic and Action Plans, including relevant budgetary allocations to indicate evident improvements from the current status-quo.

The panel found no evidence that the institution plans to conduct surveys of its alumni regarding their personal, professional and academic development. Even in regards to the students, the only evidence of satisfaction capturing refers to the academic delivery in a specific course, not the general contribution of the programme and the institution to their personal, professional and academic development.

Student involvement in international mobility and participation in various projects is one of the strengths of Webster University that the panel is convinced will be ensured in the Georgian branch. According to the interviews conducted by the panel, students will have different opportunities to be involved in the international activities planned and carried out by the Webster University global network, including semester mobility to other Webster locations. The panel also learnt about the institutional possibilities to support some students in need to cover travelling expenses related to such international activities.

In regards to the provision of extracurricular activities, sports, arts, educational activities and supporting student initiatives, the panel learnt that this will sit with the marketing coordinator. However, the operational processes to support such activities and initiatives did not provide enough clarity at this point.

The *Undergraduate Catalogue* provides the necessary information regulating the tuition, fees, refunds and financial information for all types of payment options available to Webster students in general, as follows:
● Financial aid;
● Direct billing to a third party (i.e., employer);
● Tuition assistance paid by a government agency (e.g. Military);
● Deferred payment plan;
● Payment in full.
No information regarding the student financial support is reflected in the *Student Handbook* which should normally be the first point of consolidated information available to students.

The panel observed that very little of the regulations regarding tuition, fees, refunds and financial information is in fact applicable to branches outside of the US because there are constant references to *federal and state support, defines low-SES as active Duty Military, Selected Reserve and National Guard, regulates university housing at Webster Grove campus, lists US locations available for meal plans, places the main responsibilities at the Webster Financial Aid Office, applications for support are initiated by filling out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), quotes regulations determined by the United States Department of Education,* among others. None of these regulations can apply to the students at the Webster University - Georgia campus, which is very alarming for the panel. While the interviewees the panel has met added that each campus develops its own way of

support, no such development has been recorded by the time of the authorisation visit.

Should the institution use this document as a starting point in developing the financial support system Webster University - Georgia, the panel notes the following:
- when defining the profiles of low-SES students, national, local and regional specifics should be considered. The definition of disadvantaged backgrounds should therefore be contextualised for the Caucasus region;
- the document quotes that according to the United States Department of Education regulations, all students applying for *federal and/or state* financial assistance must maintain satisfactory progress in their course of study to receive these funds. However, a few pages later it continues to say that a student who does not keep a Satisfactory Academic Progress is not eligible to receive federal, state and/or *institutional financial aid*. The panel would suggest some consistency in determining for what forms of financial aid are the satisfactory academic progress attached to as a condition. Is it only the state and federal as regulated by the USA Department of Education or is it the institutional support as well.
- the panel observes an inconsistency between the financial aid and the gift aid for academic achievement. The financial aid seems to have the role to facilitate the access, progress and completion of higher education studies for students that need this support from the socio-economic point of view; the gift aid for academic achievement has the objective to support and encourage academic excellence and performance. While it makes sense for satisfactory academic progress to be attached as a condition to the gift aid for academic achievement, it makes less sense to also attach it to the financial aid that aims at reducing socio-economic background barriers and bringing more equality for students that might not have had the same opportunity to flourish academically. The panel suggests that the institution approaches these two objectives separately (at least in the case of the aid coming from institutional funds) and considers supporting low-SES students without taking into account the academic performance in order to achieve the purpose of ensuring equity and equality. This would be particularly fit to the non-profit status the institution has in Georgia.
- The same applies to the gift aid that the institution is granting for community service, demonstrated leadership and artistic talent; in this case, attaching the condition of satisfactory academic progress makes even less sense since not only that this type of aid aims at rewarding a totally different type of achievement, but more importantly it is often times happening that excelling at community service, demonstrated leadership and artistic talent comes at direct conflict with stellar academic performance. The panel would expect that an institution that prides itself with developing global citizens, would reward students that are demonstrating community service and outstanding leadership, even if they do not fit into an academic standard expectation.

While the *Undergraduate Catalogue* is made publicly available on the institutional website in Georgia, the financial aid for low-SES students included in this document does not apply to branch students. Therefore the institution does not currently have transparent, objective and publicly accessible mechanisms for supporting low SES students at Webster University - Georgia.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Charter of the Branch of Webster University Inc. in Georgia;
- The Career Planning and Development Centre;
- The policy of activities/events beyond the Webster branch curriculum;
- Student Handbook;
- Strategic Development Plan 2022-2028;
- Action Plan 2022-2024;
- Self-evaluation report;
- Institutional website;
- Undergraduate Catalogue;
- Institutional budget;
- Branch Activities and Management;
- Student portal;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

| |
|---|
| **Recommendations:** |
| <ul><li>Revisit the organisational structure, roles and responsibilities in the area of student support to ensure that this area benefits of the necessary human and financial resources to provide all types of supports students will need; ensure that strategic planning and budgeting support such developments;</li><li>Establish the position of programme coordinator for each of the six programmes to support the students in planning of the education process and improvement of academic performance;</li><li>Establish a standalone unit/person responsible for career support services at branch level to provide students with professional orientation and other information events regarding employment and career development;</li><li>Ensure that responsibilities in the area of employer management - finding information on potential employers, facilitating employers' involvement in the creation and implementation of educational programmes, implementation of internship and practice corresponding to educational programmes, as well as creating employer database and constantly inform students and alumni on employment opportunities/vacancies – are properly catered for;</li><li>Develop and conduct surveys for students and alumni regarding their personal, professional and academic development;</li><li>Revisit the responsibility allocation regarding extracurricular activities, sports, arts, educational activities and supporting student initiatives, as well as operationalisation specifics to ensure that students are catered for in this areas as well;</li><li>Develop branch specific financial aid that fits the national, regional and local context, in particular referring to low-SES students; ensure such information is made publicly available and is included in the Student Handbook.</li></ul> |
| **Suggestions:** |
| Revisit the philosophy behind the financial aid regulations so that they are fit for purpose for each targeted area: reduce socio-economic inequalities, motivate academic performance, reward community service and outstanding leadership. |
| **Best Practices (if applicable):** |
| The opportunities the Webster University global network has the potential to open to the students enrolled in the Georgian branch in terms of international mobility and activities. |
| **Evaluation** |
| ☐ Complies with requirements<br>☐ Substantially complies with requirements<br>☐ Partially complies with requirements<br>☒ Does not comply 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** |
|---|
| <ul><li>HEI, based on its type and specifics of its fields, carries out research/creative activities.</li><li>Ensuring the effectiveness of doctoral research supervision</li><li>HEI has public, transparent and fair procedures for the assessment and defense of dissertations which are relevant to the specifics of the field</li></ul> |
| **Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements** |
| As a teaching university, Webster University – Georgia did not include any doctoral programmes in its application for authorisation and the institution's main focus is not on fundamental research. Research |

is not mentioned in the university's mission statement and has a very modest place in the Strategic and Action Plans. In spite of this, research is present in the institutional preoccupations of the institution in a different form that the panel could observe when assessing the content of the academic programme, as well as other institutional policies: research is a compulsory component of master programmes, Research Methods, as well as Research Ethics courses, are offered in all six proposed programmes, students are encouraged to conduct research projects and academic staff is expected to be involved in research activities, since this is one of the criteria for staff performance evaluation.

The workload distribution between teaching and research can be negotiated according to individual staff preferences and programme needs, but instructors will generally be expected to conduct research and publish.

The university plans to use research for marketing and promotional purposes, such as identifying needs and attracting more students from the region, as stated in the Action plan.

Although not appointed according to the local legislation, academic and scientific staff of Webster University – Georgia shows necessary research competences, proven by provided documents (CVs including lists of publications) and interviews during the site visit.

As the institution has not yet commenced its operations, the panel is unable to assess how Webster University - Georgia supports the integration of teaching, research and economics, carries out research, development, creative activities, which contribute to scientific, social, economic, cultural, etc. development on regional, national, and/or international levels, or how research results are integrated in teaching activities of the institution.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Self-evaluation report;
- Webster University Policy Handbook - Staff Productivity Assessment System;
- Strategic development plan 2022-2028;
- Action Plan 2022-2024;
- Graduate Education Programs;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

**Recommendations:**
N/A

**Suggestions:**
N/A

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
N/A

**Evaluation**
- ☒ Complies with requirements
- ☐ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☐ Partially complies with requirements
- ☐ Does not comply with requirements

**6.2. Research Support and Internationalization**

- o HEI has an effective system in place for supporting research, development and creative activities
- o Attracting new staff and their involvement in research/arts-creative activities.
- o University works on internationalization of research, development and creative activities.

**Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements**

Webster University - Georgia is committed to provide opportunities for engagement, discovery, and the development of competencies that will help students succeed in their chosen fields. The institution will support the culture of real-world experience through the development and strengthening of curricular and co-curricular activities designed to give students opportunities to practice their

developing competencies. Research, development and creative activities are a significant part of a curriculum. As stated in the *Internationalization Policy*, "...academic excellence is supported by a culture which supports faculty teaching, scholarship, research, artistic endeavours, curriculum development, and service across the network. Operational excellence is supported by infrastructure, policies, systems, and actions which ensure that data is reliable, communication is effortless across the network, and systems function well, all so that focus is on learning". The panel has found that research funding mechanisms, system of approval of research projects, existing culture of collaboration within and between university branches are creating a solid supportive environment for research activities, sufficient for a teaching university. According to the SER, the university has a research budget of 10 000 USD which the panel sees as suitable for covering costs such as conference participation fees, while research projects will be funded by the Head Office.

Being a global university with a number of branches in different countries, Webster University has significant experience and a sound internationalization strategy; however, as described in Standard 2, this is not specifically tailor made for the Caucasus region. At the same time, the university staff, experienced in working in an international environment, and existing university policies are preconditioning internationalization of research. Several collaborative research projects have been implemented by staff of different branches, and the Georgia Branch will be included in the existing system and process of research cooperation.

Considering that the institution has not yet commenced its activities, the panel cannot yet assess the quality and efficiency of university research activities, nor the degree of its internationalization.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Self-evaluation report;
- Webster University Policy Handbook - Staff Productivity Assessment System;
- Strategic development plan 2022-2028;
- Action Plan 2022-2024;
- Internationalization Policy of Webster University Inc. Branch in Georgia;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

**Recommendations:**
N/A

**Suggestions:**
N/A

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
N/A

**Evaluation**
    ☒ Complies with requirements
    ☐ Substantially complies with requirements
    ☐ Partially complies with requirements
    ☐ Does not comply with requirements

**6.3. Evaluation of Research Activities**

HEI has a system for evaluating and analysing 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**

The *Staff Productivity Assessment System* is a document drawn from the Webster University Experience and proposed for the Georgia campus; it introduces a system for scholarship and service planned to be implemented in the branch in order to motivate and evaluate research activities. It provides the evaluation criteria, criteria for professional development and scholarship and sample measures of performance for the academic staff, including measures such as published articles and

textbooks (peer-reviewed), participation in professional seminars and conferences, writing cross disciplinary grants, etc.

Based on these indicators, the academic staff is obliged to make a self-assessment and a written report to the Head of Administration. There is a special Standard for Faculty and Staff-Focused Results, measuring "scholarship" activities and setting certain benchmarks - Papers Presented, Published Articles/ Manuscripts/ Books, Consulting, Professional Related Service, Professional Conferences/Workshops, and Professional Memberships.

Being a teaching university, Webster University – Georgia focuses on teaching activities when selecting new academic staff, as described in the *Personnel Management Policy* and *Rules and Conditions for Holding an Academic Position*. At the same time research activities are an integral part of academic positions. Both, academic and research positions will be occupied through open competition.

Given its development status, the panel is not yet able to assess reports on implemented research activities or the evaluation results used for further development of research/creative activities.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Self-evaluation report;
- Webster University Policy Handbook - Staff Productivity Assessment System;
- Strategic development plan 2022-2028;
- Action Plan 2022-2024;
- Personnel Management Policy;
- Rules and Conditions for Holding an Academic Position;
- Faculty and Staff-Focused Results;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

**Recommendations:**
N/A

**Suggestions:**
N/A

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
N/A

**Evaluation**
  ☒ Complies with requirements
  ☐ Substantially complies with requirements
  ☐ Partially complies with requirements
  ☐ Does not comply 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 |
| --- |
| o 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 programmes and research activities, and corresponds to the existing number of students and planned enrolment. <br> o HEI offers environment necessary for implementing educational activities: sanitary units, natural light possibilities, and central heating system. <br> o Health and safety of students and staff is protected within the institution. <br> o HEI has adapted environment for people with special needs |
| **Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements** |

Webster University - Georgia has presented a sub-lease agreement with its local partner, BTU, which includes both fixed and liquid assets. According to the sublease agreement, both immovable and movable assets are to be used solely for educational activities for a duration of 6 years, as of May 2021. Taking into consideration the current calendar of the authorisation process, should the institution receive a positive approval to commence its operations, the sub-lease agreement for the fixed and liquid assets will no longer cover at least the authorisation period, as requested by the authorisation standards.

In regards to the fixed assets, according to the SER, the rented space has a total area of 1131.78 sq.m., of which the teaching area is 640.73 sq.m., and the auxiliary area is 491.05 sqm (however, according to the floor overall space drawings, the institution has 10 classrooms with size ranging from 40 to 85 sq.m. totalling 600.95 sq.m). The lawful possession of the building is certified by the extract from the Public Registry.

Taking into account the rented space at the time of the authorisation visit, as well as the 1080 students that Webster University - Georgia has included in its application for authorisation, the panel noted that the current facility provides a 0.59 sq.m. per student in the teaching areas, while the international best practice considers that the optimal space for teaching a student is 2.5 sq.m. While the sublease contract states that space expansion may become available during the term of the agreement, subject to BTU capabilities, the panel underlines that its judgments are based on the status quo at the time of the authorisation visit. During its visit to the facilities, the panel was informed that the institution plans to conduct its academic activities in four separate shifts which would therefore increase the sqm of teaching area per student available for each shift. However, this is contradicted by the *methodology for student contingent planning and determining the number of staff,* where the institution is stating that the teaching will be organised in two shifts. No other details were provided as to how the shifts will be rolled out and how realistic and viable the proposal is, if it will include night time and if the institution sees this as educationally effective. The entire notion of shifts is not mentioned at all in the SER submitted by the institution.

The educational and auxiliary spaces of the institution are separated, as reflected in the internal measurement drawings of the premises included in the sublease agreement. While the facility rented by the institution includes most of the compulsory sections, the panel is not sure that, as it stands now, the distribution of various units supports the effective implementation of educational and administrative process; in addition to the insufficiency of the available spaces to the requested number of students (as explained above), the panel believes that the two administrative offices (totalling 37.5 sq.m) included in the floor drawing do not suffice for the number of administrative staff included in the organisation chart submitted to the panel, even less so if the institution is planning to expand its team by co-opting a local rector and other leadership roles, as we have learnt during the authorisation meetings. Lastly, the institution is planning one single space, presented as recreation space sized 71.43 sq.m, to serve as a dedicated area for students to mingle and socialize, group work and foyer; more importantly, however, the institution presented this same space to be used as professor offices, where professors provide counselling to students, in addition to doing their individual academic, research and administrative work. The panel finds this planning very unfit for purpose.

The institution elaborated the *Methodology for student contingent planning and determining the number of staff*, according to which the formula for calculating the total student contingent is as follows: *"study area (sq.m.); Number of academic / invited staff at X (number of students); Total number of study desks / chairs; Note on the number of technical means per X30 student. From the available data, the smallest number is taken and the student contingent is doubled, taking into account the peculiarities of the study process planning - in 2 shifts."* The panel did not find evidence that this formula was actually used when determining the number of students, staff and material resources, and furthermore, we fear that this would not be working in practice.

In regards to the liquid assets, the following are transferred for use under the sublease agreement between Webster University - Georgia and BTU:
   1. Students table - 134 pcs (2 students per table, 268 seats);

2. Students chair - 280 pcs;
3. Lecturers table (auditorium) - 10 pcs;
4. Lecturers chair (auditorium) - 10 pcs;
5. Staff tables - 14 pcs;
6. Staff chairs- 14 pcs;
7. Doctor table  - 1 pc;
8. Doctor chair - 1 pc;
9. Reception table - 1 pc;
10. Chair for the reception - 2 pcs;
11. Waiting chair - 6 pcs
12. Doctor exam table -1 pc;
13. Computer (for classes) - 10 pcs;
14. Computer for administration - 14 pcs;
15. Printer - 4 pcs;
16. Scanner - 3 pieces;
17. Computer for IT class - 28 pcs;
18. Projector - 5 pcs;
19. Screen - 1 pc;
20. Puffs for recreational space - 10 pcs;
21. Reading room table - 10 pcs;
22. Chair of the reading hall - 18 pcs;
23. Bookshelves for archives - 42 sqm;
24. Ladder - 1 piece;
25. Cabinet for administration - 4 pcs;
26. Conference chair - 28 pcs;
27. Conference hall table - 2 pcs;
28. Filing cabinet for administration, doctor, reception.

The panel strongly believes that this inventory does not suffice to serve the formally defined educational purposes of the institution and it does not correspond to the requirements for implementing educational programmes with the 1080 students that the institution has requested in its authorisation application.

As observed during the visit of the facilities, the institution benefits from an uninterrupted power supply system, offers an environment that is clean and newly renovated, the classrooms for theoretical teaching provide 18/22 seating spaces, and the classrooms have natural as well as artificial light possibilities. The sanitary facilities are divided, have continuous water supply, and are cleaned and organized as appropriate. Sanitary units observe sanitary-hygienic conditions.

The building is not equipped with a central heating system.

Fire equipment and evacuation plans are located in a visible area. The building has an additional emergency exit where the door is made of wood; however, the door does not open inside out. To provide first aid, the institution has included in its organisation chart a Medical Services Coordinator and a sanitary hygiene specialist; the institution has a medical cabinet equipped with first aid tools, as well as both natural and artificial lights, and natural ventilation.

Order is maintained throughout the perimeter of the institution. There is a central security system and security services which are provided by BTU, which timely and effectively respond to violation of order, and protect material values of the institution. The building location provides students and academic, administrative staff with a safe environment that is appropriate for educational purposes. The institution has elaborated the *Security measures and mechanisms in Webster Branch*, which are presenting the security mechanisms for fire safety, medical assistance, security video surveillance, as well as fire safety instructions and action plan in case of fire. However, the fire extinguishers instructions are available in Georgian language only, which is not suitable for the student body the institution is planning to attract.

The building is adapted for people with special needs. The panel has not found evidence that students with special educational needs have access to learning resources considered by a programme or individual teaching plan, that are adapted to their needs and demands; as observed under Standards 3 and 5, individualised learning programmes and academic counselling are currently not catered for.

According to the evidence presented above, the panel considers that the current fixed and liquid resources do not meet the basic requirements of the standard component in order to provide a sustainable, stable, effective, and efficient delivery of the study programmes with 1080 students.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Self-Evaluation Report;
- Sublease Agreement;
- Extract of the premises from the Public Registry;
- Internal measurement drawing of the premises;
- Floor overall space;
- Methodology for student contingent planning and determining the number of staff;
- Security measures and mechanisms in Webster Branch;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

**Recommendations:**
- Ensure that the available fixed and liquid assets suffice for an effective educational process for 1080 students; this includes allocating the necessary number of sq.m for students to feel safe, comfortable and have an environment conducive to learning;
- Revisit the *Methodology for student contingent planning and determining the number of staff* and ensure its fitness for purpose as well as implementation in practice;
- Revisit the sublease agreement so that it covers the whole authorisation period;
- Reconsider the space allocated for administrative staff, taking into consideration the actual and future organisational developments;
- Reconsider the space available for professor offices, where professors provide counselling to students, in addition to conducting their own individual academic, research and administrative work;
- Ensure more fit for purpose division of the spaces dedicated to serve as recreation space, area for students to mingle and socialize, group work and foyer;
- Install a central heating system;
- Align the emergency exits to the authorisation standard requirement; ensure English language translations for the fire extinguishers usage instructions.

**Suggestions:**
N/A

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
N/A

**Evaluation**
    ☐ Complies with requirements
    ☐ Substantially complies with requirements
    ☐ Partially complies with requirements
    ☒ Does not comply 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**

Webster University - Georgia includes in its facilities a library sized 86.35 sq.m in the form of a reading hall, equipped with 6 computers connected to the internet, as well as special places for working on personal laptops. During the visit of the facilities the panel inquired about the meeting and group

workspace, the university representative declared that these are located in the recreation space (extensively presented in Standard 7.1.). The book archive includes, according to the *Webster Georgia Textbooks Catalogue*, a number of 100 titles for all six programmes, which the panel does not find diverse enough, nor does it ensure the achievement of the educational programmes learning outcomes for 1080 students. As the syllabi presented to the panel do not always include the bibliographic resources, the panel is not able to assess if the main literature necessary for the delivery of the programme is available in paper based format at the library of the institution. The books in the library are not processed in accordance with the library regulations; there is no automated search system in place. According to the librarian available on the site during the visit of the facilities, as soon as the institution receives authorisation, the software of the Webster University central library will serve for this purpose as well.

The institution has elaborated the rules for *Using of the Library for the Webster University Branch Campus in Georgia*, which includes the working hours (Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.), the rights and obligations of the users, guidelines for use and return of the library resources, losing and exceeding the return period of the withdrawn resource, use of internet resources, rules for Handling Library Resources, rules of conduct in the library reading room. According to the document, *only one copy of a resource stored in the library is not issued from the library, such material can only be used in the library reading room;* given that all titles in the catalogue made available to the panel are available in a single copy, that means that all resources can only be consulted within the premises, with no home loan possibility.

In regards to the electronic resources, the central Webster University library includes: 312 000 print and media items, 78 000 full academic journals, newspapers, and magazines, over 28000 eBooks, more than 111 000 streaming videos and 31 000 streaming music sources. Additionally, the library has 150 leased databases with access to a proxy server, detailed guide is in link https://libguides.webster.edu/index. However, according to a letter made available to the panel, students at Webster University - Georgia will have access to the electronic resources of the central library as well as the international databases the institution is subscribed to only as of June 2022; at the time of the authorisation visit, this was not the case.

According to the branch budget, the library will benefit in 2022 of $10000 and in following years $25000. Internationally, the Webster network earmarks 1.6% of the operating budget to library needs.

As the institution has not commenced its operations, the panel is not able to assess the mechanisms in place for the continuous renewal and upgrade of the resources and services based on the requirements of students and staff.

The services of the library have been outsourced to the local partner, BTU, and the librarian that was engaged with the authorisation process was contracted for a period of 6 months. Furthermore, the panel cannot observe if the librarian has the appropriate competence in library science as the CV has not been made available to the panel in spite of it being requested.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Self-Evaluation Report;
- Webster Georgia Textbooks Catalogue;
- Rules for Using of the Library for the Webster University Branch Campus in Georgia;
- Letter of the rector regarding the usage of the library resources and services of Websters Worldwide Network by the students on the Georgian campus;
- Institutional budget;
- Visit of the facilities;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

**Recommendations:**
- Revisit the library space to ensure that it is equipped with both individual reading, as well as areas for group work;

- Expand on the library stock to ensure coverage of the main literature necessary for the delivery of the programme, in sufficient copies for 1080 students;
- Ensure that students of the Georgian branch have proper access to the all Webster university library resources;
- Set-up an electronic search system;
- Ensure the availability of a full time librarian with appropriate competence in library sciences including competences to provide assistance with using international library databases.

**Suggestions:**
N/A

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
N/A

**Evaluation**
  ☐ Complies with requirements
  ☐ Substantially complies with requirements
  ☐ Partially complies with requirements
  ☒ Does not comply with requirements

**7.3 Information Resources**

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

**Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements**

According to the organisation chart of the institution, the infrastructure for information technologies is developed and maintained by an IT Material and Information Technology Coordinator. On the ground however, the IT function of the institution is presently outsourced to the local partner, BTU. According to the interviewees conducted by the panel, the situation is planned to remain the same permanently, with the IT role continuing to be outsourced.

The IT infrastructure available for the institution services is made of the following hardware provision, as per the *Sublease Agreement*:
1. Computer (for classes) - 10 pcs;
2. Computer for administration - 14 pcs;
3. Printer - 4 pcs;
4. Scanner - 3 pieces;
5. Computer for IT class - 28 pcs;
6. Projector - 5 pcs;
7. Screen - 1 pc.

Additionally, the premises of the institution are equipped with Wi-Fi and network connections. According to the *Rules of Procedure*, the Webster University - Georgia has also introduced an electronic system, automatic procedure management – the electronic programme for proceeding – Edocument, which implies the reflection of all stages of the proceeding in the programme from the receipt of the document or the creation to its final execution/sending, and an electronic stamp is used. Edocument is operated exclusively in Georgian and it is unclear to the panel how this can be linked to Webster University's central IT system. According to the interviews conducted by the panel, there is currently no other MIS that supports the governance and administration of the institution locally.

According to the *Branch Activities and Management*, the following systems are in place at the Webster University network and will support the process management work of the Branch:
- Webster Human Resources portal powered by ADP;

- Electronic system for receiving applications and questions from entrants;
- Student Enrolment provided by Slate Technologies CRM "Slate";
- Electronic system for academic, invited staff applications (e.g., application for programme addition or change initiation);
- There are two different portals: CX-Web and Concourse (web-based portal);
- Student Services and informing electronic system;
- CX Web, Webster SharePoint Portal powered by Office 365 nestled in Connections;
- Qualification-Diploma Issuing electronic system;
- National Clearing House (US-wide portal);
- Staff Assessment electronic system;
- Strategy execution monitoring electronic system;
- Library electronic services, resource usage monitoring;
- EBSCO host, ProQuest, Avon, Gale, MOBIUS;
- Obtaining statistical data (students, undergraduates, short-term, use of resources, the performance of working hours-violations, etc.);
- Students data is in CX Web Portal;
- Staff and Faculty data: SharePoint/Human Resources Portal in connections.

In terms of learning management systems, the institution is using World Classroom (Canvas) which provides academic support and a small number of administrative associated processes.

However, the panel learnt that Webster University - Georgia staff will only gain access to these systems and platforms after the positive authorisation decision. Even during the site visit, the local staff did not have the required access to provide a demonstration of the Canvas platform, which had to be conducted by the Webster HQ staff.

Overall, Webster University HQ and its administration benefit from information technology, but the on-site transfer methods and channels of these technologies do not give assurances of effectiveness in the delivery of the proposed educational programmes.

The panel found no evidence of IT risk assessment, and the document called *Business process continuity, financial management, and control system* does not actually provide any IT business continuity planning because, according to the document itself, these are supposed to be grounded on an analysis that has not yet been elaborated, according to the interviewees the panel has met. The panel did not locate any IT policy that regulates IT risk management and data protection, in particular, to ensure alignment of the American-based system to the European GDPR regulations.

According to the *Institutional Budget and Balance Sheet*, Webster University - Georgia is not planning significant investments in IT infrastructure, proportional to its number of students, nor are substantial developments in this area recorded in the Strategic and Action Plans.

The institutional website page has only been finalized one day before the authorisation visit commenced; at the moment it does not include all information required as per the authorisation standards, as detailed throughout this report.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Organisation Chart;
- Sublease Agreement;
- Rules of Procedure;
- Branch Activities and Management;
- Letter of the rector regarding the usage of the World Classroom and Connections by the students on the Georgian campus;
- Business process continuity, financial management, and control system;
- Institutional budget;
- Balance Sheet;
- Visit of the facilities;
- Strategic development plan 2022-2028;
- Action Plan 2022-2024;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

**Recommendations:**
- Ensure that the IT services of the institution benefit of the necessary human resource to support its effectiveness, and implement in practice the structure proposed in the institutional chart;
- Substantially increase the financial allocations to ensure that the upcoming 1080 student benefit from both the hardware and the software infrastructure to effectively support their learning experience;
- Iron out the link between EDocument with the central Webster University systems and ensure effective usage of systems to support the governance and administration of the institution locally, including through on-site transfer methods;
- Conduct the relevant assessment to inform the IT risk assessment that allows the institution to prepare business continuity planning that effectively covers the Information Technology resources and infrastructure;
- Elaborate and adopt an IT policy that regulates IT risk management and data protection, in particular to ensure alignment of the American-based system to the European GDPR regulations;
- According to the Institutional Budget and Balance Sheet, Webster University - Georgia is not planning significant investments in IT infrastructure, proportional to its number of students, nor are substantial developments recorded in the Strategic and Action Plans;
- Upgrade the institutional website contents for full alignment with the authorisation standards.

**Suggestions:**
N/A

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
N/A

**Evaluation**
- ☐ Fully complies with requirements
- ☐ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☐ Partially complies with requirements
- ☒ Does not comply with requirements

## 7.4 Financial Resources

- o Allocation of financial resources described in the budget of HEI is economically achievable
- o Financial standing of HEI ensures performance of activities described in strategic and mid-term action plans
- o HEI financial resources are focused on effective implementation of core activities of the institution
- o 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**

According to the SER, the total budget of Webster University - Georgia is $452.618 (equivalent in GEL); as per the Institutional Budget, the income in 2022 is $746.200, while the expense is $511.334; the difference between the total revenue and total expenses is $234.865.

According to the institutional budget, the projected student numbers per academic year are as follows:

| 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 | 2026 | 2027 | 2028 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 95   | 213  | 290  | 347  | 365  | 365  | 365  |

The panel is slightly confused to see this projection. If the institution is not planning to reach 1080 students by 2028, it should not have requested this number in the authorisation application, especially considering that it cannot demonstrate having the necessary resources to support the educational delivery for them. If the student number was increasing so slowly, the institution could have aspired to be authorised for a smaller number of students for the current 6-years authorisation period, and later on increase it during re-authorisation.

The institutional budget does not provide details on sources of income; based on the interviews conducted by panel, there does not seem to be any other source besides the student fee, which does not indicate diversity of income and therefore financial sustainability. Furthermore, there is no risk assessment and business continuity strategy should the number of students not reach the projected numbers. Considering this unstable source of income and its exclusive reliability, the panel fears that the allocation of financial resources might not be economically achievable. Furthermore, in order to demonstrate if the funds available to the institution are adequate and sufficient to effectively perform activities described in strategic and action plans, there would actually need to be a correlation between the two; there is no evidence that the budgeting processes were synchronised in any way with the strategic planning (some budget categories are not reflected in the strategic plan, while some sections of the strategic plan do not benefit a budgetary allocation). Lastly, as previously mentioned under Standard 1, the material resource and source of funding allocated to each goal are totally omitted from the Strategic Plan and very vaguely described in the Action Plan, using only notions such as *existing material resource, current cost, current source of funding or budget*, with no other specifics being provided. For these reasons, the panel cannot state that the financial standing of the institution ensures the performance of the strategic priorities.

According to the meetings conducted by the panel, there is no evidence that the budgeting process is a participatory process at Webster University - Georgia, nor does it demonstrate equal availability to all individuals. Since the institution has not yet commenced its operations, it is too early to observe financial reports in order to certify the correctness, fairness and fullness of financial information.

The panel found no plan for how the profits will be used. As the institution is established as a non-governmental, non-commercial legal entity, the profit cannot be transferred to the mother company, according to Georgian legislation; there should be some mechanism of paying for service providing or grants found formation that is not considered in the budget.

The budget also projects a 20% allocated for taxes on Net Surplus/Deficit; according to the Georgian taxation system (based on the Estonian model) non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) entities are not taxable until profits are withdrawn from the organization by the founder, but this cannot happen in the case of non-commercial entities, according to national legislation. Therefore, the 20% tax should not be included in the budget.

The panel also noted that the provided Institutional Budget has been prepared rather superficially: there are no closed entries for the temporary accounts, there are no financial results, short-term liability items, or short-term assets items other than "cash".

The budget includes funds allocated for the development of the library, for Social, Cultural, Economic, Environmental, Seminar, Conference and Other Activities/Events, as well as for further development of learning and teaching, human resources/infrastructure in the form of staff development, field research and study, stationery and material resources; however, the panel considers that these are not adequate considering the planned number of students and the rather scarce situation at the time of the authorisation visit.

The *Business process continuity, financial management, and control system* regulates the financial management and control, the budgetary cycle, the managerial functionality; however, the panel noted that there is no actual implementation in practice of this document. For example, the budgeting management cycle did not start by *correctly identifying the needs of the branch, studying and evaluating the created/possible risks, identifying risk mitigation/avoidance mechanisms, gathering information, analysing alternatives, budgeting,* as regulated in the document. Also, the financial management has not been based on the strategy development, and action plans approved by the General Assembly, as regulated by the document. While the institution is yet too early in its operations to have conducted financial audits, the *Business process continuity, financial management, and control system* does not regulate audits conducted by eligible auditor/audit companies and the publication of reports with relevant financial statements are publicly accessible. Therefore, the institution is urged to revisit the relevant documentation and ensure its implementation in practice so that it provides for a functional managerial accountability, financial management and control system, and ensure lawful, transparent, economical, efficient, and productive use of resources for the achievement of the strategic and action plans.

**Evidences/indicator**
- Organisation Chart;
- Business process continuity, financial management, and control system;
- Institutional budget;
- Balance Sheet;
- Strategic development plan 2022-2028;
- Action Plan 2022-2024;
- Meetings conducted by the panel during the authorisation process.

**Recommendations:**
- Ensure that the budgeting process is transparent, participatory and aligned to national legislation;
- Align the institutional budget with the strategic and action plans;
- Develop and implement budget monitoring procedures, a financial accounting policy and procedures for financial analysis and reporting systems;
- Revisit the *Business process continuity, financial management, and control system* and ensure its implementation in practice so that it ensures a functional managerial accountability, financial management and control system, and provide for lawful, transparent, economical, efficient, and productive use of resources for the achievement of the strategic and action plans.

**Suggestions:**
N/A

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
N/A

**Evaluation**
- ☐ Complies with requirements
- ☐ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☐ Partially complies with requirements
- ☒ Does not comply with requirements