Authorization Report on LEPL – Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University

Expert Panel Members

Chair: Sijbolt Noorda, President emeritus University of Amsterdam, Netherlands

Co-chair: Nadia Badrawi, Professor emerita University of Cairo, Egypt

Members:

Giorgi Abuladze, Student expert, Tbilisi State University

Ilia Botsvadze, Dean of Faculty, European University, Tbilisi

Eka Gegeshidze, Employer Expert, Professor, University of Georgia, Tbilisi

Giga Khositashvili, Head of Library, Ilia State University, Tbilisi

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Tbilisi

2024

General information on the educational institution

Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University [BSU] is a legal entity under public law based in Batumi, last authorized in 2018, offering 87 programs in higher education (of which 74 are accredited programs) and 7 in VET. The total number of active students enrolled is 6913 [2523 suspended students], of which 4806 are in bachelor programs [2059 suspended], 374 in master programs [208 suspended], 1058 in MD programs [95 suspended], 153 in one-cycle programs [25 suspended], 63 in teacher training [12 suspended] and 89 in doctoral programs [35 suspended]. The total number of staff is 1201: 303 academic staff, 291 affiliated academic staff, 480 invited staff, 34 administrative staff and 312 support staff. All data as presented in the SER 2024.

BSU was established in 1990 on the basis of a Pedagogical Institute and has since then gradually developed into a full-grown national university, firmly rooted in the region and contributing to its educational as well as employment needs and demands. In later years BSU has embraced international ambitions in education (mainly in the medical field) as well as in research (in all fields).

Brief overview of the authorization site visit

On May 27-30, 2024 the expert panel visited Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, conducted a series of interviews and visited several facilities of the university, including a number of medical provisions.

Throughout the visit the panel was assisted by NCEQE officers Tornike Bakakuri and Ana Jugeli, as well as interpreter Mariam Khazhomia.

On May 27 the panel interviewed the rector and deputy rector; the self-evaluation team; a delegation of both the academic and the representative council; the head of administration and the deans of faculty; the heads of departments SRS, SD&IR, CMVPCE, and PR; representatives of study process and SCDCSD (sub-)departments; heads of departments Chancellery, IT, FE, Legal, PLSS and Library.

On May 28 the panel interviewed heads of program at faculties of Exact Sciences & Education, Technologies, Natural Sciences & Healthcare, together with directors of three research institutes; heads of program at faculties of Economics & Business, Tourism, Humanities, and Law & Social Sciences; some members of academic & invited staff at faculties of Exact Sciences & Education, Technologies, Natural Sciences & Healthcare; some members of academic & invited staff at faculties of Economics & Business, Tourism, Humanities, and Law & Social Sciences; some BA and MA students at faculties of Exact Sciences & Education, Technologies, Natural Sciences & Healthcare; some BA and MA students at faculties of Economics & Business, Tourism, Humanities, and Law & Social Sciences; some PhD students in six different programs; a delegation of students in student self-government, as well as some students from various student clubs and societies.

In parallel the co-chair and two panel members interviewed the head of the MD program; some members of academic & invited staff at MD programs; some BA and MA students at MD programs.

On May 29 the panel interviewed some recent graduates of BA and MA programs; some recent graduates of PhD programs; some representatives of regional ministries as well as other regional employers.

In parallel the co-chair and two panel members interviewed graduates of the MD and other English taught program.

Afterwards the panel was given a presentation of the university system of digital portals; and visited a wide variety of facilities in Kobuleti and Batumi, ranging from research and library to sports and dormitory facilities.

In parallel the co-chair and two panel visited a range of medical and related facilities in Batumi.

On May 30 the panel interviewed heads of QA at university and faculty level; and the vice rector.

Afterwards the panel privately discussed its main findings and evaluations, as well as recommendations and best practices; whereupon the chair of the panel presented these initial findings to the rector and vice rector, the head of administration as well as some heads of QA.

All of this went smoothly and was efficiently supported by BSU staff, the interpreter as well as both NCEQE officers present.

Overview of the HEI's compliance with standards

Summary of Recommendations

(at 1.2.) It is recommended that BSU practice dynamic cycle strategic planning in accordance with its own methodology, include in its strategic and action plans clear performance indicators in each case and systematically bundle connected tasks and ambitions.

(at 2.1.) It is recommended that human capital development be established as a new central function, bundling and serving interconnected goals and purposes, both in management and support at the university level as well as for faculties and institutes (a future HR department's role)

(at 2.2.) It is recommended that quality culture establishment be the overall goal in quality assurance (implying mainstreaming quality responsibilities as well as multi-faceted assessments)

(at 3.2.) It is recommended to increase the degree of integration in the medical programs as well as increase clinical training time in the English programs.

It is recommended to intensify Georgian language acquisition for foreign students

It is recommended to design a capacity-building program in medical education for faculty members

(at 3.3.) As to the medical programs it is recommended to ensure real integration in the assessment of students in the medical program, as well as improve the OSCE according to the subject benchmark (it should be at least 10 stations) and introduce OSPE in the basic science modules.

(at 4.1.) It is recommended staff evaluation be brought up to standards (360 degree) and be done by an HR dept, with clear benchmarks and KPIs

(at 5.1.) It is recommended that student awareness be enhanced (on rights, student self-government)

(at 6.1.) It is recommended, with an eye toward future recruitments, that an adequate level of English is made indispensable for incoming PhD candidates

(at 6.2.) It is recommended that BSU engage in more international research projects as the best way to further enhance its international research portfolio and visibility

It is recommended that BSU address its internationalization policy and practice in a more analytical and structured manner (in addition to planning a range of individual projects and activities)

(at 7.1.) It is recommended to upgrade the medical simulator center, add more advanced manikins and an anatomage to secure clinical rotation and basic science needs

(at 7.2.) It is recommended the library clearly present training modules on Information Seeking and provide this service to its clients in both the Georgian and English languages.

it is recommended that the library takes steps to translate its rules and information on its webpage into English to guarantee foreign students (and other stakeholders) are informed as well.

(at 7.3.) It is recommended that the BSU website be complete and accessible to English language speakers as well, in view of BSU's international ambitions

(at 7.4.) It is recommended that BSU fixes control and external as well as internal audit issues in the interest of full transparency on the use of its resources (basically a repetition of 2018 advice)

It is recommended that in view of the plans for an increased income from commercialization BSU makes an integrated plan involving all relevant parts of university

Summary of Suggestions

(at 1.1.) It is suggested that a future emendation of the mission statement include a clear reference to BSU's international functions and ambitions as in the vision and values statement.

(at 2.3) It is suggested, as generative AI is already playing a substantial role in academia, BSU include this in its principles and practices of academic integrity

It is suggested that BSU review its use of percentages of textual similarity in plagiarism tests

It is suggested that norms and values are listed and described with consistency and clarity across various documents and procedures.

(at 3.1.) It is suggested to standardize both medical study programs, in English and Georgian

(at 3.2.) It is suggested to encourage the involvement of student and alumni and make their input more transparent in planning, design and implementation of programs.

It is suggested to design courses on AI for professional development for faculty members and integrate courses on artificial intelligence into all programs.

It is suggested to increase the level of language proficiency, whether English or Georgian, as a prerequisite to enrollment in programs using such languages. (see also at 6.1.)

It is suggested to standardize the English language wording of LOs in all programs, clearly link competencies with program LOs and program LOs with LOs of modules.

(at 3.3.) It is suggested in preparing the assessment of the courses, to use the blueprint or table of specification to ensure the coverage of ILOs of each course and balance the questions relevant to each content area.

It is suggested to introduce formative assessment as part of student assessment.

(at 4.2.) It is suggested that heads of program receive workload acknowledgment and additional remuneration for this part of their work

(at 5.1.) It is suggested that international students take part in relevant governing bodies (where there are seats for students)

(at 6.1.) It is suggested that supervising of PhD thesis work is done by more than one supervisor.

It is suggested the institution enhance the research commercialization dimension, considering regional needs and opportunities.

(at 6.2.) It is suggested the university strengthen its support for PhD candidates by promoting existing financial schemes and encouraging them to apply for funding.

(at 6.3.) It is suggested to subscribe to WOS to enable access to a tool that is used in education and research as well as for evaluation data

It is suggested alongside quantitative data, the university incorporate qualitative elements in the assessment of researchers. This ensures that the organization gains a comprehensive understanding of the existing practices.

(at 7.2) It is suggested the university considers international standards of copy right when digitization the printed resources even for the educational purposes.

(at 7.3.) It is suggested that the university add a management accounting and control module (MACS) to the information system, which will be able to automatically monitor the target indicators and easily evaluate efficiency and effectiveness of the organization.

(at 7.4.) It is suggested thet BSU develop a transparent and perennial policy on reserve funds and spending plans.

Summary of the Best Practices

(at 3.2.) Integration in the English medical curriculum of a health policies module addressing health issues in India.

(at 4.1. and 6.1) BSU has an incentive scheme in place to stimulate research productivity

(at 5.2.) BSU is serving a substantial student body from challenging backgrounds (some 10%) that it generously supports (with the help of regional government)
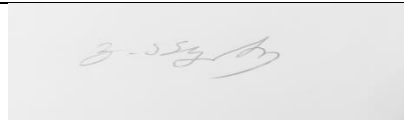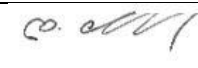
(at 7.3.) BSU has a digital portals system in place that is widely used in the university for a wide variety of purposes which is both effective and efficient. It enhances communication and makes bureaucracy manageable

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 Programs	☐	☒	☐	☐
3.1	Design and development of educational programs	☒	☐	☐	☐
3.2	Structure and content of educational programs	☐	☒	☐	☐
3.3	Assessment of learning outcomes	☐	☒	☐	☐
4	Staff of the HEI	☒	☐	☐	☐

4.1	Staff management	☐	☒	☐	☐
4.2	Academic/Scientific and invited Staff workload	☒	☐	☐	☐
5	**Students and their support services**	☒	☐	☐	☐
5.1	The Rule for obtaining and changing student status, the recognition of education, and student rights	☐	☒	☐	☐
5.2	Student support services	☒	☐	☐	☐
6	**Research, development and/or other creative work**	☐	☒	☐	☐
6.1	Research activities	☐	☒	☐	☐
6.2	Research support and internationalization	☐	☒	☐	☐
6.3	Evaluation of research activities	☒	☐	☐	☐
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. Sijbolt Noorda (Chair)	
2. Nadia Badrawi (Co-chair)	*Nadia Badrawi*
3. Giorgi Abuladze (Member)	
4. Ilia Botsvadze (Member)	
5. Eka Gegeshidze (Member)	
6. Giga Khositashvili (Member)	
7. Davit Makhviladze (Member)	
8. Davit Topuria (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 higher education area and broader society. Strategic development plan of HEI corresponds with the mission of an institution, is based on the goals of the institution and describe means for achieving these goals.

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

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

BSU recently emended its mission statement. It now reads as follows: "Shota Rustaveli university offers comprehensive educational programs across vocational and all the three cycles of academic higher education, fundamental and applied research aimed at sustainable development of our country, social welfare of the population, ecological safety, and economic strength, as well as establishment of liberal values and democratic principles, dynamic development and digitized management process. The University recognizes its special importance in the development of the region and considers as its priority the study of South-West Georgian culture and the Black Sea biology and ecology as well as Phyto-pathological research and the development of agriculture and tourism." This mission convincingly describes BSU's profile and function in conformity with this standard component in all but one aspect that is not explicitly present in the mission statement: internationalization. This, however, is an important theme in BSU's statements of vision ("Shota Rustaveli State University is one of the leading higher education institutions dedicated to developing a highly qualified, competitive specialist, a free person who embodies national and universal values. We aim to become a robust educational and research center with a prominent position in both national and international educational spheres.") and values ("Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University is committed to the fundamental principles of the great Charter of European Universities, its main values are: humanism, openness, accountability, support for the realization of personal potential, academic integrity, inclusiveness and tolerance, diversity, internationalization of learning/teaching and research.") Against this backdrop the mission statement better include a clear reference to BSU's international functions and ambitions as in the vision and values statement.

Evidence/indicators

The strategic development plan 2025-2031 sets its goals in conformity with the statements of mission, vision and values. A range of regional, national and international functions as well as a good balance between education, research and third mission strategic goals testify to this. Various interviewees confirmed this, implicitly as well as explicitly.

Recommendations:

Suggestions:
It is suggested that a future emendation of the mission statement include a clear reference to BSU's international functions and ambitions as in the vision and values statement.

Best Practices (if applicable):

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

1.2 Strategic Development

- o   HEI has a strategic development (7-year) and an action plan (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

BSU has both a strategic and an action plan, which builds upon its mission and vision, and is largely in line with its strategic planning methodology. In its core the strategic plan sets 8 goals, each with a fair number of sub-goals or tasks. The action plan in turn describes these tasks in more detail, with "target benchmarks", responsible actors, expected outcomes and budget sources indicated in each case.

In general terms these plans are in compliance with standard requirements, including a range of contributions to the development of society and some reflections on necessary improvements of past performance. If studied in more detail, however, it becomes clear that strategic planning at BSU has not yet reached the level of maturity befitting the university's ambitions. There are three issues: the planning is lacking a structured monitoring of past performance and lessons learned; the plans would substantially benefit from stronger cohesion and bundling, and be less of a very long to-do-list; and last but not least, "target benchmarks" and "expected outcomes" in the action plan are often just rather formal and very general mirrors of task descriptions instead of real performance indicators that can be monitored and reviewed in the process.

Interviewees explained that due to the Covid-19 pandemic monitoring and evaluating plans versus performance had not been feasible. However that may be, as a consequence the notes on "areas of improvement" in the SER and the rather limited SWOT-analysis were the only documentation of what BSU's own methodology describes as "a dynamic cycle, a continuous upward process that constantly requires monitoring, evaluation of achievements, identification of strengths and weaknesses, presentation of existing challenges and new opportunities, complex, multifaceted analysis of information, critical revision of existing priorities, new determining priorities, making changes, etc." [article 3.1. of the methodology]. This article 3.1. is indeed a perfect expression of what should have been done but is in fact done, documented and demonstrated only partially.

In terms of its embedding in and contribution to society BSU clearly fulfills its tasks. Its regional function is quite strong. Both its regular programs of teaching & learning and research, and its third mission programs are attracting many participants from the region. They tackle regional problems and challenges. BSU partners with schools and offers short-term education programs, as well as vocational training programs developed and implemented by the BSU Management and Lifelong Learning Center. Social involvement is also present in research (advisory initiatives for farmers, the functioning of legal and psychological clinics, projects undertaken by the Agricultural Extension Centre). In addition, there are partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations to carry out joint entrepreneurial and innovative projects.

Evidence/indicators

Primary evidence for the evaluation by the expert panel is the strategic plan, the action plan, the self-evaluation report and their annexes themselves. Interviewees explained that due to the Covid-19 pandemic monitoring and evaluating plans versus performance had not been feasible.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that BSU practice dynamic cycle strategic planning in accordance with its own methodology, include in its strategic and action plans clear performance indicators in each case and systematically bundle connected tasks and ambitions.

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

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
- o Procedures for election/appointment of the management bodies of HEI are transparent, equitable, and in line with legislation
- o HEI's Leadership/Management body ensures effective management of the activities of the institution
- 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

BSU's overall organizational structure consists of faculties and research institutes responsible for the main tasks of education and research, a good number of central offices for key tasks in management and support, and a dual university leadership structure of an academic council and a representative council on the one hand and the rector, the head of administration and the QA service on the other. In view of the size of the university this structure is adequate, although BSU in the SER is critical on the ratio between the academic staff and a relatively large administrative/support staff. BSU wants to have a better balance by 2030.

BSU fulfills its registration tasks as to educational matters in accordance with relevant legal prescriptions.

The university's business continuity policy is outlined in Article 14 of the BSU Management Effectiveness Monitoring Rule. It ensures the university's preparedness to meet its obligation to provide services to students and staff, including in circumstances that may hinder its functioning. Risk assessment of business processes and continuity policies ensure smooth implementation of the university's objectives, mission, strategic development and action plans; rational distribution of university resources; promoting a safe university environment for study and work; mitigation of negative factors that may hinder the achievement of the university's objectives; effectiveness of university management, and sustainable development of the university.

Procedures of appointment and (s)election of officers and their task-descriptions are clear and in line with legal requirements. The documentation we received does, however, not contain a selection and role description of the vice-rector.

The position of the internal auditor is momentarily vacant. See the panel's comments at 7.4.

Furthermore, there is one crucial management aspect absent in the present structure: Human Capital Development or Human Resources Management. In view of the further development of the university in terms of academic quality and international visibility and connectivity the human capital factor deserves a dedicated management and support unit. This will enable BSU to design and realize a coherent approach on HR, instead of the present fragmentary handling by various offices and officers.

In evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of university leadership and management bodies the expert panel noted that there is a solid practice of collaboration and joint deliberations. There is an obvious priority area in the ambitious digital portals system of data collection, communication and evaluation, which greatly contributes to the efficiency of many administrative processes. See further at 7.3

Support of BSU leadership for international cooperations and more in general the process of internationalization is unequivocal. It is one of the key tasks of the vice rector and a partial responsibility of relatively many other officers. Progress is slower than hoped for. A lot of work is still ahead. See e.g. SER on "future challenges" in § 2.1. (ET p. 26). More on internationalization in 6.

All in all, BSU substantially complies with standard requirements in these areas, with some avenues for improvement. See recommendation.

Evidence/indicators

All three core documents (SER, SP, AP) contribute to the observations of the expert panel. Interviews produced few additional insights. It seemed that the present structure is seen as so evident so that its relative merits or flaws are hardly being observed.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that human capital development be established as a new central function, bundling and serving interconnected goals and purposes, both in management and support at the university level as well as for faculties and institutes (a future HR department's role)

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation
☐ Complies with requirements
☒ Substantially complies with requirements
☐ Partially complies with requirements
o ☐ 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 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

BSU clearly takes quality assurance seriously. This is demonstrated by its range of dedicated QA offices/officers both at university and faculty level, by the QA processes and mechanisms in place and by its priority position in planning documents.

The logical next step should be to work on establishing a quality culture in the university at all levels and in all its parts. Hallmark of quality culture is a mainstreamed, widely shared awareness of and responsibility for good quality. At the same time, it transcends fragmented, aspect-by-aspect approaches, and goes beyond item-by-item post-factum measurement. The expert panel believes that BSU's current quality assurance practice relies too much on individual rules and interventions. A quality culture approach is therefore called for.

Solid procedures for student body planning as well study program planning are in place. The expert panel has not detected any indications of insufficient provisions for students.

Evidence/indicators

All three core documents (SER, SP, AP) contribute to the observation of the expert panel that solid QA procedures are in place, data collection follows a standard cycle, and noticeable cases or changes needed are being brought to the Academic Council.

Interviewees confirmed these by describing QA processes and discussing some specific cases, e.g. the involvement of foreign colleagues in the design of international study programs, and various degrees of (un)acceptability of reported research performance data against set standards.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that quality culture establishment be the overall goal in quality assurance (implying mainstreaming quality responsibilities as well as multi-faceted assessments)

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

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

BSU has a good code of ethics (created in 2017) in place and several procedures to check compliance. The code includes a detailed prescription for various categories of staff and students. A university ethics committee evaluates cases of plagiarism and other infringements of ethical standards. A disciplinary commission is in place to decide on sanctions. (SER, p. 34)

On plagiarism the regulations define certain percentages of similarity in the texts submitted by the students, in BA thesis it is 40%, in MA 30%. Although BSU participated in international projects where best practices do not use such percentages (it is not considered a good practice), it is remarkable that they are still used as a criterion.

The SER is not mentioning AI tools and its unethical/ethical use, nor is the SP. This suggests that the issue is not yet getting the attention it deserves.

There is a broader issue with the wording of values and principles of ethics in the available documents. The code of ethics enumerates five basic values (high quality, academic and intellectual freedom, fairness, accountability, conscientiousness). The SP lists as main values: humanism, openness, accountability, support for the realization of personal potential, academic integrity, inclusiveness and tolerance, diversity, internationalization of learning/teaching and research. In addition, both documents identify specific value-rich goals of the university and its contribution to students and society (like "the ultimate goal of creating a university environment that is devoid of all forms of discrimination and hate speech" (Code of Ethics) and "establishing the democratic, academic and civil values in the society" (SP, goal 1.2). Discrimination, harassment and hate speech are added to the Code of Ethics in 2021; yet absent in the SP and AP. Internationalization is sometimes seen as a value, sometimes as a tool for quality enhancement. It would have been better had the values vocabulary been consistent. If norms are to be guidelines that can be communicated clearly and be upheld by all, clarity and consistency are certainly helpful.

Evidence/indicators

All three core documents (SER, SP, AP) and the Code of Ethics contribute to the observations and assessments of the expert panel. In some interviews evidence of infringements was asked for. Some incidence was reported, no general overview given.

Recommendations:

Suggestions:
- It is suggested, as generative AI is already playing a substantial role in academia, BSU include this in its principles and practices of academic integrity   - It is suggested that BSU review its use of percentages of textual similarity in plagiarism tests   - It is suggested that norms and values are listed and described with consistency and clarity across various documents and procedures.

Best Practices (if applicable):

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

3. Educational Programs

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

3.1 Design and Development of Educational Programs
HEI has a policy for planning, designing, implementing and developing educational programs.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

BSU has a solid policy for planning, designing and developing educational programs. The SER describes the precise methodology, process of design, and renewal of programs, with the involvement of all stakeholders. Interviews confirmed that the procedures regarding program planning are being followed. However, the role of students and alumni in developing and revising programs stays unclear. BSU might encourage the involvement of student and alumni and make their input more transparent in program planning and design.

It is remarkable that BSU has only 2 joint programs (with national partners) while it is an important target of internationalization.

Programs are well-constructed and aligned with the mission of the university. Almost all programs are accredited by the National Center for Education Quality Enhancement (74 out of 87). There is a plan for program implementation, monitoring and periodic review. However, according to the SER, there are some programs, especially Master and PhD, with a very small number of students (2–5), and other programs with a very low employability rate of 2-3% (Bachelor of Chemistry). During the interview with the deans it was mentioned that they plan to broaden the study program to attract a larger number of students. During the interview with the QA office, the expert panel asked whether there are minimum standards for closing programs when there are almost no students or when employability is so low. They replied that they have standards, but these do not include the number of students that find

employment in a given sector of the labor market. In the Resolution N06-01/54 as of 14 July 2022 of the BSU Academic Council, Annex N1 Article 1. General Provisions it is stated that when considering to cancel an educational program an analysis of the demands of the labor market can play a role. See also SER, p. 37. This suggests that the needs of the labor market plays a role, while low graduate employment doesn't by itself lead to the decision to close a program.

There are two medical programs called one-cycle programs, one for Georgian students, including 69 modules, and one for foreign students, in English, including 74 modules. The English program enrolls 89% of its students from India.

Evidence/indicators

Self-Evaluation report, meeting with deans and faculty members, Academic Council, Quality Assurance Office, Academic Staff, and Employers

Recommendations:

Suggestions:

It is suggested to standardize both medical study programmes, in English and Georgian

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

☒ Complies with requirements

☐ Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

3.2 Structure and Content of Educational Programs

o Program 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 programs, HEI takes into consideration various requirements, needs and academic readiness of students, and ensures their unhindered involvement into the educational process.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

The program learning outcomes (LOs) describe knowledge, skills, and/or responsibility and autonomy that students gain upon completion of the program. Learning outcomes comply with the relevant level and the qualification to be awarded. Learning outcomes for certain fields are based on field characteristics (subject benchmarks) and are developed in line with the Qualifications Framework. However, during the visits and various interviews, most of the students and some of the faculty members didn't know what was meant by learning outcomes. This suggests that the concept is not generally a familiar one. Furthermore, by examining the learning outcomes in parallel programs with different languages of teaching, the review team found inconsistencies in the methodology of writing LOs.

Although the subject benchmark of the medical program clearly defines 14 general and specific competencies to be acquired in the medical curriculum, the panel didn't find any direct connection between competencies and LOs. Moreover, by examining the syllabus of the English MD program, there appeared to be no relation between program LOs and module LOs. In addition, there were some LOs not related to the subject. (e.g. the Pediatrics syllabus).

The medical program is an integrated one, according to the SER and the subject benchmark presented. However, after reviewing the medical curriculum, the panel is convinced that the degree of integration should be increased. Based on the interviews with the different faculty levels, the panel concluded that there also is a need to design capacity-building programs in medical education, especially in the design and assessment of competency-based integrated programs.

During the meeting with alumni of the English medical program, they mentioned they had asked the administration to add to their curriculum a course on global health, including the main health problems in India, as 89% of foreign students are from India. The administration agreed and added learning outcomes about Indian health policies in India to the module on health policies. The expert panel considered this one of the best practices. The alumni had also expressed the wish to increase the clinical and practical parts of their programs. On this the administration has not yet replied.

BSU takes into consideration the various requirements, needs, and academic readiness of students; the university has policies and procedures for that. In the case of a foreign language program and all PhD programs, the prerequisite for admission in terms of language proficiency, is at least B2 level. However, the students, also those in Master and PhD programs, could not communicate in English with the panel. The reverse was true for foreigners: students in the years 4 and 6 of the medical program could not communicate in Georgian, where in the medical programs, students should be able to communicate with patients in the Georgian language.

Artificial intelligence is revolutionizing higher education all over the world. During the meeting with university leadership and the QA, they agreed that there is a plan to introduce it in BSU; however, nothing was mentioned in the Strategic Plan 2030 about AI.

Evidence/indicators

Self-Evaluation report; Meeting with deans and faculty members, QA offices, students and alumni, with the deans of Georgian and English Medical Programs; the curriculum of various study programs and syllabi of medical program.

Recommendations:

It is recommended to increase the degree of integration in the medical programs as well as increase clinical training time in the English programs.

It is recommended to intensify Georgian language acquisition for foreign students

It is recommended to design a capacity-building program in medical education for faculty members

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Suggestions:

It is suggested to design courses on AI for professional development for faculty members and integrate courses on artificial intelligence into all programs.

It is suggested to increase the level of language proficiency, whether English or Georgian, as a prerequisite to enrollment in programs using such languages. (See also at 6.1.)

It is suggested to standardize the English language wording of LOs in all programs, clearly link competencies with program LOs and program LOs with LOs of modules.

It is suggested to encourage the involvement of student and alumni and make their input more transparent in planning, design and implementation of programs.

Best Practices (if applicable):

Integration in the English medical curriculum of a health policies module addressing health issues in India.

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

According to the SER, BSU is implementing a system for the assessment of learning outcomes, both direct and indirect. Assessment principles are available for all programs and syllabi. However, the system of assessment does not clearly define how the university ensures that the system assesses actual LOs, as they do not use a blueprint methodology or other methodology to ensure the assessment of LOs.They also inform students about goals,achieved and ways of improvements. The institution has an effective appellation system in place.

As to the assessment of the medical programs in use for the clinical part, the OSCE methods use the simulator center rather incompletely as they design 4 stations for the OSCE. In the subject benchmark that is used by BSU, it is clearly stated that the OSCE exam should be between 10 to 12 stations. The expert panel suggests upgrading the OSCE exam to properly implement the subject benchmark. Moreover, the panel suggests implementing direct assessment tools such as OSPE for the basic medical part of the curriculum. The panel found that there is no clear plan for formative assessment for students; they rely more on the summative one. Although the medical curriculum is an integrated one, summative assessment is not yet integrated.

Evidence/indicators

Self-Evaluation report; meeting with deans and faculty members, with QA committee, with students and alumni, with the deans of Georgian and English medical programs; the curriculum and syllabi of medical programs

Recommendations:
As to the medical programs it is recommended to ensure real integration in the assessment of students in the medical program, as well as improve the OSCE according to the subject benchmark (it should be at least 10 stations) and introduce OSPE in the basic science modules.

Suggestions:
It is suggested in preparing the assessment of the courses to use the blueprint or table of specification to ensure the coverage of ILOs of each course and balance the questions relevant to each content area.   It is suggested to introduce formative assessment as part of student assessment.

Best Practices (if applicable):

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
○ HEI has staff management policy and procedures that ensure the implementation of educational process and other activities defined in its strategic plan.   ○ HEI ensures the employment of qualified academic/scientific/invited/administrative/ support staff.
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements   BSU has an elaborated staff management policy in place, according to the document "The Personnel Management Policy of BSU" approved by BSU representative council on September 8, 2023, N07-01/41 decision.   The BSU personnel management policy establishes general principles and rules of personnel management, including:

a. The procedure of hiring (selection/appointment) of personnel.
b. The terms and conditions of affiliation of academic and scientific personnel with BSU.
c. Principles of participation of academic and scientific personnel in decision-making processes regarding educational, research, and other important issues.
d. Approaches and strategies of professional development of personnel.
e. Principles of remuneration and incentives.
f. The procedure for integration new employees into the work environment and effectively involving them in the work process.
g. A gender equality policy.

General principles and rules of staff management are based on transparent and objective procedures for hiring (electing/appointing) academic, scientific, invited, administrative, and support personnel, which ensures attracting and hiring qualified employees.

The institution has also developed the terms and conditions of holding an academic position (according to the "Rules of recruitment of academic staff"), according to which, holding an academic position is done through open competition; and all interested parties are given the opportunity to go through a transparent, equal, accessible and fair selection process. The document also regulates that the procedure for occupying an academic position consists of three stages - filing an application, selecting candidates for an interview, interviewing them and making a decision. The selection criteria defined by the rules and conditions for holding an academic position for academic staff are in accordance with the legislation of Georgia.

BSU has developed and generally implemented a transparent procedure for the selection/employment of administrative and support staff, which provides for the identification of qualification requirements. Administrative position - 1. as a result of the appointment by order of the rector - on the position of deputy rector/deputy dean/acting director of an independent research unit and 2. As a result of elections/competition - for the positions of rector, head of administration, faculty dean, heads of university and faculty quality assurance services, and director of an independent research institute, in accordance with BSU statutes and BSU election regulations. Assistant/helping positions - according to the "Rules for recruiting auxiliary staff of BSU" approved by the decision of the representative council of BSU, and in case of hiring according to the competition - the legal act on the announcement of the competition, on the recruitment of personnel of BSU in accordance with the regulation and the legislation of Georgia.

The labor contract closed with BSU employees determines the rights and obligations of the subjects of the labor relationship, which derives from Georgian legislation and university regulations (Among them: Labor Code of Georgia; Law of Georgia "On Higher Education"; Law of Georgia "On Personal Data Protection", BSU Charter, BSU Personnel Management Policy, BSU Code of Ethics; Bylaws of BSU; BSU procedure instruction; Regulation of the relevant structural unit where the person is employed; other legal acts, which are related to the employee's activities and official functions and duties). The abovementioned legislative and university legal acts, according to the internal regulations of the BSU and the employment contract concluded with the employee, are considered a constituent part of the employment contract, and it is ensured that the employee is familiar with them before the beginning of the labor relationship/before the signing of the employment contract (the structural unit responsible for personnel management provides support for familiarization with the regulations), as well as It is publicly available on the university's website, in the field "Legal Reference".

The institution has developed a rule for the affiliation of academic staff, according to which a written agreement is formed between the University and the person selected based on the rule for holding academic positions. The form of affiliation agreement with BSU is approved by the order of the Rector of BSU. The conditions for affiliation of an academic official with BSU are: employed in an academic position only at BSU, doesn't hold a scientific position at another institution, carries out educational, scientific-research activities at BSU and connects (is considered) only BSU with the results of his scientific research; participates in the processes of community development and knowledge sharing on behalf of BSU; involved in the decision-making processes of BSU regarding educational, research and other important issues; involved in the processes of academic counseling and academic/scientific guidance of students. The rules for affiliation of academic staff of BSU, determination of workload of academic and invited staff and payment of remuneration (hereinafter - the rule of affiliation) will be developed by the academic council and approved by the representative council. Annual work (academic) workload categories of BSU academic officials are determined in accordance with the affiliation rule, taking into account their affiliation with BSU, their workload in BSU and/or other institutions.

Statutes of BSU define the main duties of academic staff as follows: to engage in or lead learning/teaching and research activities, to participate in and/or initiate curriculum development and involvement of academic and scientific personnel in decision-making processes. Academic personnel beside the involvment in the teaching, scientific-academic processes also involved in decision-making as they are represented at faculty board, academic and representative boards of University.

BSU employes the strategy and approach for the professional development of the staff through various measures, namely: financing of professional training/development courses/trainings (with full financing or co-financing from the BSU budget); paid creative leave of an academic official (the so-called "academic leave") for a period of not less than 1 semester and not more than 1 academic year; Permissibility of an active labor relationship by an academic or scientific official during the period of participation in the international grant project (with maintenance of the salary); support for participation in professional development events (conferences, trainings and others) by self-financing/on the initiative/desire of the employee (counting absence at work for the specified reason as valid excuse); introduction of new technologies and electronic programs in the university, in order to promote and improve activities. BSU presented various evidences proving support of professional development of the staff.

To ensure the maintenance of highly qualified personnel and increase motivation, BSU has established principles of remuneration and encouragement, which take into consideration employees performance evaluation results based on the "Rule of financing the professional development of BSU staff and encouraging the publication of articles". The development of motivation mechanisms is based on the results of staff satisfaction questionnaires and interviews. The requirements and procedures of the applicable affiliation rule in BSU ensure the transparency of the process, openness, availability of information and are aimed at the formation of a competitive environment. The mechanisms for increasing staff motivation are: Adequate compensation for labor; financial incentives, taking into account the qualification and additional labor volume; opportunities for promotion, official advancement; freedom in the process of making decisions; positive emotional support of the employee in the labor process and objective evaluation of the work performed; creation of modern material and technical conditions necessary for the smooth conduct of activities/educational process.

The academic and scientific staff of BSU are fully or partially financed in accordance with the rules established by internal university legal acts. Namely: publication of a work prepared for use in the

educational process of BSU and recognized as a guide, in accordance with the regulation of publishing activity of BSU and/or other legal act; participation in international conferences, seminars, etc. on behalf of BSU; publishing an article on behalf of BSU in highly rated scientific publications; research and activities; unlimited access to BSU electronic databases related to the employee's research field; intra-university targeted/faculty grant projects that are in compliance with the priorities of the strategic development plan of BSU. BSU academic and invited staff can obtain funding (in the amount of 2000 GEL) for participation in the conference; For scientific publications in periodicals indexed in Web of Science, Scopus, or ERIH PLUS metric databases, a cash award of up to 2500 GEL is provided. Also, international scientific-practical conference is periodically held at BSU faculties. BSU has a regulation for issuing targeted scientific-research grants and an annual budget of 240,000 GEL considered for the competition to be held annually. In agreement with the mentioned regulation, a competition is announced according to the directions of sectoral and interdisciplinary studies, including for young scientists. The budget of BSU covers the purchase and translation of educational and scientific literature. In order to increase the language competence of academic, scientific, administrative, support and invited personnel, certified English language courses operate on the co-financing principle. The Administration occasionally offers academic, scientific, administrative, support and invited staff to participate in qualification-enhancing training. The annual budget of BSU allocates 100,000 GEL for staff training.

BSU's staff management policy generally describes the integration process of new employees into work environment and their efficient involvement into the working process. The structural unit responsible for personnel management and the official direct supervisor introduce the new employee to the relevant structure, introduce the working environment, personnel, material and technical base and other resources. The new employee is informed about the mission of the university, the strategic development plan, present personnel management policy, internal regulations, the code of ethics, the sexual prevention policy document, the procedure instruction, the regulation of the relevant structural unit and other legal acts regulating the activity. In the first stage for the full adaptation of the new employee to the workplace, the head of the relevant structural unit, in coordination with the structural unit responsible for personnel management, provides support by the employee with working experience in accordance with the needs of the new employee.

BSU actively utilizes staff evaluation and satisfaction survey results in the process of staff management. It has established a system of evaluation of academic and invited personnel that includes personnel self-evaluation and evaluation according to the standards and requirements set by institution. Academic-scientific activities evaluation is integrated as one of the many modules in University Electronic Portal (portal.bsu.edu.ge); however evaluation of administrative and support staff is not as clear and mostly carried out by the heads of departments, faculties and by the representative council. The expert pannel could not find the internal target marks defined by the institution for the staff and the activities performed by them, in order to effectively manage the institution's activities. Moreover, overarching institutional goals and aspirations are framed in a way that makes it difficult for individual units and roles to cascade indicators defined by the strategic and operational plan to measure their own success and excellence (See also at standard 1.2). Interviews with different groups revealed the need of a clear evaluation mechanism of administrative and support staff based on indicators, target marks and appropriate KPIs for ensuring effectively management of the University activities. This should be remedied by the creation of a dedicated HR department.

The panel finds staff evaluation an area for improvement. 360-degree evaluation and clear targets (in terms of performance as well as personal professional progress) should be the rule. This should be a strategic priority for the university as it is the corner stone of its further growth and international

visibility. It is recommended staff evaluation be brought up to standards (360 degree) and be done by an HR dept, with clear benchmarks and KPIs.

BSU already started taking steps toward the issue by developing of employee evaluation system within USAID project financing, which they believe will result in optimization of workload of academic staff, optimization of workplaces in structural units, the transition to a digital platform leads to the optimization of the structure, which leads to the release of human resources.

Evidence/indicators

- Personnel Management Policy;
- BSU Mission and Strategic Development Plan.
- BSU Statute.
- BSU- scientific staff recruitment procedure.
- The rules for hiring BSU academic staff.
- BSU- support staff recruitment procedure.
- Rules and conditions for holding an academic position.
- The procedure for affiliation of academic staff of BSU, determination of workload of academic and invited staff and payment of remuneration.
- Samples of contracts signed with academic, invited and administrative staff.
- The procedure for evaluating the activities of BSU academic and invited staff;
- CVs of academic, invited and administrative staff.
- The rule for monitoring the efficiency of BSU management.
- Rules for financing the professional development of BSU staff and encouraging them to publish articles.
- Provision of the competition for selection of targeted scientific research projects.
- BSU Budget 2024.

Results of the interview with the interested parties.

Recommendations:

It is recommended staff evaluation be brought up to standards (360 degree) and be done by an HR dept, with clear benchmarks and KPIs

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

BSU has an incentive scheme in place to stimulate research productivity (See 6.1)

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 programs and scientific-research activities, and also other functions assigned to them

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

The academic staff workload plan is defined in accordance with the rules of affiliation of academic staff of BSU, determination of workload of academic and invited staff and payment of remuneration and the corresponding agreement with the staff members. According to these documents, the working hours of a full-time employee should not exceed 40 hours per week, and the working hours of a part-time employee should not exceed 20 hours per week. The remuneration of the employee must be related to the implementation of the educational program, namely the hourly workload, which is determined by the relevant educational program and the academic calendar. The hourly load may increase or decrease each semester. A portion of an employee's salary may be tied to his or her participation in social, cultural, environmental, economic and/or other activities and projects at the University. The electronic version of the academic staff's annual (semester) academic workload draft is prepared by the field department of the relevant faculty in coordination with the Dean of the Faculty. Before preparing the electronic version of the annual workload draft of the academic staff, the employee is obliged to record the information about employment in the BSU or another institution in the corresponding module of the BSU portal. According to the information specified by the academic official about employment in another institution, the annual workload category of the employee is formed in the BSU portal module. The employee must familiarize him/herself with and electronically declare his consent or state his opinion about the draft workload in the comment field. According to the comment of the employee, the issue is discussed at the meeting of the field department and based on the decision, the workload of the employee is adjusted or remains unchanged.

The expert panel found that heads of program do not receive workload acknowledgment and additional remuneration for this part of their work

In case of affiliation of the employee, the parties individually agree on additional remuneration. An academic official affiliated with BSU may have a workload of category "A1", "A2", "B1", "B2" or "B3", and an unaffiliated person - a workload of category "C". "A1" and "A2" category envisages full workload for an academic position at BSU, and "B1", "B2" or "B3" category - half workload. Differentiation between them is done by combining work at BSU or another institution (without holding an academic and scientific position). The scheme includes teaching, scientific/research/creative/performing and other workload according to academic staff's functions and duties. The number and workload of academic and scientific staff ensure implementation of educational programs, and proper fulfilment of research/creative/performing/other activities and functions/duties assigned to them; BSU takes into account the workload of an academic staff in all institutions, where he/she holds an academic or scientific position.

BSU has developed a methodology for planning the student contingent and determining the number of staff, according to which the human and material resources of the University, the specifics of the educational program, the number of active students, the principles of student-oriented education and others should be taken into account; this methodology was taken into account when determining the number of students, staff and resources for authorization purposes.

BSU has updated its affiliation rules. The aim of the affiliation rule is to attract and retain qualified academic staff, create a competitive environment, raise the motivation of academic staff and encourage their activities. Affiliation also implies the implementation of various measures to encourage academic staff, including discussion, financing and/or support in other forms of initiatives, projects, research activities and other activities of academic staff, active participation of academic staff in the educational and research process, as well as involvement in socio-cultural events.

The BSU "Academic Staff Affiliation, Workload Determination, and Remuneration Rules for Academic and Invited Staff" sets benchmarks for staff and ensures their improvement.

The actual ratio of academic/scientific staff to total staff, to invited staff and to administrative/support staff is considered too low. BSU wants to see academic staff numbers go up, invited staff numbers go down considerably, and student numbers go up considerably as well. Target benchmarks are set for 2030. See SER, p. 7. At the same time these numbers suggest that overall, there is some unused capacity which even at the present ratio of staff to students leaves room for growth of enrolment numbers. This may of course differ between departments and/or faculties. Regarding workload interviews were useful. Conditions are considered fair. It became clear to the panel that there is sufficient flexibility. In case of frictions either workload is reduced, or employment contract hours or terms are expanded.

Evidence/indicators

- Personnel Management Policy;
- The procedure for affiliation of academic staff of BSU, determination of workload of academic and invited staff and payment of remuneration.
- Samples of contracts signed with academic, invited and administrative staff.
- Methodology for planning the student contingent and determining the number of staff.
- The procedure for evaluating the activities of BSU academic and invited staff.
- CVs of academic, invited and administrative staff.
- Rules for financing the professional development of BSU staff and encouraging them to publish articles.
- Interview with the relevant parties.

Recommendations:

Suggestions:

It is suggested that heads of program receive workload acknowledgment and additional remuneration for this part of their work

Best Practices (if applicable):

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

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

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

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

In terms of regulations the SER clearly demonstrates that student status and rights are well organized and protected at BSU. Also, the BSU portal services are a clear asset, enabling students to file their evaluations and communicate with (academic) administration on a wide range of topics.

What is largely missing is specific information on the use of available tools and opportunities, as well as survey results on all that matters in student life support and academic performance.

In some cases (like on student government) interviews filled this gap. It became clear to the expert panel that student government has not yet become the kind of representation of student rights and positions students deserve. Its agenda seem to be too lopsidedly focused on activities outside the academic curriculum and employability interests.

The Legal Department has explicitly stated that it is immediately available for assistance and remediation in the event of violations of students' rights. That's a good thing, assuming the department has enough autonomy to protect the interests of students.

Evidence/indicators

SER; interviews with students of various categories

Recommendations:

It is recommended that student awareness be enhanced (on rights, student self-government)

Suggestions:

It is suggested that international students take part in relevant governing bodies (where there are seats for students)

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

☐ Complies with requirements

☒ Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

5.2 Student Support Services

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

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

The SER presents a broad range of support services and opportunities for students, supporting their academic performance and study progress, enabling career awareness and offering orientation help, and inviting students to participate in various study, research or career related projects and events. The Student Career Development department supports students and employers in various ways to find a good match. The student portal offers a great opportunity for students to register their profile and preferences and for employers to show what they are looking for. More generally, the student portal is an excellent means of communication for and about students. It is the highway to stay informed.

In case of need BSU offers various forms of financial support to students, among them low SES students. For the latter category of students from the region BSU receives support from the regional government.

Its own evaluation is very positive, although it would like to see more students actively participate in projects and events (some numbers are indeed very low) and more activities to support student employability. (p. 80) The new Action Plan includes activities to improve levels of participation. Likewise it plans to further intensify activities directed towards student career successes.

Some interviewed students reported a lack of info on physical accessibility in some cases, and others (some medical students) wished for better access to syllabi. The expert panel could not verify the exact circumstances of such reports.

Evidence/indicators
SER; interviews with students of various categories

Recommendations:

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):
BSU is serving a substantial student body from challenging backgrounds (some 10%) that it generously supports (with the help of regional government)

Evaluation

☒ Complies with requirements

☐ Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ 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

- o HEI, based on its type and specifics of its fields, carries out research/creative activities.
- o Ensuring the effectiveness of doctoral research supervision

o	HEI has public, transparent and fair procedures for the assessment and defense of dissertations which are relevant to the specifics of the field

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

According to the submitted documents current scientific research at BSU aligns with the university's mission priorities. It conducts both fundamental and applied research, encompassing the topics explored by its faculties, centers, and institutes. Recognizing its significant role in regional development, BSU has prioritized research on the culture of South-Western Georgia, the biology and ecology of the Black Sea, and Phytopathological studies.

The expert panel visited some of the research centers and had a chance to observe the facilities on site. With the support of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, the Institute of Phytopathology and Biodiversity annually offers diagnostic services for plant diseases and pests—plant health clinics—in the region's municipalities. As part of their consulting services, they identify quarantine pest-diseases affecting drupe and seed crops, fungal diseases in nuts, kiwi, citrus, and vegetables, pest insects, and bacterial plant diseases. They also handle sample registration, the documentation of harmful organisms, and their subsequent laboratory analysis.

Following the minimum scientific standards and supportive measures outlined by BSU's research policy, both the quantity and quality of research have markedly improved from 2017 to the present. This improvement is evidenced by the publication of research results from international, national, and university grant projects in various high-rated journals indexed in international scientific databases. The SER describes the number of the publications in the journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, in both cases there is a significant increase in the recent six years. In addition to this,

To support and enhance research, BSU funded 55 domestic targeted grant projects, including 16 specifically for young researchers, during the reporting period. These grants facilitate "small volume" research and serve as a foundation for securing national and international grants. The number of funded grant projects is on the rise.

The university owns some laboratories and specialized equipment, which are accessible to external stakeholders. Although the current economic partnerships are not particularly strong, the university is committed to enhancing commercialization efforts. The university aims to forge stronger economic links and foster greater collaboration with industry partners. The expert team suggests the institution enhances the research commercialization dimension, considering the regional needs and opportunities.

The site visit together with the submitted documents confirmed that the university integrates its research activities into teaching and learning. This approach ensures that students benefit from the latest scientific advancements and methodologies. Faculty members incorporate current research findings into curricula, providing students with hands-on experience and a deeper understanding of their fields. By engaging in research projects, students develop critical thinking skills and gain practical knowledge, preparing them for future academic and professional success. Almost 50 research staff are either teaching courses or supervising the Master and Ph.D. theses; some Ph.D. programs function within the research institutes and centers.

It is evident that although research is a well-established function at BSU, there is still quite a way to go in view of its ambitions. The international component of research work and publications requires constant stimulation and support. BSU is ready to exercise these influences. Success will, however, take time and require constant care. The portion of academics internationally active and visible is still relatively limited in size. So, both professional development of present staff and clear directives for recruitment are called for.

The incentives awarded to internationally publishing academics are a clear sign that BSU actively stimulates international reach and visibility for its research programs and results.

In his interview with the panel the vice-rector reported that BSU worked hard on these issues during the past period and is making progress into the right direction. At the same time, he acknowledged what the panel had concluded from reading the SER and the SP, that there is still quite a way to go.

The focus on SW Georgia in some prioritized areas of research is a good example of service to the region, in full compliance with BSU profile and mission.

The submitted documents describe the primary responsibilities of the scientific supervisor. These duties include providing regular consultations tailored to the specifics of the research topic, covering aspects such as research design, seminars, colloquia, scientific-research papers, and dissertations. Supervisors also facilitate the integration of doctoral students into local and international scientific networks, encourage participation in scientific events, and support the presentation and publication of research findings. Additionally, they oversee the educational and research components of the doctoral student's individual plan, guide their preparation to assist professors, and periodically evaluate their progress.

PhD candidates as well as graduates declared themselves satisfied with support and opportunities they received. The panel, however, found some language issues. Publication in international journals is mandatory and international reviewers give feedback on dissertation summary drafts. Yet the full dissertation text is in Georgian and from the interviews the panel concluded that the English language proficiency of candidates is inadequate. It also became clear that supervising in each case is done by one professor, and that candidates do not use the opportunity to evaluate their supervisor. Internationally this is seen as a too high degree of dependency. On the other hand, limiting the number of doctoral students to two for each supervisor is setting a rather low limit.

According to the existing regulations the doctoral student must have at least three publications (papers/articles) related to their thesis. These should be published or accepted for publication either abroad or in Georgia, in peer-reviewed journals indexed in relevant international scientific databases, or in reputable international scientific journals or conference materials. At least one of these articles must be published in a journal indexed in Web of Science (Clarivate Analytics), ERIH PLUS (European Reference Index of the Humanities), or Scopus databases.

The procedures of the thesis defense describe that the chair of the Dissertation Council submits the doctoral student's thesis to the Scientific Research Service for technical review, including verifying the compliance of student publications with existing requirements. To ensure transparent and fair evaluation, the process includes either a foreign co-supervisor or a foreign evaluator. Negative evaluations by foreign experts result in further reviews, and two negative assessments lead to the thesis being returned to the student. After receiving evaluations, the chair selects three evaluators, approved by the Dissertation Council, who must be experts in the relevant field but not involved with the thesis. If two evaluators give negative assessments, the thesis is not accepted for public defense. Evaluators submit their conclusions within a month, assessing various criteria, and recommend whether the thesis should proceed to defense. The student is informed of the decision and, if approved, given at least 15 days to prepare for the defense. The Field Dissertation Commission, comprising at least seven experts, evaluates the thesis during the public defense, using a confidential assessment method with specific evaluation criteria.

Evidence/indicators

SER; SP; interview with vice-rector, with PHD graduates and candidates, and with directors of research institutes; BSU Scientific Research Implementation Policy; The list of the Publications in recent six years; The list of the Research Projects in recent six years; University Webpage.

Recommendations:

It is recommended, with an eye toward future recruitments, that an adequate level of English is made indispensable for incoming PhD candidates

Suggestions:

It is suggested that supervising of PhD thesis work is done by more than one supervisor.

It is suggested the institution enhance the research commercialization dimension, considering regional needs and opportunities.

Best Practices (if applicable):

BSU has an incentive scheme in place to stimulate research productivity (See 4.1.)

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

According to the submitted documents to support and promote scientific research, BSU has developed a research policy aimed at defining key research directions, enhancing research quality, involving young scientists, integrating teaching and research, and fostering an environment that upholds research ethics and internationalization. The core principles of this policy include a culture of research ethics and integrity, academic and intellectual freedom, a competitive environment, and the integration of teaching and research with an international perspective. The policy is implemented through several measures: an evaluation system for research activities, identification of primary research areas, promotion of scientific research, support for young scientists, encouragement of research-teaching integration, internationalization of research, and the development of research ethics and culture.

From 2016 to 2022, BSU had a policy for financing the participation of academic and scientific staff in conferences, seminars, congresses, forums, and similar events. Under this policy, faculty councils decided on funding allocations based on the faculties' budgets. Due to the growing number of applicants for funding, competitive funding became necessary. Consequently, in 2022, a new policy was introduced to support the professional development of BSU staff and encourage article publications. This new policy finances training for academic and scientific officials, participation in scientific events, and the publication of articles in high-rated scientific databases.

Mechanisms for supporting scientific research activities at BSU include financing projects from independent research units and targeted internal university projects, funding participation in national and international scientific events, and encouraging publications in high-rated journals. Since 2016,

BSU has operated a targeted scientific research project financing program. During the interviews with teaching staff, as well as researchers they confirmed they had already benefited from the above-mentioned schemes, some of them got some financial support after publication in high ranked journals, while some was successful in getting internal research support. The submitted documents indicate that the annual budget for internal research projects has been doubled since 2017. In recent years 250 000 – 270 000 GEL was dedicated to this from the university budget. In addition to this, on average 60 000 GEL is allocated as a conference participation fee annually. Moreover, the three research institutes budget is almost two million GEL annually. The budget for scientific research is at present 2,952,142 GEL, which amounts to approximately 8% of the total budget of BSU.

As the submitted documentations state since 2018, BSU's Scientific Research Service has promoted the integration of educational and research activities, organized international reviews of doctoral dissertations, and supported scientific events such as summer schools, seminars, conferences, and congresses. The service also advises students and staff on conducting research, familiarizes them with state and university grant projects, and provides consultations on project management. Additionally, it facilitates participation in scientific grant competitions by assisting with the preparation of necessary documentation.

The expert panel found that in the given six years the number of the PhD students who benefited from the National Science Foundation of Georgia was extremely low. BSU reported to have almost 160 PhD graduates, out of which only 8 got a scholarship/grant from the National Science foundation. The expert panel recommends that university enhance the support of PhD candidates by promoting the existing financial schemes and encourage them to apply for funding. This will have its positive impact on the research projects itself.

As already stated above (at 6.1.) BSU has a priority policy on research development and expansion that it supports and stimulates by various means. SER shows that in doing so the university is learning by doing and adapting its policies when necessary (like in prolonging the budget period of internally funded research projects to two years). Although the pandemic is clearly distorting the trend, there is an increasing participation rate in international research gatherings.

A recently launched Horizon Europe Grant Office is expected to stimulate participation in European projects. Parallel to this there is a policy to stimulate international staff mobility (41 in 2022/3) as well as good use of the Jean Monnet program. More could and should be done, however, to realize international mobility and participation in international projects and consortia.

The SP has internationalization as one of its priority goals (goal #4) targeting academic as well administrative staff, and students. Many subgoals and tasks are well taken. There is, however, very little on method, good practices and lessons learned (what works and what doesn't). Joint study programs with international partners is a good goal. It is, however, crucial to know what is needed for success (in terms of language skills and internationally attractive subject matter) and how one best identifies potential partners. Similarly, the goal of attracting foreign students is fine. The AP, however, doesn't specify what will be done to reach it.

Evidence/indicators

Primary evidence for the evaluation by the expert panel is the strategic plan, the action plan, the self-evaluation report and their annexes themselves. Several interviews helped to understand better what is written. BSU Scientific Research Implementation Policy

The rule of Competition for the Selection of the Targeted Scientific-Research Project of Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University

The rule of financing the professional development of the BSU staff and encouraging the publication of articles

The Rules for Administering International Exchange Programs
University Webpage

Recommendations:

It is recommended that BSU engage in more international research projects as the best way to further enhance its international research portfolio and visibility

It is recommended that BSU addresses its internationalization policy and practice in a more analytical and structured manner (in addition to planning a range of individual projects and activities)

Suggestions:

It is suggested the university strengthen its support for PhD candidates by promoting existing financial schemes and encouraging them to apply for funding.

Best Practices (if applicable):

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 analyzing the quality of research/creative-arts activities, and the productivity of scientific-research units and academic/scientific staff.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

The SER describes the evaluation and productivity measurement system of BSU. It is largely based on digital data collection via BSU portals. Which is both efficient and flexible. Assessment of specific activities is rule based, with set marks for each category. Also, publication data are measured by category. According to the SER since 2017, BSU has utilized an academic staff evaluation system that involves the annual assessment of their pedagogical, scientific research, and other activities. Following the system's piloting phase, modifications were made to the assessment rules in 2019 and 2023. Until 2019, an electronic system was used where responsible individuals assessed staff based on established criteria and the staff's self-assessments. In this system, responsible individuals would verify and confirm information provided in self-evaluations rather than directly evaluating personnel. The system would then automatically generate assessments based on the confirmed information. This new system was launched for the 2022-2023 academic year. However, its implementation necessitated several changes to the evaluation rules. These changes were made in 2023, resulting in a new electronic platform for assessing the scientific and research activities of academic staff.

According to the current procedures to evaluate scientific research activity, academic staff fill out a self-evaluation form on the BSU electronic portal. Staff can enter data at any time, but the assessment only reflects the data as of the form's completion date. For instance, data entered late will not be

included in the current year's assessment but will be considered in future evaluations. The evaluation is reviewed by responsible individuals, including the Scientific Research Service, Deputy Rector, Head of University Quality Assurance Service, Dean, Head of Field Department, and Head of Faculty Quality Assurance Service. They verify the data and provide comments for any necessary corrections.

There is a specific issue regarding WOS that plays a role in many parts (evaluation of research, mandatory for PhD students, evaluation of research institutes etc.). Without having access to WOS how does BSU guarantee all stakeholders understand and meet the criteria used by the university? It was explained to the panel that this was due to the high cost of the WOS access provision. The expert panel suggest the university finds a solution here either within international research collaborations, or within national projects to get the funding needed for a WOS subscription.

As was explained during the interviews based on the analysis of academic staff performance evaluations, the Quality Assurance Service of the relevant faculty makes recommendations and submits a final report to the Dean and the university's Quality Assurance Service. Using this information, the university's Quality Assurance Service provides recommendations to the Rector and the Academic Council on necessary actions. In coordination with the Quality Assurance Service and Administration Head, the Dean submits proposals to the Rector regarding the implementation of incentive measures for the relevant staff as outlined in the bylaws.

It remained unclear, however, whether in addition to the overall evaluation system and the data it produces, there are periodic interviews with academic staff on their performance and future plans. Neither the documents, nor the interviews confirmed any. The expert team suggest the university collects the qualitative data as well by interviewing researchers and academic staff periodically.

During the interviews it was confirmed that conducting seminars is a requirement for scientific and academic staff. To support this, a "Seminars" link was added to the university's website, displaying the annual seminar schedule. Abstracts and presentations from speakers are posted in the news section 10 days before each seminar. The representative from Scientific Research Service department attends these seminars, creates a database, and provides detailed descriptions.

Evidence/indicators

SER; some interviews, with academic staff and head of library; Rules for evaluating the activities of BSU academic and visiting staff; Rules for evaluating scientific and research work of BSU scientific staff; University Webpage

Recommendations:

Suggestions:

It is suggested to subscribe to WOS to enable access to a tool that is used in education, research as well as for evaluation data

It is suggested alongside quantitative data, the university incorporate qualitative elements in the assessment of researchers. This ensures that the organization gains a comprehensive understanding of the existing practices.

Best Practices (if applicable):

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 programs and research activities and corresponds to the existing number of students and planned enrolment.
- o HEI offers environment necessary for implementing educational activities: sanitary units, natural light possibilities, and central heating system.
- o Health and safety of students and staff is protected within the institution.
- o HEI has adapted environment for people with special needs

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

BSU has adequate material resources, with a balance value of 173,395,226.00 Gel, calculated by historical value; the market value can be twice as high. The total area of the buildings is 42,992.9 sq. m., including a total teaching area of 19,918.94 sq. m. and a total auxiliary area of 23 073,96 sq. m. distributed over 8 buildings, which are in Batumi and Kobuleti.

BSU has 67 laboratories, clinics or offices in different fields, serving 89 different programs and 6013 students. BSU healthcare programs have clinical components using clinical facilities. BSU has signed agreements for practices with 25 clinics.

By and large teaching & scientific-research laboratories have adequate safety regulations.

BSU's balance sheet further includes numerous movable properties, such as vehicles, which are used to facilitate the smooth execution of educational processes, research, and commercialization activities. Some vehicles and agrarian facilities, however, have been written off and are by now unsuitable for use. These facilities contain significant security risks for students and employees. Such vehicles, machines and devices in coordination with the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth, should be disposed for liquidation to the property management agency. The vehicle and machinery park should be updated for a more effective implementation of the university's mission, including mechanized equipment, minibuses and small enterprise type vehicles, for example, combo, van or pickup type for establishment commercial service - site plant analysis. Financial resources to remedy this are available at BSU.

According to the documentation provided, material resources (fixed and liquid assets) under the ownership or lawful possession of the institution serve the educational purposes of the institution and correspond to the requirements for implementing educational programs and research/creative/performing activities, suitable for more than the planned student number of 12 000 (especially in non-medical programs).

The existing facilities at BSU are ideally suited for carrying out educational activities. Sanitary facilities are clean. There is ample natural light in most buildings, as well as central heating. The

university has a medical support office, where first aid is available. BSU has fire protection systems. In short, the health and safety of students and employees are adequately protected in the institution. University buildings are adapted for people with special needs.

BSU's buildings comprise foyers, recreation spaces, classrooms for theoretical teaching, space for administrative offices, space for group work, sanitary/hygienic units, laboratory appropriate to the specifics of the field, learning classrooms, archive where existing documents properly and Important documents are stored in the safe iron boxes lookers. The distribution of administration, office, laboratories, conference hall, professor offices classrooms, research institutions and other units supports effective implementation of educational, research and administrative process. These spaces are mostly equipped with necessary facilities for educational program implementation, including teaching/scientific-research laboratories, inventory needed for implementing practical component, IT equipment or agreements with relevant entities for the use of such resources, relevant stock (reagents, teaching materials, etc.) that ensures achieving program objectives and learning outcomes; there are some more specific needs in case of the medical program facilities.

BSU has various appropriate agreements for obtaining possession of the liquid assets.

BSU is obliged to present appropriate written evidence (written agreement, handover statement, invoice, prolonged existence on the balance (for at least the authorization period), written consent of the grantor in case of oral contribution, etc.) to certify rights to the liquid assets. According to the provided information and based on the panel's visit the expert panel obtained sufficient assurance that BSU has sufficient material resources to support the number of students as required in the authorization process.

In conclusion, by and large material resources at BSU are adequate, in good shape and well kept. Building plans promise further expansion and quality boost. The building program includes facilities for medical programs, for technologies and agriculture, for dormitories and sports.

There are some specific issues.

Teaching/scientific-research laboratories should in all cases observe safety regulations.

Simulation technology nowadays is an important tool for medical students to prepare them for clinical practice. The simulator center at BSU needs updating. Not all manikins are of the advanced kind. There are no computer-controlled manikins, no anatomage and the facility itself is just four small rooms, also used for the OSCE exams (they examine students in this simulation center). This situation certainly should be improved.

Evidence/indicators

SER; visits of expert panel to various facilities; Webpage: https://www.bsu.edu.ge/ Information from www.reestri.gov.ge Information regarding real estate, extracts from the public register, and measurement drawings of buildings; Laboratory incentivization documentation; Agreements signed with entities for practical training and scientific research activities; Agreements on the purchase of security cameras; Regulations of the BSU Protection and Labor Safety Service; Emergency Management Plan of BSU Buildings (Corpses).

Recommendations:

It is recommended to upgrade the medical simulator center, add more advanced manikins and an anatomage to secure clinical rotation and basic science needs

Suggestions:
Best Practices (if applicable):
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.

BSU has adequate library resources, book archives, reading rooms, staff space, space for meetings and group work, as well IT access spaces.

According to surveys done by the organization student satisfaction rate of the library is $(0.88*3+16.81*4+82.3*5)/500*100\%$ =96%, about accessibility of online resources $(0.89*1+2.68*2+6.25*3+23.21*4+66.96*5)/500$=90%; the overall library satisfaction rate is 84%. There is some room for development for Faculty of Natural Sciences and Health and Tourism faculty, but also there the satisfaction rate is more than 80%.

The library is open 62 hours, 6 days in a week. However, the webpage of the university does not state this clearly: students need to open the library rules in order to find information about the working hours. This does not work in the English version, making it unclear how foreign student are informed about the working hours of the reading halls.

The library has an electronic catalogue of library resources and an online publicly accessible catalogue. As mentioned during the interviews a total of 8252 books have been digitized and uploaded in the electronic database of the university library. The expert panel suggests the university follow international standards of copyright when digitization printed resources, also for educational purposes. In 2023 BSU spent 124 977 GEL on books, in the current year 2024 25,385 GEL (in the 1st quarter). The library offers copy machines and scanners. Library resources, both paper-based and electronic are diverse, and constantly updated based on developments in the field. This way the library supports and contributes to the achievement of educational program learning outcomes and implementation of research/scientific work.

The library offers access to a good selection of academic databases. The existing collection covers almost all study fields offered at BSU. During the interviews with students and graduates on all three level of the studies the expert panel asked about the support services that the library offered. All confirmed that during the orientation weeks they had an information session with library representatives. Yet this was the only session they could recall. The expert panel doublechecked the university webpage, which says nothing about any training or workshop that students can attend. In addition to this, the university submitted the usage reports of the academic databases, that was significantly low. The expert panel recommends the library clearly present the training modules in Information Seeking and offers this service to its clients in both the Georgian and English language.

Most of the library staff are having a field specific education, and do attend professional development activities, seminars and workshops organized locally.

The library currently lists rules and information on the webpage exclusively in the Georgian language, without providing the same resources for foreign students. It is crucial to ensure that this information is equally accessible to both Georgian and foreign students for several reasons. Firstly, providing information in multiple languages promotes inclusivity and ensures that all students, regardless of their linguistic background, can fully engage with library resources and services. Secondly, foreign students, who may not be proficient in Georgian, require clear guidelines and information to navigate library procedures effectively. By offering information in both Georgian and English, the library demonstrates its commitment to serving the diverse needs of its student community and fosters an environment of accessibility and equity. This approach ultimately enhances the overall academic experience and promotes student success. Thus, it is recommended that the library takes steps to translate its rules and information on its webpage into English and guarantee the foreigner students (and other stakeholders) are informed.

Evidence/indicators

SER, interview with head of library, site visit to library facilities. The rule of using BSU library.

The usage reports of Academic Databases; The budget of the library in recent five years; University Webpage

Recommendations:

It is recommended the library clearly present training modules on Information Seeking and provide this service to its clients in both the Georgian and English languages.

it is recommended that the library takes steps to translate its rules and information on its webpage into English to guarantee foreign students (and other stakeholders) are informed as well.

Suggestions:

It is suggested the university considers international standards of copy right when digitization the printed resources even for the educational purposes.

Best Practices (if applicable):

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 webpage in Georgian and English languages.

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

BSU has an up-to-date information technology management and infrastructure in place which is compliant with business processes of the institution and supports the successful implementation of teaching process. Electronic services and electronic management systems are implemented and mechanisms for their constant improvement are in place,

The university has IT risk management procedures. Adequate and effective data protection (including personal data) is ensured. The efficiency of the information system is frequently evaluated. There are good backup systems. IT infrastructure (computer equipment, software provision, internet), is continuously accessible to students and staff and usable for university services. BSU has introduced electronic services and electronic education management systems, which ensure effectiveness, efficiency and accessibility of management of services and processes. So far without a financial module, although the organization has a separate accounting module where simple accounting can be performed. These two systems are not integrated with each other and therefore financial KPIs cannot be automatically generated. It would be good if the university adds a management accounting and control module (MACS) to the information system, which will be able to automatically monitor the target indicators and easily evaluate efficiency and effectiveness of the organization.

The university has an official web-page which serves communication and information functions, contains contact and other useful information, including the mission of BSU, its activities, structure, catalogue of educational programs, enrolment criteria, expected learning outcomes and qualifications to be granted, procedures for teaching-learning and assessment, administrative/academic/scientific staff, library electronic catalogue, regulation documents, strategic development plans, ongoing and implemented research (results), basic statistics, accessible services, employment opportunities. All this information is in Georgian.

The website only has summary content in English. There are no annual reports, financial reports, basic statistics comprehensive annual reports.

The university has very active social pages, https://www.facebook.com/BSUBatumi Instagram – batumi_state_university_bsu; https://www.linkedin.com/company/bsu-batumi/ and twitter https://twitter.com/bsubatumi

During the site visit, and from available documentation experts obtained sufficient assurance that BSU substantially complies with the requirements of this substandard.

Evidence/indicators

BSU Self assessment; Site visit; Webpage: https://www.bsu.edu.ge/
Social pages: facebook - https://www.facebook.com/BSUBatumi instagram – batumi_state_university_bsu; linkedin- https://www.linkedin.com/company/bsu-batumi/ and twitter https://twitter.com/bsubatumi
BSU Information Technology Management and Official Website Administration Rule; Provision of Information Technology Service"; Job Description of Information Technology Service Staff; University Student Support Services; Approval of the Rules for the Administration of E-Learning in BSU; BSU Rule for Electronic Services Administration; Documents Confirming the Purchase of Hardware and Computer Programs, and Operating Instructions

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

Recommendations:
It is recommended that the BSU website be complete and accessible to English language speakers as well, in view of BSU's international ambitions

Suggestions:
It is suggested that the university add a management accounting and control module (MACS) to the information system, which will be able to automatically monitor the target indicators and easily evaluate efficiency and effectiveness of the organization.

Best Practices (if applicable):
BSU has a digital portals system in place that is widely used in the university for a wide variety of purposes which is both effective and efficient. It enhances communication and makes bureaucracy manageable

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

The current budget is 38,392,313.00 GEL, of which 10,500,000.00 GEL is accumulated from previous year budgets. According to budget completion reports expenditure of budgets reached about 83% in the last three years. Even though the university plans to spend these funds every year, reserves are still growing. However, the university effectively manages its savings placed on deposit and creating interest income. According to the budget the allocation foreseen in the budget is economically achievable. Sources of funding are diversified thereby ensuring adequate and effective risk management. Funds available are sufficient to effectively perform activities described in strategic and action plans.

The financial reports (though without cash flow ledger) certify correctness, fairness and completeness of financial information. As BSU has no financial accounting policy and procedures it's difficult to fully understand income and expense in financial statements. There is also no financial management policy. On our request for such a document during the visit, we received the budget once more. Asked about their financial policy vision, interviewees demonstrated to have clear ideas, but they're not documented.

According to the program budget BSU has the following spending programs: 1. Support of BSU Faculties, Research Institutes and Vocational Programs Management and Continuing Education Center; 2. Management and regulation of the university; and 3. Infrastructural development of the university. The university certainly has the financial resources for a sustainable and further development of

learning/teaching/research/arts-creative activities, and human resources/infrastructure and adequate and sufficient financial resources for continuous implementation of scientific research, equally available to all individuals.

The university accountability, financial management and control system are fragmented. It looks as if its components, accounting, budgeting, treasury, procurement, management, monitoring, are all in place, but there is a lack of synchronization, which is reflected in the action plan implementation, reports and KPI development. In the 2018 authorization report it was recommended that an internal audit department be established. So far no one has been appointed. According to the job description, they are probably aiming too high. It would be better if they start creating an audit office with junior specialists, provide training and qualification raising support for them, and in parallel do outsource some of the internal audit service. This way a university audit service could be build up over time.

The university has neither done an external audit. Only in 2021 a "Public Audit Service" did a compliance audit. The organization's financial management and accounting process had some risks of non-effectively management of the resources. This demonstrates that there are sufficient risks in the area of lawful, transparent, economical, efficient, and productive use of resources. BSU should have a certified external audit on all three domains of Financial, Efficiency and Compliance Audit.

Because of these aggregated challenges the expert panel finds the university to only partially comply with the standard component in case.

Finally, it should be stated that the university has a clear business continuity scheme in place which in view of uncertain external conditions is both risk and development oriented. Risk resilience i.a. requires spreading sources of income. The drive to raise more money from commercialization might be a good avenue. As far as the panel can see these efforts are still rather fragmentary. Here coherent planning is called for.

Evidence/indicators

SER; Site visit; Website: https://www.bsu.edu.ge/ BSU budget for 2018- 2023;Annual State Procurement Plan (2018- 2023); Dynamics of income and expenses; Financial statements (2018- 2023); Annual activity reports of the head of the administration (2021, 2022 and 2023); Compliance Audit report for 2020.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that BSU fixes control and external as well as internal audit issues in the interest of full transparency on the use of its resources (basically a repetition of 2018 advice)

It is recommended that in view of the plans for an increased income from commercialization BSU makes an integrated plan involving all relevant parts of university

Suggestions:

It is suggested thet BSU develop a transparent and perennial policy on reserve funds and spending plans

Best Practices (if applicable):
40
Evaluation
☐ Complies with requirements
☐ Substantially complies with requirements
☒ Partially complies with requirements
☐ Does not comply with requirements