



განათლების ხარისხის განვითარების ეროვნული ცენტრი
NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

Higher Education Institution Authorisation Experts' Report Akaki Tsereteli State University

Expert Panel Members

Chair: Vaidotas Viliūnas, independent consultant, Lithuania

Members:

Co-Chair Mitra Amini, Shiraz University, Iran

Ekaterine Bakaradze, New Vision University, Georgia

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Tbilisi

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Authorisation Report Resume

General information on the educational institution

Akaki Tsereteli State University (ATSU) was established nine decades ago and is one of the biggest multidisciplinary regional universities in Georgia. ATSU was formed as an integration of three independent universities in 2010. First, Kutaisi Akaki Tsereteli State University and Kutaisi Niko Muskhelishvili Technical University were merged at 2006, and the Sukhumi State Training University of Subtropical Agriculture joined it as a result of the reorganization in 2010.

The main concern of the university is to provide quality education and employment opportunities to both local and foreign students. For this purpose, in the process of developing and enhancing educational programs, ATSU actively cooperates with all stakeholders, particularly, with employers. The university provides quality education to students by offering modified educational programs taking into account the requirements of the labour market and promoting employment through the development of relevant competencies.

The main educational structural units of the university are nine faculties: 1. Business, Law and Social Sciences; 2. Humanities; 3. Exact and Natural Sciences; 4. Pedagogical; 5. Medicine; 6. Engineering-Technical; 7. Engineering-Technological; 8. Agrarian; 9. Maritime-Transport.

ATSU provides educational programs of all three levels of higher education (bachelor's, master's, doctoral), one-cycle medicine, teacher training (one-year), and a training program in the Georgian language (100 educational programs - 44 bachelor's, 42 master's, 8 doctoral, 3 one-cycle 1 integrated bachelor-master, 2 one-year (60 credit) programs) since 2024.

Currently university has 9001 student (5601 of them suspended), 758 are international among the above (96 of them suspended).

The total number of HEI staff, including academic, scientific, invited, administrative, and support staff, is 1450. Among them, there are 474 academic staff, consisting of 82 professors, 332 associate professors, 60 assistant professors. The institution has no scientific staff. The number of affiliated academic staff is 458 (80 professors, 324 associate professors, and 54 assistant professors). Additionally, there are 414 invited staff, 21 administrative staff, and 541 support staff, of which 245 are permanent and 296 are on contract.

University is one of the largest providers of professional education in the Imereti region. Over the years, the university has accumulated positive experience and high competence in the development and implementation of vocational education programs.

Each faculty has developed a research-scientific profile, in which the main scientific-research directions/sub-directions of the faculty are defined, considering the human and material resources available at the faculty.

The integration of research and teaching at the university is provided by qualified academic staff involved in research as well as by engaging doctoral students in teaching-learning and research processes.

The university supports the academic staff in terms of participation in international and local grants. The university encourage the authors of articles published in highly rated journals, which helps to boost the recognition of the university on an international scale.

Cooperation with foreign partners and internationalization processes is considered as an effective tool to enable sharing of knowledge and experience in educational and research activities.

ATSU cooperates with more than 100 HEI-s around the world in different formats. University has participated in more than 25 international institutional development projects. The university became the first regional and the fourth higher educational institution in Georgia, which became the project coordinator within the framework of the ERASMUS+ project in 2016. Based on the project, the position of ombudsman was established in the university and the university became a member of ENOHE (European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education). The university is a member of a number of international organizations, such as WHO, AMEE, AMSE, Universitaire de la Francophonie, and others. ATSU was the coordinator of ERASMUS+ project "The Role of Regional Universities in the Development of the Region" (RURD). Within the framework of this project, a conference of rectors of regional universities was established.

The university, within the framework of international mobility, implements fully funded exchange programs for students of all levels, and academic and administrative personnel. In 2023, such exchange programs were implemented in 25 higher education institutions in Europe and Asia.

The university signed a dual diploma recognition agreement with L'Aquila University in Italy, based on which master's degree students of Akaki Tsereteli State University defended their master's theses in the 2022-2023 academic year and received a double master's diploma in 2022. A similar agreement was signed with the University of Silesia in the field of engineering in 2023.

The university implements the joint master's educational program "Biomedical Engineering" (in cooperation with the Technical University of Georgia and State Medical University) and the doctoral educational program "Education Sciences" (TSU, BSU and TESAU).

The university implemented a wide range of activities to attract foreign students. Namely, ATSU participated in various educational exhibitions: Helsinki, New Delhi (Uni Agent UNICA), Johannesburg, USA NAFSA, Holland, Hyderabad (India). The single-level Georgian-language and English-language MD programs of the Faculty of Medicine successfully passed international accreditation in 2021.

The university actively participated in the ERASMUS+ project "The Third Mission of Universities" (SQUARE 3M), which outlined the role of the university's social responsibility and its significance in regional and state development during 2021-2024.

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

The panel of experts had the opportunity to visit the ATSU Kutaisi and Poti campuses onsite and meet with university representatives during 12th – 15th of June 2024. Before the visit, the panel received a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and supporting documents to prepare for the site visit. However, due to deficiencies in these documents a number of additional documents (particularly English versions) were requested from ATSU before and during the site visit. These were partly provided to the panel during the visit. Absence of some important documents limited the panel's understanding of some key areas prior to and during the visit.

Besides the presented documents, expert pool members observed and analysed the University's website as another source of information. However, the website was not containing completely all necessary information uploaded. Particularly quite a few English versions of documents were not accessible.

Experts visited the Medical Faculty Campus in Kutaisi during the June 12th (day 1). The meetings with University Rector, Vice-Rectors and Head of Administration, Self-Evaluation team, Academic and Representative Councils, Quality Assurance Department, Heads of Administrative Departments, Representatives of Study Process and Sub-services, Heads of Departments, Student Self-Government took during the June 13th (day 2). Expert pool members were split into two groups to meet with medical program and the rest of programs, namely Heads of Programs, Academic affiliated and invited staff and students, including PhD students, and graduates (except the medical program) during the June 14th (day 3). Meeting with employer representatives and Kutaisi Campus tour, including archive, sports facilities, teaching and conference rooms, centres and non-medical laboratories, library, examination centre, and dormitory was organized during the June 15th (day 4). The expert pool members drafted an initial finding of the site-visit and presented them to the Rector and members of university community at the end of the day 4.

Expert pool members reviewed the ATSU Authorisation Draft Report after careful analysis of an Argumentative Position of Akaki Tsereteli State University and came into the following conclusions:

1. Accept ATSU's arguments regarding the Recommendations: 2.1.1.; 3.2.1.; 6.2.1. and change them into the respective Suggestions.
2. Decline ATSU's arguments regarding the Recommendations: 2.1.2.; 2.2.1.; 2.3.1.; 4.1.3.; 4.2.1.; 5.1.2.; 5.1.3.; 5.1.4.; 5.2.2.; 7.3.1.; 7.4.1.; 7.4.2. and 7.4.3. as they were published in the ATSU Authorisation Draft Report because they meet quality standard requirements or changes mentioned in ATSU's arguments were made after the site visit and can't be changed according to the NCEQE HEI authorization rules.
3. Keep Suggestions 1.2.1.; 2.2.2; 3.3.1; 4.1.1.; 5.1.2.; 6.3.1. as they were published in the ATSU Authorisation Draft Report.

Overview of the HEI's compliance with standards

1. Mission and strategic development of HEI – complies with requirements

Mission statement of ATSU comply with the standard component requirements. However, internal and external stakeholders of the university demonstrate the potential and capacity to elaborate more ambitious mission for the forthcoming strategic development cycle.

The university introduced the Procedure for Strategic and Operational Planning and Evaluation, which ensures the effective planning and evaluation processes, based on the PDCA planning cycle. The above process involves University structural units and staff from the bottom to the top, as well as most important external stakeholders.

2. Organisational structure and management of HEI – substantially complies with requirements

The organizational structure of HEI is designed to support the implementation of its strategic plan effectively, which is evident in a way ATSU has organized its internal structures and processes to drive strategic initiatives and goals, particularly through its leadership and management bodies, and its strategic planning process.

Stakeholders' involvement in decision-making processes supports decentralized governance and enhances the university's responsiveness to its community's needs and third mission. Though it is suggested to include international students in the management bodies, and expand the representation in the student self-government by including international students as well as it is suggested to conduct workshops or orientation programs aimed at encouraging international students to participate in university governance.

It would be desirable to increase the number of international projects and exchange opportunities for both academic and administrative staff, as well as students.

HEI has taken significant steps in establishing an Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) system, with significant updates implemented within the last year. The Quality Assurance Service evaluates learning, research and management processes, ensuring that each process of university operation aligns with established quality standards.

Because of the low participation rate of students in university surveys it is advisable to refine university-wide survey methodologies to ensure more reliable and actionable feedback, which is crucial for continual enhancement of quality assurance.

It is recommended to undertake a thorough review and evaluation of the student body planning mechanisms to enhance the quality of educational opportunities.

It is advisable to incorporate specialized software specifically designed for data collection, analysis, and reporting to further enhancement of the effectiveness of IQA processes.

ATSU has mechanisms to detect and prevent plagiarism, ensuring academic integrity across all academic activities. However, it is advisable to enhance student workshops on ethics and academic integrity to strengthen the university's ethical culture.

While the regulations are available in Georgian, enhancing accessibility and transparency, translating and uploading English versions on the university webpage is advisable that would further extend their reach to non-Georgian speakers.

3. Educational Programmes – complies with requirements

Akaki Tsereteli State University has a comprehensive policy for the planning, designing, implementing, and developing of its educational programs, as outlined by the "Educational Programs Quality Assurance Policy EP-QA." This policy ensures that educational programs align with accreditation standards, the National Qualifications Framework, and sectoral standards.

ATSU described the procedures for planning, designing, implementing, and renewal of educational programs in the documents provided, and the process was affirmed during the site visits.

However, it would be desirable to take into consideration the views of external stakeholders in developing programs and emphasize the need for more practical elements in the study programs.

Most academic and invited staff know English well enough to deliver the English MD program. However, there is a need for some of the academic and invited staff to be more familiar with the English language.

ATSU follows Georgian legislation and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) for program design. Their Quality Assurance Policy for Educational Programs (EP-QA) outlines specific procedures and instructions. It is suggested include more optional subjects available to students across the programs.

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

in its student assessment system. The program curricula, syllabi, and the university website outline the evaluation system.

4. Staff of the HEI – complies with requirements

The human resource management system at the university encompasses recruitment, selection, assessment, and development of staff, ensuring transparent, fair, and objective procedures for hiring academic, scientific, administrative, and support personnel. These processes are regulated by the personnel management document titled 'Policy and Procedures for Management of Human Resources,' approved in 2018.

However, the human resource management policy document (2018), might be periodically updated due to university internationalization. Dynamic changes in Higher Education require to attract more young affiliated academic personnel to the programs.

The effectiveness and transparency of the administrative and support staff evaluation process can be enhanced.

ATSU has a renewable semester workload scheme for academic staff, encompassing teaching, research, and other responsibilities based on their assigned roles and duties.

University considers the workload of academic staff in all HEI-s where it holds an academic or research position', but the examination of the documents and interview results revealed that there are no clear-cut mechanisms for monitoring academic staff's teaching workload outside the university. Therefore, it is recommended to utilize a higher education management information system, along with internal monitoring mechanisms, to monitor the teaching workload of academic staff outside the university.

5. Students and their support services – substantially complies with requirements

ATSU runs different educational level programs, and for each level the HEI has developed and implemented rules for obtaining, suspending, terminating, restoring the student status, mobility, granting qualification and recognition of received education, in case of changing/cancelling the educational program, the mechanisms for providing further education to students of the relevant program. This process is regulated by the Resolution of the Academic Council of ATSU No. 87(23/24), 28.02.2024; This rule and procedure is transparent, fair and in line with current legislation.

However, it is recommended to edit "The rules for obtaining, suspending, terminating, restoring the student status, mobility, qualification granting and recognition of received education, in case of changing/cancelling the educational program, the mechanisms for providing further education to students of the relevant program" and remove expired articles.

ATSU website shall contain all necessary documentation (rule about student status, scholarship awarding, tuition payment, code of ethics and others) both in Georgian and English languages. And, it shall be ensured that all foreign students have to have an access to e-services.

It is suggested to strengthen student information providing mechanisms about their rights, obligations and other legal issues. And, supplement all contract forms between students and the university by the chapter students' rights.

ATSU strives to sustain and improve student-oriented learning environment, what itself is a guarantee of the successful implementation of educational programs. The HEI shares and implements good practices from other institutions and sources, for example Ombudsman and psychotherapist services.

However, the students' employment portal and website shall be updated with relevant information, new vacancies and provide students with more employment opportunities. Student exchange opportunities shall be increased for MD students, for both Georgian and foreign ones. University shall elaborate and implement transparent, fair and publicly accessible criteria and procedure for students' scientific activity/project granting.

University shall increase scholarship amount to support student life and promote students' motivation, including scholarship opportunities for foreign students.

Contacts between students and alumni could be enhanced to increase students' awareness about academic and career development.

6. Research, development and/or other creative work – complies with requirements

The university carries out the activities in the field of research and development, which aims at economic, technological, industrial and other types of innovative development.

The Academic Council of the university is responsible for working out the research development policy and monitoring the results of its implementation, while the implementation of research development policy and the processes of its evaluation and improvement are coordinated by a faculty.

Research activities are regarded as one of the most effective instruments of social responsibility, which ensure the development of a city, a region and a country and solution of the problems the society faces.

Internationalization of research activities is regarded as an efficient instrument of exchanging knowledge and modern technologies, rationally using human, financial, material resources.

Doctoral and Master theses design, structure, references are all of very good quality.

However, it should be suggested an intellectual property ownership of the authors to be well-defined in the contract of the affiliated personnel with the university.

The scale of research funding has increased by 30% during the last six years. Funds, based on the decisions of the faculty councils, can be used to finance research activities. The doctoral study process at university is financed by 30%.

However, it could be suggested to give a part of the supplementary payment (premium) to PhD students right after a research article is published in a high impact factor journal. PhD students are one of the main authors of the research.

The university is developing the system to monitor research activities using a unified platform and use the transparent criteria for evaluating research activities (ERASMUS+ project "Raising Research Capacity of Georgian HEIs through Developing R&D Units/HERD").

The Academic Council approved a system of incentives for authors of articles published in journals indexed in high-ranking bases. The university is developing the system to prevent plagiarism, and ensure academic integrity, and encourage good scientific practice (ERASMUS + project "Academic Integrity for Quality Learning and Teaching in Georgian Higher Educational Institutions (INTEGRITY) 2017-2022" and "Responsible Conduct of Research - Research Integrity and Ethics in Georgian universities (ETHICS)" (2023-2027).

University could increase its visibility to improve its position in National ranking system.

7. Material, information and financial resources – substantially complies with requirements

Akaki Tsereteli State University has rich material resources, asset balance value is 28,165,376 GEL, calculated by historical value, the Market value can be twice more. Organization has the total area of the buildings is 68994,89 sq.m. including the total teaching area – 44832 sq.m. total auxiliary area, which are located In Kutaisi and a Poti.

However, the shape of the University's premises requires a repair in some buildings. Desks should be changed in some auditoriums. Some rest rooms (sanitary units) need to be adapted, and University have started the works for solve those issues.

University has rich Library resources, including book archive, reading rooms, staff space, meeting space and group workplace, and IT equipment space. Library works of 60 hours a week. University students and representatives has access following international library databases.

ATSU have been developing updated information technology management software and infrastructure, which is compliant with business processes of the institution and ensures their 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 and adequate and effective, data protection (including personal data) is ensured, and the efficiency of information system is evaluated.

ATSU current budget is 30 million GEL, including 4.5m GEL savings from previous year budgets. The budget is provided according treasury requirements. Budget according action plan is not provided, and budget connections to strategy plan is not shown. The university effectively disposes of the savings, it is placed on deposit and receives interest income. Financial resources are economically achievable, sources of funding are diversified ensuring adequate and effective risk management, and funds available to HEI are adequate and sufficient to effectively perform activities described in strategic and action plans.

HEI have started implementation the "Accounting Policy" which is developed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, for territorial Bodies and Budgetary Organizations operating in the sphere of its governance. The financial reports, certify correctness, fairness and fullness of financial information.

But, the University managerial accountability, financial management and control system, is fragmented. The university never did an individual external or Internal audit.

Therefore, University should carry out an external audit in the three directions: Financial, Efficiency and Compliance. The auditor should have the valid IPSAS certificate.

The University should increase transparency there are sufficient risks - in direction of the legal, economical, sustainable, efficient, and productive use of resources.

University budget should be formed according to the action plan, be traceable and connected to the respective KPIs.

Summary of Recommendations

2.1.1. Increase the number of international projects and exchange opportunities for both academic and administrative staff, as well as students.

2.2.1. Refine university-wide survey methodologies to ensure more reliable and actionable feedback.

2.2.2. Review and evaluate student body planning mechanisms and enhance the quality of educational opportunities.

2.2.3. Incorporate specialized software within the HEI designed specifically for data collection, analysis, and reporting related to IQA processes.

2.3.1. Translate and upload English versions of 'Code of Ethics' and 'Code of Academic Integrity' on the university webpage to extend their reach to non-Georgian speakers.

4.1.1. Given the absence of reported analyses or studies, the university is recommended to enhance the effectiveness and transparency of the administrative and support staff evaluation process at the individual level.

4.1.2. The University is recommended to work on creating more concrete mechanisms to attract more young affiliated academic personnel to the programs.

4.1.3. Most academic and invited staff know English well enough to deliver the English MD program. However, there is a need for some of the academic and invited staff to be more familiar with the English language.

4.2.1. It is recommended to utilize a higher education management information system, along with internal monitoring mechanisms, to monitor the teaching workload of academic staff outside the university.

5.1.1. Provide ATSU website with all necessary documentation (rule about student status, scholarship awarding, tuition payment and others) both in Georgian and English languages.

5.1.2. Ensure that all international students have access to e-services.

5.1.3. Increase students', especially international students', awareness in the code of ethics and make it available in Georgian and English on the ATSU website.

5.1.4. It is recommended to edit "The rules for obtaining, suspending, terminating, restoring the student status, mobility, qualification granting and recognition of received education, in case of changing/cancelling the educational program, the mechanisms for providing further education to students of the relevant program" and remove expired articles.

5.2.1. Update students' employment portal and website with relevant information, new vacancies and provide students with more employment opportunities.

5.2.2. Increase exchange program opportunities for MD students, for both Georgian and international ones.

5.2.3. ATSU needs to encourage not only participation of more students and alumni in the surveys, but also carry out an analysis of different programs' low alumni employment rate (with granted qualification) and take measures to reduce the incompliance.

5.2.4. Elaborate and implement transparent, fair and publicly accessible criteria and procedure for students'/graduate's scientific activity/project granting.

5.2.5. Increase university scholarship amount to support student life and promote students' motivation for Georgian, as well as international students.

7.1.1. University should repair some buildings and change desks in some auditoriums.

7.1.2. Some sanitary unit needs adaptation, University have started the works for solve those issues.

7.3.1. The university should develop all necessary informational services in English for non-Georgian speaking students and staff.

7.4.1. University should carry out an external audit in the whole three directions: Financial, Efficiency and Compliance. The auditor should have the valid IPSAS certificate.

7.4.2. The University should increase transparency there are sufficient risks - in direction of the legal, economical, sustainable, efficient, and productive use of resources.

7.4.3. University budget should be formed according to the action plan, be traceable and connected to the respective KPIs.

Summary of Suggestions

- 1.1.1. To elaborate more ambitious and updated mission for the forthcoming strategic development cycle.
- 1.2.1. Rector's annual reports could be translated to English and be accessible on the ATSU webpage.
- 2.1.1. Include international students in the management bodies.
- 2.1.2. Conduct workshops or orientation programs aimed at encouraging international students to participate in university governance.
- 2.2.1. Increase communication efforts to ensure that all members of the university community are aware of and understand the IQA processes and their impact.
- 2.2.2. Fully integrate new technologies with existing systems like Moodle and the e-Dean system.
- 2.2.3. Correct technical issues in the English versions of regulatory documents. Avoid to use different synonyms to the same titles of organizational units.
- 2.3.1. Enhancing student workshops on ethics and academic integrity to strengthen the university's ethical culture.
- 3.2.1. Consider the views of more external stakeholders in developing programs and emphasize the need for more practical elements in the study programs.
- 3.2.2. Consider making more optional subjects available to students across the programs.
- 3.3.1. Develop a whole assessment system that is tailored to the specific needs of each academic program and course.
- 4.1.1. Given the ongoing advancements in Higher Education Institutions through internationalization, the human resource management policy document, approved in 2018, might be suggested for some periodic updates.
- 4.1.2. It is suggested that the university enhances the transparency and accessibility of its affiliation policy more.
- 5.1.1. It is suggested to strengthen student information providing mechanisms about their rights, obligations and other legal issues.
- 5.1.2. Add the chapter students' rights in all contract forms between students and the university.
- 5.2.1. Enhance contact between students and alumni through alumni network to increase students' awareness about academic and career development.
- 6.1.1. Intellectual property ownership of the authors should be well-defined in the contract of the affiliated personnel with the university.
- 6.2.1. PhD students should be given part of the supplementary payment (premium) after a research article is published in a high impact factor journal. PhD student is one of the main authors of the research.
- 6.2.2. Some memorandums of understanding are expired; therefore, they can be removed or sign new ones.
- 6.3.1. University is positioned not high enough in ranking systems (according to webometrics 10-th in Georgia, not visible in Times higher education). Increase visibility using Google Scholar profiles of academic personnel.

Summary of the Best Practices

- 3.3.1. OSCE stations were designed perfectly, and all students and OSCE examiners were trained well on OSCE. A well-developed central recording system was used to record each OSCE station and give students feedback based on the records.
- 4.1.1. At the University peer observation has been identifies as its leading best practice, recognizing its value in enhancing teaching quality and fostering collaborative professional development among faculty members.

Summary Table of Compliance of HEI with Standards and Standard Components

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

Signature of expert panel members

1. Vaidotas Viliūnas (Chair)



2. Mitra Amini (Co-chair)



3. Ekaterine Bakaradze (Member)

4. Ekaterine Pipia (Member)

5. Oleg Kvividze (Member)

6. Avtandil Tavkhelidze (Member)

7. Eka Gegeshidze (Member)

8. Shota Silagadze (Member)

Compliance of the Applicant HEI with the Authorisation 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

Akaki Tsereteli State University (ATSU), built on the traditions of the Phasisi and Gelati Academies, and cognizant of its responsibility for the development of the city, region, and state, as well as aligning with the principles of the "Great Charter of the Universities" and the fundamental national and EHEA goals.

The mission, vision and action principles of Akaki Tsereteli State University was formed in 2018 with the broad involvement of the university community. Later, in 2023, the self-evaluation team discussed the relevance of the University mission and included internationalization and the formation of public policy within the framework of social responsibility to the former text of the mission which have not lost its relevance.

University mission states:

- Akaki Tsereteli State University is a multi-disciplinary higher education institution that implements academic and professional programs at all three levels, meeting the demands of the labour market;
- Through international cooperation, active involvement in internationalization processes, and the creation of an inclusive environment, it conducts high-quality educational, research and creative activities, fostering the personal development of students and nurturing them as professionals and leaders.
- Ensures provision of life-long education programs and services for interested persons, creation and dissemination of new knowledge and support for the formation of public policy within the framework of social responsibility.

University declares its responsibility for the development of the Kutaisi and Imereti region, and State of Georgia. University follows the principles of the "Great Charter of the Universities" and the fundamental goals of national and European education.

Mission statement of ATSU comply with the standard component requirements. However, after meetings with university staff, students, graduates and external stakeholders, expert pool members formed an opinion that University has a potential and capacity to elaborate even more ambitious mission for the forthcoming strategic development cycle.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-Evaluation Report;
- Mission of Akaki Tsereteli State University;
- ATSU website <http://atsu.edu.ge/index.php?lang=en>;
- Interview results.

Recommendations:

N/A

Suggestions:

1.1.1. To elaborate more ambitious and updated mission for the forthcoming strategic development cycle.

Best Practices (if applicable):

N/A

Evaluation

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

1.2 Strategic Development

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

The university introduced the Procedure for Strategic and Operational Planning and Evaluation, which ensures the effectiveness of the planned work and evaluation processes. The above procedure is based on the PDCA planning cycle and involves University structural units and staff from the bottom to the top, as well as most important external stakeholders.

The strategic plan of the university is based on the university's mission and vision statements and presents the university's development opportunities, existing challenges and mechanisms for overcoming them; it defines its future development priorities, expected results and performance indicators in a seven-year perspective.

The strategy of the university for 2018-2024 was developed in 2018. This strategy has 5 main directions with the specific objectives, expected results and ways to achieve them.

Following the strategic plan, three-year action plans have been developed. These plans outline the activities to be implemented, implementation deadlines, performance criteria, and forms of responsibility. Objectives and expected results are specified with indicators of achievement, which are reflected in the strategy monitoring plan.

During the implementation of the strategic plan, three action plans (2018-2020; 2021 interim action plan; and 2022-2024) were developed. Interim action plan was developed because of the Covid19 contingency.

It should note, that the strategic plan development (2018-2024) took place together with the changes in the authorization and accreditation standards of HE in Georgia. System of the measurable results of actions (indicators) was introduced in the process of strategic planning for more effective monitoring of the progress due to new regulations (Article 1.2 of the Authorization Standard).

In terms of authorization process management, following measures were taken:

- Normative documents, strategic and action plans were evaluated and changed in the process of preparation for authorization;
- The procedures of teaching, scientific activities, student services, and human resources implemented in the university were re-evaluated and became more effective;
- The activities of the university's "Third Mission" have been diversified;
- The library fund was updated, and cooperation with the international library network was developed.
- A scholarship named after Jacob Gogebashvili was established for excellent students at the Pedagogics Faculty of the university (Academic Council Resolution No. 48.1 (23/24), and many more.

The monitoring of the implementation of action plans was carried out every year, and the recommendations were developed for the next year's action plan. The monitoring reports were analysed and general recommendations were developed in 2024, aimed at improving the strategic plan for 2024-2031. Draft strategic plan for 2025-2031, based on the results of SWOT analysis, contains 6 main strategic directions and goals, and actions with expected results as well as respective key benchmarks.

ATSU strategy contains a strategy for the development of professional programs, a strategy of the social policy, and the research development policy.

It should be noted that ATSU developed its social responsibility policy or the Third Mission which is in the process of implementation within the initiatives, aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly quality education (SDG 4) and reduced inequality (SDG 10).

An action plan for 2025-2027 (in accordance with the strategic plan 2025-2031) was developed. This plan outlines the activities to be implemented, their deadlines, performance indicators, responsible implementers and involved parties, including financial resources.

University top management, administration and academic staff as well as members of Academic and Representative Councils demonstrated full understanding of strategic planning, monitoring, implementation and reporting system as well as their roles in the strategic management processes.

Strategic planning for the period of 2025-2031 was started by Rector's order to renew the self-evaluation group to draft strategic plan. University community representatives were widely involved in the discussion starting from the mission statement compliance with National HE and EHEA goals. Draft of the strategy was uploaded on the ATSU webpage (according to the interviews with staff) to ensure the high involvement of internal and external ATSU stakeholders to collect their opinions for draft improvement. After the review, Rector of the University presented draft strategic plan 2025-2031 for the Academic and Representative Councils approval.

The evaluation of the strategic plan results is done annually. Reporting starts from the structural units (bottom) and goes to the top of organization. The Rector presents the annual report to the Academic Council and after discussion decides together with above Council regarding the necessary changes. Conclusions are taken into account for the next planning period. Therefore, each action and respective annual plan was based on the strategic plan and monitoring results as well as recommendations developed in previous periods.

It would be desirable, that Rector's annual reports be translated to English and be accessible on the ATSU webpage.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-Evaluation Report;
- Procedure for Strategic and Operational Planning and Evaluation;
- 2018-2024 Strategic Development Plan;
- 2025-2031 Strategic Development Plan Draft Project;
- 2018-2020, 2021 and 2022-2024 Action Plans;
- 2025-2027 Action Plan Draft Project;
- 2018-2020, 2021 and 2022-2024 Action Plan Annual Reports;
- Analysis of 2018-2023 Action Plan Reports;
- Rector's reports of 2018-2023 (in Georgian);
- Strategy for the Development of Professional Programs;
- University Social Policy Statement and Strategy;
- Research Development Strategy;
- List of main activities carried out within the social responsibility of the university;
- Statistics of trainings carried out by the Center for Continuing Education;
- Erasmus+ projects websites: <http://erasmusplus.org.ge/ka/projects>;
- Strengths.

Recommendations:

N/A
Suggestions: 1.2.1. Rector's annual reports could be translated to English and be accessible on the ATSU webpage.
Best Practices (if applicable): N/A
Evaluation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements

2. Organisational Structure and Management of HEI

Organisational 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 Organisational Structure and Management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisational structure of HEI ensures implementation of goals and activities described in its strategic plan Procedures for election/appointment of the management bodies of HEI are transparent, equitable, and in line with legislation HEI's Leadership/Management body ensures effective management of the activities of the institution Considering the mission and goals of HEI, leadership of the HEI supports international cooperation of the institution and the process of internationalisation.
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements <p>The organizational structure of HEI is designed to support the implementation of its strategic plan effectively, which is evident in a way ATSU has organized its internal structures and processes to drive strategic initiatives and goals, particularly through its leadership and management bodies, and its strategic planning process. The involvement of ATSU's senior leadership, including the Rector and Vice Rectors, in strategic planning and decision-making ensures that the university's organizational structure aligns with its strategic goals. The university's organizational structure supports strategic initiatives such as internationalization, research enhancement, and quality improvement.</p> <p>Each structural unit, including faculties and administrative offices, has clearly defined goals, tasks, functions, and competences. This clarity supports effective management and operation, aligning each unit's activities with the university's strategic objectives. Having well-defined roles and responsibilities helps in maintaining a high level of accountability and efficiency, which is fundamental for the successful implementation of the university's strategic plans.</p> <p>ATSU's organizational structure facilitates feedback mechanisms through its IQA system, which supports the strategic plan by ensuring that all educational and administrative processes are regularly reviewed and aligned with the university's goals. The recent actions based on internal surveys and monitoring highlight the functioning of this system in aligning the university's operations with its strategic objectives.</p> <p>The university's strategic planning process involves clear documentation, including strategic and action plans. These plans detail the responsibilities, timelines, and expected outcomes, which are crucial for effective implementation and monitoring. The structure facilitates the integration of strategic initiatives into core activities such as teaching, research, and community engagement. The documentation and interviews during the authorization site visit indicated that there is a conscientious effort to align strategic initiatives with organizational activities.</p> <p>Based on the documentation provided and interviews, it can be concluded that the procedures for the election and appointment of ATSU's management bodies are transparent and equitable, including university community, and complying with the legislation. The university adheres to a clearly defined process outlined in its statutes and regulations, which are approved by the representative council and</p>

supervised by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. Inclusivity supports equitable representation within management bodies, such as the Academic Council, where various stakeholders, including faculty and students, have the opportunity to participate and contribute to decision-making processes. Stakeholders' involvement in decision-making processes supports decentralized governance and enhances the university's responsiveness to its community's needs and third mission. Though it is suggested to include international students in the management bodies. The exception is in the Medicine Faculty, where the board includes international students through the student parliament. This is likely due to the MD program being offered in English, which attracts a significant number of international students.

ATSU's student self-government is structured with a student parliament, president's office, and a board. This structure facilitates leadership development among students and provides a formal mechanism for representing student opinions and rights in the university's management process. This setup promotes student engagement and leadership, giving students a platform to influence university policies and decisions, which is crucial for a holistic educational environment. The student self-government is active and functioning well. Based on the interviews with the students and self-government representatives, it is suggested to conduct workshops or orientation programs aimed at encouraging international students to participate in university governance. These programs can inform the students about the roles they can play and the impact they can make.

The HEI leadership is committed to enhancing internationalization through various international activities, including exchanges, international research collaborations, and the development of joint program, also, participating in international networks and enhancing the university's capabilities to attract international students and faculty, which was evident during the interviews. The Erasmus+ programs play a central role in ATSU's internationalization strategy, facilitating academic exchanges that benefit both students and academic personnel. The university has 60 programs under the Erasmus+ scheme, which is significant. ATSU is seeking alliances with universities in south and southeastern European countries, aiming to foster external collaborations that include joint programs and exchanges at all levels of the organization. There is a concerted effort to attract overseas professors, academics, and students, which is crucial for enhancing the university's international profile and academic diversity. Despite the efforts, the interviews with the university community revealed that significant number of the staff and students, due to their field specificity, didn't have the opportunity to participate in any international programs. Given the current number of students and staff, it is desirable to increase the number of international projects and exchange opportunities for both academic and administrative staff, as well as students.

The university has implemented an electronic document circulation system called "e-flow". Additionally, it uses an electronic educational process management system (edean.atsu.edu.ge). This system allows students to monitor their profiles, study cards, educational programs, syllabi, and specifics of teaching courses. It also enables the electronic selection of elective courses, minor programs, and provides other academic options.

ATSU follows relevant legislation and regulatory documents in its operations, which include maintaining any necessary registries as required by law. The management system is based on policies and procedures that comply with Georgian legislation.

ATSU has developed business continuity mechanisms, as described in a document "Business continuity maintenance policy and management mechanisms" (Approved by Academic Council Resolution No. 57 (19/20), 25.05.2020). The document includes a plan that ensures the continuity of all major business processes at the institution, taking into account all possible risks. This document outlines the methods for assessing and preventing risks associated with teaching, learning, science, and management activities at the university. It also includes a business continuity plan providing detailed information regarding the necessary activities, responsible persons, and deadlines. The policy ensures that the university can continue its operations smoothly even in the face of potential risks.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-Evaluation Report;
- Structure of ATSU;
- Statute and instructions;
- Provisions of structural units;
- Policy and procedures for monitoring the implementation of strategic development and action plans ATSU Policy documents;
- Business continuity maintenance policy and management mechanisms;
- The University Website;
- Site visit;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews; • Office of Foreign Relations and Development.
Recommendations: 2.1.1. Increase the number of international projects and exchange opportunities for both academic and administrative staff, as well as students.
Suggestions: 2.1.1. Include international students in the management bodies. 2.1.2. Conduct workshops or orientation programs aimed at encouraging international students to participate in university governance.
Best Practices (if applicable): N/A
Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="radio"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements
2.2 Internal Quality Assurance Mechanisms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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. ○ 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 <p>HEI has taken significant steps in establishing an Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) system, with significant updates implemented within the last year. The Quality Assurance Service evaluates learning, research and management processes, ensuring that each process of university operation aligns with established quality standards. ATSU's leadership, including the Rector and Vice Rectors, actively participates in the ongoing development and fortification of the IQA system. This demonstrates a strong institutional commitment to fostering a quality culture across all levels of the university, as evidenced by detailed documentation and the insights gathered during site visits and interviews.</p> <p>The IQA system at ATSU is results-oriented, and its effectiveness is periodically assessed through regular reporting. The university implements actions based on internal surveys and monitoring. ATSU has developed a comprehensive performance evaluation system for all categories of staff, including academic, scientific, invited, administrative, and support staff. This system is part of the university's management and quality assurance framework, which ensures that all operations align with the institution's mission and strategic goals. The performance evaluation system includes several components:</p> <p>a) Self-evaluation and Reporting: Each structural unit, including faculties and administrative departments, submits an annual report to the Quality Assurance Service. These reports are based on a standardized form that gathers timely information about the unit's activities. The reports are then used to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching, research, service availability, and organizational development.</p> <p>b) Workload Evaluation: For academic staff, ATSU has a specific system to evaluate the workload, ensuring that planned and actual work align with the university's expectations. This system helps in maintaining a balance in the distribution of tasks and responsibilities among the academic staff, thus promoting fairness and efficiency.</p> <p>c) Management Accountability: The heads of various structural units are required to present annual reports to their respective councils. For example, the dean presents a report to the faculty council, while the head of administration reports to the representative council. This process ensures transparency and accountability at all levels of the institution. This systematic approach to performance evaluation helps the university identify areas of strength and improvement, providing a solid foundation for staff development and organizational growth.</p> <p>One challenge identified through the IQA processes is the low participation rate of students in university surveys. Recognizing this, ATSU is advised to refine its university-wide survey methodologies to ensure more reliable and actionable feedback, which is crucial for continual enhancement of quality assurance.</p>

ATSU pays significant attention to the periodic evaluation of its services and resources, recognizing that continuous improvement is crucial for maintaining high standards in higher education. The Quality Assurance Service plays a central role in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of teaching, learning, and research processes. This service conducts regular evaluations at both the university and faculty levels, using such tools as peer observation, self-evaluation of educational programs, and stakeholder surveys. Feedback from these evaluations is collected into annual reports, which include detailed assessments of the university's operations, highlighting successes and areas needing improvement. Based on these findings, the university develops action plans to address identified issues. The transparency of the IQA processes should be improved by making detailed reports and action plans more accessible to all stakeholders, including students, faculty, and external bodies. Increasing communication efforts will ensure that the entire university community is well-informed about the IQA processes and their significant impact.

Documentation and interviews have revealed ATSU's commitment to providing every student with access to high-quality education. This commitment is reflected in the structured strategic and operational planning, which includes detailed actions and continuous monitoring to uphold educational quality and adhere to standards. The clarity of strategic plans and actions underscores clear responsibilities and expected outcomes, essential for the effective implementation and sustainability of quality assurance in student education.

Despite the existing mechanisms for student body planning aimed at providing high-quality educational opportunities, recommendations for improvement have been identified. It is recommended that ATSU undertake a thorough review and evaluation of its student body planning mechanisms to enhance the quality of educational opportunities. This review should focus on aligning these opportunities more closely with the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle, ensuring a systematic approach to continual improvement.

Recently, ATSU has initiated the integration of technology into its Internal Quality Assurance processes. Utilizing platforms such as Moodle for communication and an e-Dean system for program management, alongside an internal mail system and an examination management system, provides a foundational level of technological support aimed at facilitating administrative and academic processes. Given the current technological advancements, to further enhance the effectiveness of its IQA processes, it is encouraged that ATSU incorporates specialized software specifically designed for data collection, analysis, and reporting. Such technology would automate the gathering of data from various academic and administrative sources, standardize data formats, and equip the university with advanced analytical tools to interpret this data efficiently. This would not only reduce the manual effort required in data management but also improve the reliability of data used in quality assurance evaluations, boosting the HEI's ability to maintain high standards it aims to achieve. It could be suggested to fully integrate new technologies with existing systems like Moodle and the e-Dean system. Therefore, the HEI significantly enhances the overall effectiveness of its IQA processes and foster a culture of continuous improvement and accountability across the university.

Some English versions of university regulatory documents are grammatically, lexically or stylistically incorrect. Some titles of organizational units are translated into English with use of different synonyms in documents. The experts' panel would suggest to correct technical issues in the English versions of these legal documents to be more comprehensive for international community of the university.

This commitment to continuous improvement helps the university maintain its reputation for quality education and effective management.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-Evaluation Report;
- Policies, procedures and reports of Quality Assurance Service;
- Resolutions of the Representative and Academic Councils;
- The University Website;
- Site visit;
- Interviews.

Recommendations:

- 2.2.1. Refine university-wide survey methodologies to ensure more reliable and actionable feedback.
- 2.2.2. Review and evaluate student body planning mechanisms and enhance the quality of educational opportunities.
- 2.2.3. Incorporate specialized software within the HEI designed specifically for data collection, analysis, and reporting related to IQA processes.

<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>2.2.1. Increase communication efforts to ensure that all members of the university community are aware of and understand the IQA processes and their impact.</p> <p>2.2.2. Fully integrate new technologies with existing systems like Moodle and the e-Dean system.</p> <p>2.2.3. Correct technical issues in the English versions of regulatory documents. Avoid to use different synonyms to the same titles of organizational units.</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>N/A</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>
<p>2.3. Observing Principles of Ethics and Integrity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HEI has developed regulations and mechanisms that follow principles of ethics and integrity. Such regulations are publicly accessible. ○ Institution has implemented mechanisms for detecting plagiarism and its prevention. ○ HEI follows the principles of academic freedom.
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>ATSU has developed and implemented mechanisms that uphold the principles of ethics and integrity for students, faculty, and staff. The Representatives Council approved the Code of Ethics, which aligns with Georgian law, the University Charter, and other relevant statutes, embodying the principle of academic freedom.</p> <p>Academic Integrity Assurance Code of ATSU, approved by the Academic Council, is a foundational document that defines the ethical frameworks governing university operations. The document details ATSU's ethical standards and practices, reflecting the institution's deep commitment to integrity.</p> <p>HEI has mechanisms to detect and prevent plagiarism, ensuring academic integrity across all academic activities. ATSU employs software 'Turnitin' to help prevent plagiarism and promote academic integrity. Interviews indicate that while MA and PhD students are well-versed in plagiarism policies ('Regulation on Determining the Basic Principles of Conducting Doctoral Studies'; 'Regulation on the Approval of the Rules for the Execution and Evaluation of the Master's Thesis'), awareness among BA students remains insufficient, suggesting a need for enhanced educational outreach at this level. It is advisable for the HEI to enhance student workshops on ethics and academic integrity to strengthen the university's ethical culture.</p> <p>While the regulations are available in Georgian, enhancing accessibility and transparency, translating and uploading English versions on the university webpage is recommended that would further extend their reach to non-Georgian speakers.</p> <p>The institution has mechanisms for detecting plagiarism, which is a vital component of academic integrity. These mechanisms include the use of plagiarism detection software (Turnitin) and educational initiatives that emphasize the importance of originality in academic work.</p> <p>ATSU upholds academic freedom as declared in university policies and the Council's Resolution No. 77, "On the approval of the social policy application and strategy of the State University of Akaki Tsereteli State University". The university's commitment to academic freedom is evident in its policies, and interviews with the university community confirm that they experience this freedom in their daily practices as well. Significantly, the university regulatory documents not only mention academic freedom but also define it: academic staff, researchers, and students at ATSU are completely free to form and develop their scientific-academic profiles, create new knowledge, and seek opportunities for its open discussion and dissemination in society. Academic freedom ensures the rise from "modern university to free thinking". With these clear guidelines HEI ensures faculty and students can operate in an intellectually open environment.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Evaluation Report; • Code of Ethics of Akaki Tsereteli State University; • Akaki Tsereteli's Code of Academic Integrity;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation on Determining the Basic Principles of Conducting Doctoral Studies; • Regulation on the Approval of the Rules for the Execution and Evaluation of the Master's Thesis; • The University Website; • Site visit; • Interviews.
Recommendations: 2.3.1. Translate and upload English versions of 'Code of Ethics' and 'Code of Academic Integrity' on the university webpage to extend their reach to non-Georgian speakers.
Suggestions: 2.3.1. Enhancing student workshops on ethics and academic integrity to strengthen the university's ethical culture.
Best Practices (if applicable): N/A
Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements

3. Educational Programmes

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

3.1 Design and Development of Educational Programmes
HEI has a policy for planning, designing, implementing and developing educational programmes.
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements ATSU described the procedures for planning, designing, implementing, and renewal of educational programs in the documents provided, and the process was affirmed during the site visits. Since 2016, ATSU has established and developed a scheme for evaluating educational programs based on the PDCA cycle. Later, it was transformed into a full-scale Quality Assurance Policy comprising procedures for planning, assessing, and developing educational programs. During the interviews, it was proved that the stakeholders contribute to the program design, implementation, and revision process. Academic staff working in the University, students, and, to a lesser extent, graduates and employers are involved in developing and revising programs. This University implements around 100 higher education programs at various levels, most accredited in 2019-2023. Since 2019, some new programs (bachelor's, Master's, doctorate, certified MD, and certified MD/PBL in the English language) have been added to the existing programs at this University. The quality assurance policy of educational programs is based on meeting the interests of the university community with educational activities, taking into account critical external factors, and ensuring full compatibility with external requirements of educational programs. The educational program's design consists of three phases: initiation, development, and review. The program's working groups defined the structure and content of the program, relevant program objectives based on outcomes, design mechanisms for assessment, and so on. The educational program evaluation procedure describes the activities/measures necessary to evaluate the current academic and professional educational program and the various indicators and criteria used for evaluation. For revising the educational programs, surveys of key stakeholders (students, teachers, employers, graduates), students' academic performance, the employment of graduates, the integration of the research results into the educational process, the improvement of the material and technical base, and peer observation process are used. One example of revising the current programs is the undergraduate educational program "Social Sciences," which was divided into three undergraduate programs, "International Relations," "Public Administration," and "Mass Communication," based on the activities mentioned above. This cyclical program evaluation ensures continuous improvement and adaptation to

evolving needs. ATSU ensures transparency by communicating program review findings and planned improvements to students, faculty, and employers.

Procedures for approving, implementing, and revising programs align with existing legislation. Overall, the evidence presented in the documents and during the interviews showed awareness of the importance of a standardized approach to educational design, delivery, and revising educational programs comprehensively and scientifically.

Akaki Tsereteli State University has a comprehensive policy for the planning, designing, implementing, and developing of its educational programs, as outlined by the "Educational Programs Quality Assurance Policy EP-QA." This policy ensures that educational programs align with accreditation standards, the National Qualifications Framework, and sectoral standards. The analysis of ATSU's policy will be structured around the following aspects: Framework and Guidelines; Stakeholder Involvement; Evaluation and Improvement; Challenges and Recommendations.

The policy framework at ATSU is structured to maintain high standards of educational quality and compliance with national and international benchmarks. Key elements include: Quality Assurance Policy EP-QA: In effect since 2018, this policy underpins the university's approach to designing and developing educational programs. Accreditation Standards and National Qualifications Framework: These provide a clear structure and benchmarks for program development. PDCA Cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act): Ensures continuous improvement through planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement.

ATSU's policy emphasizes the collaborative participation of all stakeholders, which is crucial for the relevance and quality of educational programs, including faculty councils, university departments, academic and scientific personnel, students, and external partners. The accreditation and Self-Evaluation Groups also include all interested parties (academic staff, students, graduates, employers).

ATSU employs a rigorous evaluation process to ensure the continuous improvement of its programs through statistical indicators, including student enrolment numbers, graduate employment rates, etc. ATSU also uses feedback from student and stakeholder surveys, academic performance analysis and peer observations. Additional useful tool used by the HEI is the SWOT Analysis for each of the program. In cases of amending/annulling of programmes, ATSU gives due consideration to legal interests of the students, and grants students an opportunity to smoothly complete an educational program.

ATSU's policy for the planning, designing, implementing, and developing educational programs is robust and comprehensive. It effectively incorporates stakeholder involvement, continuous evaluation, labour market and improvement mechanisms to ensure the quality and relevance of its programs.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-Evaluation Report;
- Interviews with deans, program directors, staff, students, alumni, and employers;
- Educational Program Catalogue;
- Quality Assurance Policy of ATSU;
- Reports of the Quality Assurance Service of ATSU;
- Resolution of the Academic Council No. 5 (23/24), 14.09.2023 "On the approval of the educational programs valid for the 2023-2024 academic year";
- Educational programs of ATSU;
- Resolution of the Academic Council No. 69 (22/23), 9.06.2023 - On the approval of the annual educational, educational-methodical, and scientific-methodical workload norms of academic staff, emeritus, teachers, specialists invited by contract and on an hourly basis of Akaki Tsereteli State University;
- Resolution of the Academic Council of ATSU No. 87(23/24), 28.02.2024 – on "The rules for obtaining, suspending, terminating, restoring the student status, mobility, qualification granting and recognition of the received education, in case of changing/cancelling the educational program, ensuring students of the relevant program with the mechanisms for providing further education".

Recommendations:

N/A

Suggestions:

N/A

Best Practices (if applicable):

N/A

Evaluation

☒ **Complies with requirements**

☐ Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

3.2 Structure and Content of Educational Programmes

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

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

ATSU follows current Georgian legislation and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) for program design. Their Quality Assurance Policy for Educational Programs (EP-QA) outlines specific procedures and instructions. Undergraduate programs require at least 240 credits (one credit = 25 hours). Master's programs require 120 credits (thesis: 25-30 credits). Doctoral programs last at least three years with a study component not exceeding 60 credits. Medical doctor/dentist programs require 360/300 credits, respectively. Teacher training and Georgian language programs are one year (60 credits). Two main structures exist Structure 1: Courses (at least 120 credits) and free components related to the field of study. Structure 2: Courses (at least 120 credits), minor programs (30-60 credits), and free components related to the field of study.

ATSU offers 34 undergraduate programs with both structures. Additionally, ten undergraduate programs follow structure one exclusively.

ATSU clearly outlines program entry requirements following Georgian law, ensuring anyone interested can find them. Medical programs have stricter entrance exams to select students with the necessary skills. English-language programs consider updated industry standards to assess English proficiency. For entering the program in the English program, a B1 or B2 English level is enough for entering the program, however there are opportunities for students and staff to improve their language proficiency. Program goals are linked to the University's mission, faculty expertise, and national qualifications frameworks. Upon graduation, students demonstrate specific knowledge and skills outlined in the program's learning outcomes. A clear connection exists between program goals, learning outcomes, and individual courses. The curriculum map defines courses that develop specific learning outcomes at three progressive levels: Introduction, Practice, and Mastery.

Each program utilizes the curriculum map to design a learning outcomes assessment plan with target benchmarks. Outcomes must match the program's level, directly connect to the awarded qualification and educational level, define the knowledge, skills, autonomy, and responsibility students gain by program completion, and consider industry-specific standards to ensure graduates are prepared for the workforce. Overall, the documentation appears to reflect an approach to alignment in the program and syllabi that works in practice. The academic staff interviewed were aware of the institutional approach to curriculum development and program coherence.

Evidence is provided in SER that the ATSU employers help students meet curriculum goals, student-specific outcomes, performance objectives, teaching methods, materials, and updated strategies for improving learning. ATSU allows students to create personalized learning plans that consider each student's needs, interests, and academic preparedness.

Students with disabilities or special needs can receive appropriate support through their plans. Plans can be designed for complete programs or specific courses, allowing students to adjust their workload.

ATSU employs teaching methods that are suitable to each program's unique field. For example, medical programs utilize problem-based learning, flipped classrooms, case studies, simulation training, and clinical rotations to prepare students for real-world scenarios. Engineering programs emphasize hands-on learning through labs, practical exercises, and industry simulations. Agricultural programs integrate fieldwork and practical activities to complement classroom learning. The catalogue of education programs is available on the University's website.

ATSU makes reasonable efforts to engage with academic staff and students regarding program development and enhancement.

Akaki Tsereteli State University ensures that its educational programs' learning outcomes are clearly stated and aligned with higher education levels and qualifications. Through individualized education programs, ATSU takes into consideration various student requirements, needs, and academic readiness, ensuring their unhindered involvement in the educational process. ATSU's educational programs are

designed to align with both national and international standards (ESG 2015), including compliance with Legislation on Higher Education in Georgia and ECTS Guidelines, as well as Quality Assurance Policy (EP-QA), which encompasses a set of relevant procedures and instructions, including the higher (academic) educational program designing instruction, which guides the development of programs using ECTS credits.

Learning outcomes are tied to the program's objectives and the university's mission, as well as align with the framework's competency descriptors and continuous evaluation and improvement through surveys of students, teachers, employers, and graduates.

ATSU's policies and practices for defining and achieving program learning outcomes are robust and well-aligned with higher education standards. The university's commitment to individualized education programs ensures that the diverse needs and academic readiness of students are met, fostering an inclusive and effective learning environment. ATSU ensures access to information on programs. A catalogue of educational programs serves the purpose of informing interested parties on educational activities of the ATSU. The catalogue is updated according to the changes in the program. It is accessible to all interested individuals and is published on the web-page of the ATSU. In addition, ATSU organizes a science picnic and an open day every year. ATSU conducted Alumni tracer study regarding career including employment rate for graduates 2020-2023. 2415 students were interviewed and at the end 34.7 percent of their graduates are employed with granted qualification.

Through continuous evaluation and adherence to national and international guidelines, ATSU maintains high standards for its educational programs, ensuring that learning outcomes are clear, relevant, and achievable.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-Evaluation Report;
- Interviews with deans, program directors, staff, students, alumni, and employers;
- Educational Program Catalogue;
- Quality Assurance Policy of ATSU;
- EP-QA 1.1. Procedure for initiating, planning, and approval of an educational program;
- Sample of the diploma supplement, form;
- Resolution of the Academic Council No. 30(17/18), 5.12.2017) On the approval of the rules for developing a student's individual curriculum at the university;
- Reports of the quality assurance service of the ATSU.

Recommendations:

N/A

Suggestions:

3.2.1. Consider the views of more external stakeholders in developing programs and emphasize the need for more practical elements in the study programs.

3.2.2. Consider making more optional subjects available to students across the programs.

Best Practices (if applicable):

N/A

Evaluation

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

3.3 Assessment of Learning Outcomes

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

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

ATSU uses a credit system for assessment based on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). To earn credit, students must demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes for each course. ATSU uses various assessment methods to measure students' achievement of program learning outcomes. These methods include class activities (participation in seminars, discussions, and group activities, written work essays, assignments, presentations, case studies, simulations, OSCE (12 station) (Objective Structured Clinical Examination), and other practical evaluations.

ATSU emphasizes transparency and accessibility in its student assessment system. The program curricula, syllabi, and the university website outline the evaluation system.

Faculty, program heads, and instructors regularly inform students about assessment methods and regulations.

There are criteria for Master's and doctoral thesis assessment in ATSU. The evaluation criteria and methods for students' Master's thesis will depend on the specific program and will be detailed in the program syllabus. "Resolution of the Academic Council of ATSU No. 81 (23/24) - On Defining the Basic Principles of Doctoral Studies at ATSU" (dated February 14, 2024) has guidelines for doctoral thesis evaluation and categorize the thesis based on excellent, very good, satisfactory, needs improvement, unsatisfactory, and completely unsatisfactory. Doctoral students receiving an "Unsatisfactory" evaluation may resubmit their revised thesis within one year. However, a "Completely Unsatisfactory" evaluation prohibits resubmission of the same dissertation. During the site visits, some Master's and PhD thesis were available, all with good qualities. The University also upholds a strict policy against plagiarism and cheating.

Instructors openly evaluate students' progress throughout the course. ATSU allows students to challenge final exam grades they believe are inaccurate. Within one week of official results, students can file a written appeal to the deputy rector and the dean of their faculty. This appeal should clearly explain why a re-evaluation is warranted. The faculty dean, advised by the department head, will form a committee to review the appeal within two business days. This committee will issue a final decision that is documented in a formal protocol. If the appeal is successful, the deputy rector will approve the updated grade and ensure its reflected electronically. This streamlined process ensures a fair opportunity to address any concerns about final exam grades. During interviews with students and academic staff, it was found that students are familiar with the appeal policy.

Systemic evaluation of teaching courses ensures feedback from students on the efficiency and fairness of the academic staff teaching and assessment system. The site visits confirmed that this process is in place and valued highly by students.

The authorization standards for the assessment of learning outcomes at Akaki Tsereteli State University are comprehensive and align with both national and European educational frameworks. These standards aim to ensure that the evaluation system is law-compliant, transparent, and fair, thereby promoting the continuous improvement of students' academic performance. The university's assessment system complies with the Law of Georgia "On Higher Education" and specific orders from the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, ensuring adherence to national legal requirements. Internal regulations, such as the Resolution of the Academic Council of ATSU, provide additional structure and ensure that the assessment standards are tailored to the specific needs of the university.

The maximum evaluation for a course is 100 points, distributed across various components: 1. Interim evaluations: 60 points (including student activity and midterm exams); 2. Final exam: 40 points. To qualify for the final exam, students must meet minimum competence levels in interim evaluations. This system ensures that students have a foundational understanding before attempting the final assessment.

ATSU ensures the transparency and fairness in evaluation through several components: 1. Detailed assessment criteria, which are clearly defined in course syllabi. Students are informed about the evaluation system through multiple channels, including the university website and direct communication from faculty; 2. Diverse Evaluation methods, such as written assignments, presentations, case studies, and practical examinations (e.g., OSCE for clinical skills). This diversity caters to different learning styles and provides a holistic evaluation of student capabilities; 3. Appeal System that the university has established allowing students to contest their grades if they believe there has been an error or unfair assessment.

ATSU uses an electronic system (e-dean) to manage the learning process, enabling students to monitor their academic progress, access course materials, and communicate with faculty. This system enhances transparency and accessibility.

The learning outcomes assessment system at ATSU is robust, law-compliant, and designed to be transparent and fair. By adhering to national and European educational standards, utilizing diverse and detailed evaluation methods, integrating technology, and maintaining an effective appeal system, ATSU ensures that its assessment practices promote the continuous improvement of students' academic performance. This comprehensive approach not only supports student achievement but also upholds the integrity and quality of the university's educational programs.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-Evaluation Report;
- Interviews with deans, program directors, staff, students, alumni, and employers;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational Program Catalogue; • Master's and PhD thesis; • Resolution No. 6 (22/23), 16.09.2022 of the Academic Council of ATSU "On approval of the student evaluation system at Akaki Tsereteli State University"; • Resolution No. 38 (20/21), 15.07.2021 of the Academic Council of ATSU - "On the procedure for completing and evaluating the master's thesis"; • Resolution No. 81 (23/24), 14.02.2024 of the Academic Council of ATSU – "On defining the basic principles of doctoral studies at Akaki Tsereteli State University"; • Resolution No. 10 (17/18), 10.11.2017 of the Academic Council of ATSU -"On the approval of the procedure for conducting the examination process of the bachelor's, one-step (Georgian and English language), master's and minor educational programs at Akaki Tsereteli State University in an organized and centralized manner, and the approval of the rules for the appeal of the examinations"; • Resolution No. 7 (22/23), 16.09.2022 of the Academic Council of ATSU – "On making changes to the student evaluation system at the Faculty of Medicine"; • Resolution No. 16 (21/22), 9.12.2021 of the Academic Council of ATSU "On the changes in the evaluation system of the Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences; • The results of the student survey conducted by the HEI.
Recommendations: N/A
Suggestions: 3.3.1. Develop a whole assessment system that is tailored to the specific needs of each academic program and course.
Best Practices (if applicable): 3.3.1. OSCE stations were designed perfectly, and all students and OSCE examiners were trained well on OSCE. A well-developed central recording system was used to record each OSCE station and give students feedback based on the records.
Evaluation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="radio"/> <input type="checkbox"/> 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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 <p>The human resource management system at the university encompasses recruitment, selection, assessment, and development of staff, ensuring transparent, fair, and objective procedures for hiring academic, scientific, administrative, and support personnel. It includes affiliation of academic personnel, regulations for workload approval and performance monitoring, and rules for work monitoring and feedback for improvement. These processes are regulated by the personnel management document titled 'Policy and Procedures for Management of Human Resources,' approved in 2018. This document is designed to be flexible and subject to updates in line with legislative changes or university decisions. It covers staff attraction, selection, hiring, adaptation, orientation, probation, job descriptions, professional development mechanisms, and staff evaluation. Given the ongoing advancements in Higher Education Institutions through internationalization, these topics may require periodic updates. Some periodic updates for the human resource management policy document could be suggested.</p>

The university has procedures for the selection and approval of the staff members and academic personnel defined (Decree# 78 (23/24) of ATSU Academic Council approved on 4.02.2024 "Criteria for Selection of Academic Staff at LEPL-Akaki Tsereteli State University by Competition"). Transparent and objective procedures are in place for hiring academic, scientific, invited, administrative, and support staff, ensuring the attraction and recruitment of qualified employees. This process encompasses five stages: Preparation, Attraction, Selection, Hiring, and Orientation.

The university has established recruitment procedures utilizing a variety of methods, including documentation, interviews, and test-based exams. Interviews revealed that the Quality Assurance Department requires test-based exams due to specific job requirements, with deans actively participating in the recruitment of academic and invited staff. Personnel needs are identified by the faculties and negotiated with the university administration. Deans expressed a desire to attract more young scholars and have recently announced vacancies for assistant professors. Some program heads recounted challenges in recruiting PhD students as invited lecturers, noting that experienced affiliated staff have held positions for many years, somehow limiting opportunities for younger scholars. They emphasized the need for more young faculty members in their programs (medical programs have young invited lecturers). The University is recommended to work on creating more concrete mechanisms to attract more young affiliated academic personnel to the programs. The University is recommended to work on creating more concrete mechanisms to attract more young affiliated academic personnel to the programs.

The university has an affiliation policy for academic staff, outlined in Resolution #133 (22.11.2017) by the ATSU Representative Council. Of the 474 academic staff at ATSU, 458 are affiliated. Affiliation is voluntary and provides several benefits, including representation in elective bodies, financial support for publications and international conference participation, bonuses, and salary supplements. Only affiliated staff can attain emeritus status and receive research funding. They can also adjust their workload to prioritize research for one academic year. Interviews revealed mixed opinions among academic personnel. Some program heads emphasized the value and prestige of affiliation over financial benefits, citing funded articles and conferences as examples. However, during the interviews, the affiliation policy has been criticized for lacking transparency in financing and assessment criteria by one of the lecturers. Invited personnel acknowledged awareness of financial opportunities but had not applied. Based on academic staff feedback, it is suggested that the university enhances the transparency and accessibility of its affiliation policy more.

The university emphasizes its commitment to the professional development of its staff through various services. At ATSU, professional development is facilitated by university services and through international projects that include mobilities, trainings, seminars, workshops, and governmental and non-governmental initiatives. The interview results revealed that the needs of the personnel are defined by the questionnaires conducted by the Research Support and Development Center and Marketing, Project, and Event Management Service. Center of Continuing Education works with the faculties to define those needs and appropriate trainings are provided for the staff. Some of the professional development trainings have been named: PBL, OSCE, assessment and teaching methods, etc. Some academic personnel from the faculty of Medicine mentioned that they took some English Enhancement classes from the language center. They receive information from the website, mail, and faculty administration. Most academic and invited staff know English well enough to deliver the English MD program. However, there is a need for some of the academic and invited staff to be more familiar with the English language.

At the University peer observation has been identified as its leading best practice, recognizing its value in enhancing teaching quality and fostering collaborative professional development among faculty members. The academic and invited personnel noted that they have a pre-defined schedule of observation and they find it productive.

According to SER 'The administrative and support staff evaluation system is based on the annual reporting system implemented by the services. Each structural unit summarizes the results of its work once a year and prepares an annual report, which is submitted to the relevant university management body. As part of this process, quantitative and informal qualitative evaluation of the activities performed by the employees takes place' (p.57). The interview results revealed that the administrative units are supposed to report their performance, but there is no evidence that quantitative and qualitative analyses are done. The interview with the manager of the Human Resources Management Service revealed that the mechanism of evaluating administrative staff is new and no studies have been conducted yet. It is notable that the document 'Policy and Procedures for Management of Human Resources', which was approved in 2018, contains a sub-chapter 1.7 Staff evaluation focusing on defining short-term working individual aims, relevant criteria of evaluation, discussing the results of staff member's evaluation and making a development plan. Given the absence of reported analyses or studies, the university is recommended to enhance the effectiveness and transparency of the administrative and support staff evaluation process at the individual level.

The total number of HEI staff, including academic, scientific, invited, administrative, and support staff, is 1450. Among them, there are 474 academic staff, consisting of 82 professors, 332 associate professors, 60 assistant professors, and no assistants. The institution has no scientific staff. The number of affiliated academic staff is 458, comprising 80 affiliated professors, 324 affiliated associate professors, and 54 affiliated assistant professors. Additionally, there are 414 invited staff involved in teaching, 21 administrative staff, and 541 support staff, of which 245 are permanent and 296 are on contract. The ratio of academic/scientific staff to administrative/support staff is 1:1.2; The ratio between academic/scientific to students is 1:10.1; The ratio between administrative staff to students is 1:428. The university has set the benchmarks for the year 2029.

The University has the selection criteria for the academic staff based on a competitive principle. The document contains information regarding the required documents, qualifications, criteria for selecting contestants, etc. The submitted personnel documents demonstrate their high quality and compliance with the required standards. The University has all the functions and job descriptions designed for all the structural units and faculties.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-Evaluation Report;
- Policy and Procedures for Management of Human Resources', 2018;
- Criteria for Selection of Academic Staff at LEPL-Akaki Tsereteli State University by Competition;
- Procedure for hiring support staff at Akaki Tsereteli State University;
- Rules and conditions for awarding the academic title to LEPL-ATSU emeritus;
- Rules for holding a competition for the position of a teacher at LEPL-Akaki Tsereteli State University;
- Affiliation Policy;
- Academic Personnel Documents;
- Interview Results.

Recommendations:

4.1.1. Given the absence of reported analyses or studies, the university is recommended to enhance the effectiveness and transparency of the administrative and support staff evaluation process at the individual level.

4.1.2. The University is recommended to work on creating more concrete mechanisms to attract more young affiliated academic personnel to the programs.

4.1.3. Most academic and invited staff know English well enough to deliver the English MD program. However, there is a need for some of the academic and invited staff to be more familiar with the English language.

Suggestions:

4.1.1. Given the ongoing advancements in Higher Education Institutions through internationalization, the human resource management policy document- approved in 2018, might be suggested for some periodic updates.

4.1.2. It is suggested that the university enhances the transparency and accessibility of its affiliation policy more.

Best Practices (if applicable):

4.1.1. At the University peer observation has been identified as its leading best practice, recognizing its value in enhancing teaching quality and fostering collaborative professional development among faculty members.

Evaluation

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

4.2. Academic/Scientific and Invited Staff Workload

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

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

ATSU has a renewable semester workload scheme for academic staff, encompassing teaching, research, and other responsibilities based on their assigned roles and duties. The annual workload norms for academic staff, emeritus professors, contract specialists, and hourly invited teachers are outlined by the Academic Council as follows: the annual workload for academic staff is 1500 hours, including 500 hours of teaching contact work and 1000 hours of teaching-methodical work; contract specialists have an annual workload of 1000 hours, with 500 hours dedicated to educational work and 500 hours to scientific and methodical work; Emeritus professors have an annual workload of 630 hours, including 30 hours of teaching contact work and 600 hours of scientific-methodical work; teachers have an annual training workload of 600 hours, including 420 contact hours. For academic programs, the teaching-methodical workload of specialists invited on an hourly basis is between 30 and 700 hours. A differentiated approach is designed for the undergraduate educational program "Performing Arts (Keyboard Instruments/String Instruments/Wind Instruments/Vocal/Choir Conducting) due to its specificities.

The academic staff organizes educational and methodological activities throughout the academic year in alignment with the standards set by the Academic Council, which approves the rules for determining, approving, recording, and verifying the performance of workload norms.

According to SER, 'ATSU considers the workload of academic staff in all HEI-s where it holds an academic or research position' (p.66), but the examination of the documents and interview results revealed that there are no clear-cut mechanisms for monitoring academic staff's teaching workload outside the university. According to the Order of the Minister of Georgia, 2018 year (the procedure for the creation and administration of the higher education management information system and on the approval of the conditions), the universities are required to design a Higher Education information management system to systematize the information about the university personnel (Article 6. Information to be submitted about the personnel implementing the educational programs and other persons employed in the higher educational institution). It is recommended to utilize a higher education management information system, along with internal monitoring mechanisms, to monitor the teaching workload of academic staff outside the university.

To ensure program sustainability, the institution considers the number of students in each program when planning the number of academic, scientific, and invited staff. The ratio of the academic, scientific, and invited staff number to the number of the higher educational programs is 888/1028, 7:1. The ratio of the affiliated staff number to the total number of academic and invited staff is 458/888, 1:1,9. The ratio of the affiliated staff number to the number of students is 458/9001, 19,7; The ratio of the number of supervisors and Master students is 180/439, 1:2,4; The ratio of the number of supervisors and doctoral students is 54/84, 1:1,6. For each of the above-noted indicators, the university has set the benchmarks for 2029 year. The university maintains detailed and clear contractual relationships with its affiliated personnel.

The university has a policy of planning the student body for the educational programs. The following indicators are considered: a) the analysis of students' enrolment in the last five years; b) market research; c) the employment rate of the graduates; d) human and material resources; and e) the university's perspectives and trends.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-Evaluation Report;
- Academic Personnel Documents;
- Resolution #133 22.11. 2017 of ATSU Board of Representatives on approval of the rules of affiliation of academic staff of LEPL-ATSU;
- Contract Forms;
- Methodology of Planning Student Body;
- Interview Results.

Recommendations:

4.2.1. It is recommended to utilize a higher education management information system, along with internal monitoring mechanisms, to monitor the teaching workload of academic staff outside the university.

Suggestions:

N/A

Best Practices (if applicable):

N/A

Evaluation

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

5. Students and Their Support Services

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

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

- 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

ATSU runs different educational level programs, including BA, MA, PhD, one-cycle, preparation in Georgian language, teacher training and vocational, for each level the HEI has developed and implemented rules for obtaining, suspending, terminating, restoring the student status, mobility, granting qualification and recognition of received education, in case of changing/cancelling the educational program, the mechanisms for providing further education to students of the relevant program. This process is regulated by the Resolution of the Academic Council of ATSU No. 87(23/24), 28.02.2024; This rule and procedure is transparent, fair and in line with current legislation. The latest edition of the rule contains the article from the 224/N order of Minister of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia about suspension of the student status of a foreign citizen enrolled without passing the unified national exams/common master's exams if the person has not received a grade in at least one component of the educational program within 45 calendar days after passing the academic registration. It is important to mention that the interviews showed the HEI's administration's awareness about the regulation, that it is adequately followed and international students have received proper consultations about the new rule. Article 26.1 in the same rule is expired.

To ensure the accessibility of the information about student status, mobility and other issues, the rule and other regulating documents need to be available in both English and Georgian languages on the website. As the ATSU website lacks many documents, especially in English, the problem needs to be solved.

The contract between HEI and a student protects student rights and lawful interests, the consultation meetings from student support service, deans and other administrative representatives aim to increase students' awareness about their rights and obligations, but after the interviews with students experts' panel believes that further steps are suggestible to ensure that all students get relevant information about legal issues. The student expert also would suggest adding the chapter about students' rights in all contract forms of all educational programs.

For protecting the right of a fair assessment of the student's knowledge, the HEI has developed and implemented appeal regulation "On approval of the rules for conducting the examination process in an organized and centralized manner and examination appeal procedure"; Interviews with deans and students clarified, that the mechanism is actively implemented in practice. Students can fill appealing form in the administration or send it via self-service terminals, but the last service isn't available for all international students, as their student cards aren't activated. The IT department explained that because of the large student number, they are gradually solving this problem.

The rights and duties of the student are defined in the ATSU Statute and the Code of Ethics. In case of their violation, the student bears certain disciplinary responsibilities. It is carried out by the faculty committee. During the interviews with students, it was revealed, that international students do not have proper information about the Code of Ethics, plagiarism, Turnitin platform and other relevant issues. Because of this, students' awareness regarding this aspect should be increased and additionally the English version of the document should be uploaded on the website.

Along with the Ethics Commission, the Office of the Ombudsman which has been operating at the university since 2018 and is an independent body, serves to protect the rights and legitimate interests

of students and staff of the university. Georgian and international students stated that Ombudsman's service is really helpful and some of them have already benefited from this opportunity.
Evidences/indicators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Evaluation Report; • Student Support and Development Office; • Resolution of the Academic Council of ATSU No. 87(23/24), 28.02.2024 on "The rules for obtaining, suspending, terminating, restoring the student status, mobility, qualification granting and recognition of received education, in case of changing/cancelling the educational program, the mechanisms for providing further education to students of the relevant program"; • Resolution No. 1 (23/24) of the Academic Council of ATSU dated September 1, 2023 "On the approval of the rules for payment of tuition fees, earning credits (different and/or remaining to be earned) determined for the relevant level of higher education and fulfillment of financial obligations by students of Akaki Tsereteli State University."; • Samples of the contract signed between ATSU and the student; • Resolution No. 30(17/18), 5.12.2017 of ATSU "On the procedure for developing a student's individual study plan"; • Code of Ethics of Akaki Tsereteli State University; • Site-visit; • The University Website; • Interviews.
Recommendations: <p>5.1.1. Provide ATSU website with all necessary documentation (rule about student status, scholarship awarding, tuition payment and others) both in Georgian and English languages.</p> <p>5.1.2. Ensure that all international students have access to e-services.</p> <p>5.1.3. Increase students', especially international students', awareness in the code of ethics and make it available in Georgian and English on the ATSU website.</p> <p>5.1.4. It is recommended to edit "The rules for obtaining, suspending, terminating, restoring the student status, mobility, qualification granting and recognition of received education, in case of changing/cancelling the educational program, the mechanisms for providing further education to students of the relevant program" and remove expired articles.</p>
Suggestions: <p>5.1.1. It is suggested to strengthen student information providing mechanisms about their rights, obligations and other legal issues.</p> <p>5.1.2. Add the chapter students' rights in all contract forms between students and the university.</p>
Best Practices (if applicable): N/A
Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements
5.2 Student Support Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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

ATSU strives to sustain and improve student-oriented learning environment, what itself is a guarantee of the successful implementation of educational programs. The HEI shares and implements good practices from other institutions and sources, for example Ombudsman and psychotherapist services.

As it was discussed both in the SER and during the interviews, every year first-year students are met by the university administration, the rector, deputy rector, head of administration and information meetings are organized by the faculty administration, department and program heads, student support and development office, library, marketing, project and event management service, external relations and development service. Students get additional information about educational process and other activities mainly through corporate email. Georgian and international students mentioned that they do regularly get consultations from academic staff. Consultation hours are determined in the contracts between academic staff and the university, and this opportunity is constantly utilized by students. Students as well as administrative representatives and lecturers also underlined the fact, that in case of need to improve student's academic performance, summer and winter schools, individual study plan elaboration and other mechanisms are available and they could provide experts with such examples.

Students' Support and Development Service conducts activities to promote career development and employment of students and graduates, including organizing employment forums, webinars, informative events, training courses etc. ATSU has a wide network of partner organizations and potential employers, meeting with them showed that the cooperation is productive. Representatives of clinics stated the fact that a lot of ATSU students and graduates are employed in their structures and for supporting their academic activity, they implemented 8h and 16h shifts. Although several issues regarding the standard need to be mentioned. The HEI has created online vacancy portal and special section on the Website to promote career development, but neither the portal nor the section on the website with employment information wasn't updated since 2022; Both e-services needs further development. The HEI representatives explained that vacancies are mostly provided through corporate emails. MD/PBL and MD English program students mentioned that they would like to get more employment opportunities associated with the medical field. The HEI has created Alumni Network, that helps not only alumni in their career development path, but also the students, as through periodic live and online meetings they get an opportunity to get more information from their senior colleagues. The meeting with alumni showed that the university stays in touch with them and considers their opinion about the improvement of educational environment. On the other hand, during the interview with foreign students it was revealed that they would like to have more active contact with alumni for getting advices and adequate information about the opportunities and difficulties of their pathway.

The HEI supports employers' involvement in the creation, implementation and development of educational programs. Examples of changes in the programs based on partner employers' feedback and recommendations were given during interviews.

But the expert panel believes that it is a problematic issue that many of the graduates and students do not participate in surveys and that only delays further development. ATSU needs to encourage not only participation of more students and alumni in the surveys, but also carry out an analysis of different programs' low alumni employment rate (with granted qualification). Graduates' employment studying survey that was conducted by the ATSU shows, that only 1/3 of pedagogical faculty graduates, 1/4 of natural sciences faculty graduates, 1/2 of engineering faculty graduates, 1/5 of agricultural faculty graduates, 1/5 of maritime transport faculty graduates are employed with granted qualification. So the numbers for this directions are high, that's why expert panel believes, that this problem should be discussed on time and specific steps should be taken to avoid such incompliance.

The Foreign Relations and Development Office of the university offers university students of all educational levels (as well as international students) services supporting the internationalization of the student contingent, including adaptation and integration support, orientation days for international students, exchange programs for all educational level students, participation opportunities in different international events and programs. Information about exchange programs and various events are shared on the website, via corporate emails and e-portal. ATSU has a wide network of partner foreign institutions, that encourages the internationalization process. But during the interviews MD programs' Georgian and international students mentioned, that they would like to have more exchange programs for medical faculty, as mostly other program students benefit from this important opportunity.

The student support and development service and student self-government organize various extracurricular activities, including sports, cultural, intellectual events, parties and trips for encouraging students' integration and adaptation process, the HEI hosts and is participant of several international conferences, that give students an opportunity to participate in scientific and research activities.

The interview with the Heads of MD and other programs revealed that there is a necessity of elaboration and implementation scientific activity/international activity granting criteria and procedure to ensure the fair distribution of finances between student participants or graduates who present their project

that is being/was done during their academic period, represents the university and most importantly supports its international popularization.

Akaki Tsereteli State University takes into consideration students' socio-economic status (SES) and implements various support services, including tuition fee payment schemes, payment instalment, financial assistance and funding for low SES students, financial support for the commuting expenses of individuals with disabilities to the university to facilitate their full inclusion in the educational process, additionally student self-government offers financial support to students in the framework of social funding activities. 4 different types scholarships are available for students (1 state, 2 private company, 1 university scholarship), but it is important to be emphasized, that university stipend amount (75 lari a month) isn't relevant at all for encouraging students' motivation and student life. It needs to be increased. The interviews with international students revealed that they lack scholarship opportunities. So, this problematic issue needs also further work. Scholarship appointing rule, tuition payment rule and other documentation should be also accessible on the website in English.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-Evaluation Report;
- Interviews;
- Site-visit;
- Akaki Tsereteli State University Employment Portal <https://job.atsu.edu.ge/> ;
- Resolution No. 1(23/24), 1.09.2023 of the Academic Council of ATSU - "On the rules for payment of the tuition fees by the students of LEPL Akaki Tsereteli State University, conditions for earning the credits determined by the corresponding level of higher education (different and/or remaining to be earned) and the manner of fulfilling the financial obligation";
- Resolution No. 14 (14/15), 6.04. 2015 of the Representative Council of ATSU "On the approval of the regulations on the establishment of assistance to cover the financial obligation of students of LEPL – Akaki Tsereteli State University";
- Scholarship awarding rule;
- Regulation of Students' Support and Development Service;
- Alumni network <https://alumni.atsu.edu.ge/>;
- Alumni employment survey.

Recommendations:

- 5.2.1. Update students' employment portal and website with relevant information, new vacancies and provide students with more employment opportunities.
- 5.2.2. Increase exchange program opportunities for MD students, for both Georgian and international ones.
- 5.2.3. ATSU needs to encourage not only participation of more students and alumni in the surveys, but also carry out an analysis of different programs' low alumni employment rate (with granted qualification) and take measures to reduce the incompliance.
- 5.2.4. Elaborate and implement transparent, fair and publicly accessible criteria and procedure for students'/graduate's scientific activity/project granting.
- 5.2.5. Increase university scholarship amount to support student life and promote students' motivation for Georgian, as well as international students.

Suggestions:

- 5.2.1. Enhance contact between students and alumni through alumni network to increase students' awareness about academic and career development.

Best Practices (if applicable):

N/A

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

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

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

The university carries out the activities in the field of research and development, which aims at economic, technological, industrial and other types of innovative development.

The Academic Council of the university is responsible for working out the research development policy and monitoring the results of its implementation, while the implementation of research development policy and the processes of its evaluation and improvement are coordinated by a faculty.

Research activities are regarded as one of the most effective instruments of social responsibility, which ensure the development of a city, a region and a country and solution of the problems the society faces.

Internationalization of research activities is regarded as an efficient instrument of exchanging knowledge and modern technologies, rationally using human, financial, material resources. About 90 articles were published in journals indexed in international databases (Clarivate Analytics and Scopus) during the reporting period by 125 authors affiliated to ATSU. More than 35 international scientific conferences have been held since 2018.

In accordance with the research development strategy current research priorities of the university are conducting regional and interdisciplinary research, ensuring thorough integration of the research outcome in the teaching/learning process.

Along with decentralization the university provides systemic support of research development by setting up Research Support and Development Centre, enhancing internationalization and collaboration at the local level, fostering professional development of academic personnel, providing targeted funding, supporting innovative types of research and initiatives, thus creating positive organizational climate in the university.

Akaki Tsereteli State University is involved in more than 40 research projects funded by different donors, including: 23 international research projects; 19 projects funded by national funds.

In accordance with the mission, research strategy and policy of the university, the centre conducts projects meeting regional requirements. Research Support and Development Centre was awarded 27,000 GEL grant by (NNLE) Non-entrepreneurial Non-commercial Legal Entity International Education Centre Alumni Association in 2021.

In the project - "Enhancing the monitoring of research development process and supporting mechanisms in regional universities"- were involved regional universities of Telavi, Akhaltsikhe, Batumi, Zugdidi. It was co-financed with 3,000 GEL by ATSU. The project was carried out in 2022. The participants had trainings in the following directions (5 trainings in total, up to 20 representatives of the regional universities were trained);

Research activities currently are conducted in the university by the following research units:

- Kartvelology scientific-research centre;
- Scientific-research centre for agrarian directions;
- Scientific-research centre of the faculty of business, law and social sciences;
- Research structural unit of the faculty of medicine.

Future Innovation Laboratory (FabLab ATSU) functions in the university, which has been set up within the framework of the memorandum drawn up with the Innovations and Technologies Agency of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia.

In 2021 the university with the support of the administration launched the initiative of setting up university lab was appointed. The corresponding commission worked in two directions: equipping a common university laboratory and ensuring commercialization of the research (working out the strategy, supporting specific ideas). It should be mentioned that 5 inventions have been patented in the name of university, all the patents are valid. In 2023, 5 applications were submitted to the National Intellectual Property Centre of Georgia Sakpatenti, three of which have already been registered.

However, intellectual property ownership of the authors should be well-defined in the contract of the affiliated personnel with the university.

Selected Directions of research profiles:

- Pharmacy;
- Direction of clinical medicine and public health;

- Transport processes, mechanical engineering, food technology, building materials and constructions, measurements and quality management, materials engineering, welding technologies, mathematical modelling of technological processes, electric power industry technology and energy systems;
- Environmental technologies, engineering and safety; technology of chemical, pharmaceutical, cosmetic and biologically active substances. Food science, technology and safety;
- Evolution of garment and leather goods construction, design, technology and materials science; textile design;
- Selection of subtropical and other agricultural crops of Georgia, care-growing, protection, development of storage-processing technologies;
- The study of hydro engineering problems in the Black Sea coastline and their impact on the economic development of the region, the study of geopolitical and regional factors of the country's economic development, measures to stabilize geomorphological processes in the confluence of the Rioni and Enguri rivers and hydrodynamic methods of their calculation, the importance of Poti harbour in the realization of the transit function of Georgia.

The integration of the research results into the educational activities of the university:

- Research component of doctoral programs, doctoral dissertation, and master's thesis of the master's program;
- Availability of periodicals and international electronic databases for students;
- Involvement of professors and researchers of the research units in the educational process;
- Involvement of doctoral students in the educational process within the framework of the doctoral program component -assistance;
- Research of undergraduate and graduate students, which they presented at the student conference annually;
- Exchange programs for students and staff.

Currently, 84 active doctoral students are enrolled in the university. Within the reporting period, a total of 50 dissertations have been successfully defended. (Refer to the appendix for the list of defended theses).

In 2023, the Research Support and Development Centre developed a project, the goal of which was to promote the enhancement of doctoral education in LEPL higher education institutions, to boost the research skills of doctoral students, to increase their awareness in the international arena from a scientific point of view, and professional development of supervisors of doctoral theses. As a result of the project, the participants could improve their skills in the following areas:

- Outlining the article;
- Formulation of a research question and design;
- Academic writing (in English);
- Data visualization;
- Journal ranking system;
- The process and importance of peer review;
- Research ethics principles and approaches;
- Difficulties of the writing process and methods of overcoming them.

Doctoral and Master theses design, structure, references are all of very good quality. ATSU has Memorandum of cooperation with economic agents and research projects are implemented and planned in collaboration with these agents. University has clearly defined functions for the supervisors of PhD students. Workload of academic and scientific staff enables them to effectively supervise PhD works. High standard for the evaluation and defense of dissertation is ensured.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-Evaluation Report;
- ATSU Statute (Appendix 7);
- Research Development Strategy (Appendix 37);
- Abstracts of the defended doctoral theses (Appendix 39);
- Research Policy (Appendix 11);
- Interview with PhD students interview with academic personnel.

Recommendations:

N/A

Suggestions:

6.1.1. Intellectual property ownership of the authors should be well-defined in the contract of the affiliated personnel with the university.

Best Practices (if applicable):
N/A
Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements
6.2. Research Support and Internationalisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HEI has an effective system in place for supporting research, development and creative activities ○ Attracting new staff and their involvement in research/arts-creative activities. ○ University works on internationalisation of research, development and creative activities.
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements <p>In the last six years, the scale of faculty research funding has increased. These funds, based on the decisions of the faculty councils, can be used to finance research activities, taking into account the current needs and preferences of the faculties. Over the last 6 years, the budget allocated to research amounts to 30% of the total budget. The university finances the doctoral study process by 30%. Substantial part of the University budget is directed to the research which is a good result. Laboratory tour show that new building is renovated for the common use laboratory. Infrastructure of the laboratory is already in place. Many other laboratories (Chemistry, Environmental Science, Biology, Energetics) have been equipped with modern apparatus.</p> <p>In 2018-2024, the number of applications submitted from the university to the Rustaveli National Science Foundation increased, including in new directions. The number of applications submitted by the university for obtaining local grants has also increased. About 60 applications from Akaki Tsereteli State University were submitted to the Rustaveli National Science Foundation in 2018-2024, of which 19 were funded, which is an 8% improvement compared to previous years. In this regard, the particularly increasing rate in the engineering direction is worth mentioning, especially in the background when the Rustaveli National Science Foundation suspended competitions in specific directions twice during the reporting period (especially during the pandemic).</p> <p>On the initiative of the university administration and academic council, in 2021, the encouragement of authors of articles published in high-rated journals (SCOPUS, Clarivate Analytics) began. The award amounts to 2,500 GEL and is given for 1 article published in journals indexed in Scopus and Thompson databases. It should be noted that after this initiative, the overall index of the university in the mentioned bases has increased. In 2021, 25 people were awarded, and in 2022, 28 people were nominated for the award, and in 2023, 35 people.</p> <p>PhD students should be given part of the amount (2,500 GEL) after a research article is published in a high impact factor journal. The PhD student is (should be) one of the main authors of the research.</p> <p>The initiative adopted in 2021 (implementation in 2022) was aimed at encouraging academic staff in terms of internal university research grants, within the framework of which research projects were funded by faculties. 200,000 GEL for renewing/purchasing laboratory equipment, which was completely shared and utilized by the faculties; 100,000 GEL to finance intra-faculty research projects.</p> <p>Lab tours show that labs have needed infrastructure and are equipped with modern apparatus. New building with modern infrastructure is prepared for common use laboratory.</p> <p>The university constantly supports the academic staff in terms of participation in international and local grants. With the support of the National Office of Georgia of "Horizon Europe", on February 15, 2022, the Scientific Grant Office was established at the university and officially opened on March 17 of the same year.</p> <p>The management bodies of the university are actively working on issues related to improving the level of foreign language proficiency among the academic staff. Taking into account the needs of the university, it was decided to develop a complex approach to improving foreign language competence. In 2019-2023, 49 people completed the English language learning course and 34 people confirmed their language competence at the appropriate level (certificates were awarded). In the academic year 2020-2021, 6 employees took English language courses (C1 - 3; A2 - 3), in the academic year 2022-2023 - 28 employees (B2 - 3, B1 - 13, A2 - 8, A1 - 4). In the 2023-2024 academic year, 29 employees of ATSU are taking the general English language course.</p> <p>In 2019, Akaki Tsereteli State University became the applicant-coordinator of the EU ERASMUS+ institutional development project "ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT - RURD". Regional universities of Georgia and 4 European partners from Spain, Austria, Czech Republic, and</p>

<p>Lithuania were involved in the project. The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia and the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement are also involved in the project.</p> <p>The data processed by the Research Support and Development Centre show that the number of joint scientific research and publications has increased both internationally and locally. The academic staff of the university conducts joint research with such institutions as Rafiel Dvali Institute of Machine Mechanics, Ilia Vekua Institute of Applied Mathematics, Ivane Beritashvili Experimental Biomedical Centre, Sh. Yessenov Caspian University, Linnaeus University (Sweden), Kaunas University of Technology (Lithuania), Estonian Institute of Life Sciences (Estonia), Taras Shevchenko National University (Ukraine) and others.</p> <p>Some memorandums of understanding are expired; therefore, they can be removed or sign new ones.</p> <p>ATSU practices effective system for attracting and supporting new staff in research. It fosters MA, PhD, and postdoctoral students involvement into university's research activities.</p> <p>University supports the implementation of joint MA and PhD programmes. It also supports joint supervision practices by international and local professors.</p> <p>ATSU has public, transparent and fair procedures for internal funding of reserch.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Evaluation Report; • Research development strategy (Appendix 37); • Research policy (Appendix 11); • Research process monitoring methodology (Appendix 42); • Interviews.
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>N/A</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>6.2.1. PhD students should be given part of the supplementary payment (premium) after a research article is published in a high impact factor journal. PhD student is one of the main authors of the research.</p> <p>6.2.2. Some memorandums of understanding are expired; therefore, they should be removed or sign new ones.</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>N/A</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>
<p>6.3. Evaluation of Research Activities</p>
<p>HEI has a system for evaluating and analysing the quality of research/creative-arts activities, and the productivity of scientific-research units and academic/scientific staff.</p>
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>The university joined the ERASMUS+ project HERD (Raising Research Capacity of Georgian HEIs through Developing R&D Units/HERD) in 2018. So, that after its completion, it would have the opportunity to monitor research activities using a unified platform and develop transparent criteria for evaluating research activities.</p> <p>The Academic Council approved a system of incentives for authors of articles published in journals indexed in high-ranking bases, which functions continuously in 2021.</p> <p>To prevent plagiarism, ensure academic integrity, and encourage good scientific practice, the university joined the ERASMUS + Institutional Development Project "Academic Integrity for Quality Learning and Teaching in Georgian Higher Educational Institutions (INTEGRITY) 2017-2022" and "Responsible Conduct of Research - Research Integrity and Ethics in Georgian universities (ETHICS)" (2023-2027).</p> <p>Professional development - activities planned for this purpose (preparation of grant applications, general information about research opportunities and sources of funding, formation of a research idea, issues</p>

related to the preparation of an academic article, orientation in databases, specifics of journal selection, risks and dangers related to publication, about the latest research and methodology in the field provision of information, informing about modern international practices in the issues of research ethics and academic integrity, events planned to increase foreign language competence, support in the process of communication with partners, etc.).

Academic integrity and research ethics issues play an important role in the assessment of productivity. The university is involved in the ERASMUS + project "Responsible Conduct of Research - Research Integrity and Ethics in Georgian Universities" (ETHICS), the aim of which is to systematically improve research activities carried out by universities and research organizations by introducing practices focused on highly qualified research and advanced academic approaches.

University is positioned not high enough in ranking systems (according to webometrics 10-th in Georgia, not visible in Times higher education). Increase visibility using Google Scholar profiles of academic personnel.

ATSU regularly publishes reports on implemented research activities. Evaluation results are used for the further development of research.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-Evaluation Report;
- RE-QA Research Development Policy (Appendix 11);
- Regulation of the Research Support and Development Centre (Annex 6);
- Research development strategy (Appendix 37);
- Internationalization strategy (Appendix 10);
- Interviews.

Recommendations:

N/A

Suggestions:

6.3.1. University is positioned not high enough in ranking systems (according to webometrics 10-th in Georgia, not visible in Times higher education). Increase visibility using Google Scholar profiles of academic personnel.

Best Practices (if applicable):

N/A

Evaluation

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

7. Material, Information and Financial Resources

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

7.1 Material Resources

- The institution possesses or owns material resources (fixed and current assets) that are used for achieving goals stated in the mission statement, adequately responds to the requirements of educational programmes and research activities, and corresponds to the existing number of students and planned enrolment.
- HEI offers environment necessary for implementing educational activities: sanitary units, natural light possibilities, and central heating system.
- Health and safety of students and staff is protected within the institution.
- HEI has adapted environment for people with special needs

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

Akaki Tsereteli State University has rich material resources, asset balance value is 28,165,376 GEL, calculated by historical value, the Market value can be twice more. Organization has the total area of

the buildings is 68994,89 including the total teaching area - 44832sq.m. total auxiliary area, which are located In Kutaisi and a Poti.

University has laboratory, clinic or office in different fields, they serve 100 different programs and 9001 students. University healthcare programmes clinical component implemented through clinical facilities also university has signed agreements for practices with different clinics. Teaching/scientific-research laboratory has adequate safety regulations.

University's balance sheet includes numerous movable properties.

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

Organization's buildings have: 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 offices where existing documents properly and Important documents are stored in the safe iron boxes lookers.

All buildings of the University have uninterruptible power supply system; Each of the classrooms have natural as well as artificial light possibilities the buildings have central heating system; Institution has developed fire prevention and safety guidance's, first aid instructions, and order mechanisms, and has appropriate inventory in place; Fire equipment is located on each floor of the building, in a visible area, with detailed instruction of use, and evacuation plans approved by competent agencies;

University buildings have additional emergency exit(s) (where doors open inside out, and is not of iron);

The University has medical staff in place, special room- medical cabinet, there are working persons with appropriate qualification; the medical cabinet equipped with first aid tools, in the cabinet is both natural and artificial lights, natural ventilation, and constant supply of cold and hot water.

The University in all buildings (throughout the premises) have security video recording and storing facilities which are installed both inside and outside of the buildings.

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. In those spaces is mostly equipped with necessary facilities for educational programmes implementation, including teaching/scientific-research laboratories, there are 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 programme objectives and learning outcomes.

Some buildings need repairing, in some auditoriums necessary changing of the desks, for better use group working. Some sanitary unit needs adaptation, university have started the works for solve those issues.

In general, in the most of premises intended for the educational process, the needs of persons with disabilities are taken into account. Most buildings have Specially adapted sanitary unit in place for students with special needs.

University has different appropriate agreements for the purposes of obtaining possession of the liquid assets.

Institution 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; Teaching/scientific-research laboratories observing safety regulations.

According provided information and visit we obtained sufficient assurance that university, and That the University has sufficient material resources to support the number of students required in the authorization process.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-Evaluation Report;
- Site visit;
- Webpage <https://www.atsu.edu.ge>;
- Information from <https://www.reestri.gov.ge>;
- Regulations of the Protection and Labor Safety Service;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency Management Plan of Buildings (Corpses).
Recommendations: 2.1.2. University should repair some buildings and change desks in some auditoriums. 2.1.3. Some sanitary unit needs adaptation, University have started the works for solve those issues.
Suggestions: N/A
Best Practices (if applicable): N/A
Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements
7.2. Library Resources
Library environment, resources and service support effective implementation of educational and research activities, and HEI constantly works for its improvement.
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements <p>University has rich Library resources, including book archive, reading rooms, staff space, meeting space and group workplace and IT erumpent space. Library works 60 hours a week.</p> <p>University students and representatives has access different international electronic library https://library.atsu.edu.ge/ge/p/scientific-bases databases. electronic libraries include thousands of scientific journals and electronic books. Currently, only ELSEVIER and EBSCO electronic databases are accessible from any location, and the others only from university premises, although.</p> <p>During visit, library staff (librarians), demonstrate us appropriate competence in library science, including competences to provide assistance with using international library databases. Library staff provides information to students and staff on the resources and services offered by the library (e.g., orientation sessions/ meetings, counselling, etc.), help with finding appropriate literature and other resources, including from external sources (other libraries, purchasing), holding workshops and trainings. Library management system ensures effective use of library resources and services. HEI continuously renews and upgrades resources and services based on the requirements of students and staff. The main literature listed in the syllabi is available in the library of the institution, experts randomly choose books syllabus and librarian immediately show the books from and they were on place. The university continuously renews and upgrades resources and services based on the requirements of students and staff; the university continuously renews, and upgrades resources and services based on the requirements of students and staff. Library management system ensures effective use of library resources and services</p> <p>The university Library resources, both paper-based and electronic is diverse, constantly updated based on developments in the field, and ensures achievement of educational program learning outcomes and implementation of research/scientific work. library of the university has electronic catalogue of the library resources and an electronic search system.</p> <p>The University library has Book archive, reading hall, library staff office space, meeting and group workspace, IT equipment space.</p> <p>According presented documentation and authorization visit we received sufficient assurance that University Library environment, resources and service support effective implementation of educational and research activities, and HEI constantly works for its improvement. Library management system ensures effective use of library resources and services.</p>
Evidences/indicators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Evaluation Report; • Site visit; • Webpage https://www.atsu.edu.ge; • Provision of library (appendix); • Rules for using the library (appendix); • Library website; • E-library https://library.atsu.edu.ge;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-catalogue https://atsu.library.ac.ge; • E-databases https://library.at su.edu.ge/ge/p/scientific-bases. • Information about inventory books (appendix).
Recommendations: N/A
Suggestions: N/A
Best Practices (if applicable): N/A
Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements
7.3 Information Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HEI has created infrastructure for information technologies and its administration and accessibility are ensured ○ Electronic services and electronic management systems are implemented and mechanisms for their constant improvement are in place ○ HEI ensures business continuity ○ HEI has a functional web-page in Georgian and English languages.
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements <p>ATSU have been developing updated information technology management software and infrastructure, which is compliant with business processes of the institution and ensures their successful implementation of teaching process. It should be noted that more than 20 Smartboards are widely used in the rooms intended for the educational process. The Conference Hall as well as rooms at the Faculty of Medicine are equipped with a modern video broadcast system. The Faculty of Medicine has implemented and now successfully uses the OSCE examination system with audio and video surveillance and a recording system. Electronic services and electronic management systems are implemented and mechanisms for their constant improvement are in place.</p> <p>The university has IT risk management procedures and adequate and effective, data protection (including personal data) is ensured, and the efficiency of information system is evaluated. They have good backup systems. IT infrastructure (computer equipment, software provision, internet) of the University IT infrastructure (computer equipment, software provision, internet), is constantly and continuously accessible to students and staff and used for supply university services.</p> <p>Student service system working well in Main buildings and in Georgian language, HEI need improve information system in English for better serve the foreign students.</p> <p>HEI ensures business continuity mainly by cash savings, for that more see in 7.4. HEI has some plans about assessing performance, there are introduced some forms, but there is not started using the forms.</p> <p>The university has an official web-page it serves communication and information functions, contains contact and other useful information, including mission of HEI, its activities, structure, catalogue of educational programmes, programmes and 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, the information is in in Georgian.</p> <p>In web there is shortage of the information in English language, including annual reports, financial reports, basic statistics complementing annual reports.</p> <p>In spite of that the information is regularly updated so that the interest to receive information in a timely manner is protected.</p> <p>The university has very active social media pages, Facebook - https://www.facebook.com/AkakiTsereteliStateUniversity/</p>

During the site visit, according presented documentation experts obtained sufficient assurance that university substantially complies with requirements of the substandard.
Evidences/indicators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Evaluation Report; • Site visit; • ATSU webpage; • Social pages: https://www.facebook.com/AkakiTsereteliStateUniversity/.
Recommendations: 7.3.1. The university should develop all necessary informational services in English for non-Georgian speaking students and staff.
Suggestions: N/A
Best Practices (if applicable): N/A
Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Fully complies with requirements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements
7.4 Financial Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allocation of financial resources described in the budget of HEI is economically achievable ○ Financial standing of HEI ensures performance of activities described in strategic and mid-term action plans ○ HEI financial resources are focused on effective implementation of core activities of the institution ○ HEI budget provides funding for scientific research and library functioning and development ○ HEI has an effective system of accountability, financial management and control
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements <p>ATSU current budget is 30 million GEL, including 4.5m GEL savings from previous year budgets. The budget is provided according treasury requirements. Budget according action plan is not provided, and budget connections to strategy plan is not shown. The university effectively disposes of the savings, it is placed on deposit and receives interest income. According of the budget allocation of financial resources described in the budget is economically achievable, sources of funding are diversified ensuring adequate and effective risk management, and funds available to HEI are adequate and sufficient to effectively perform activities described in strategic and action plans.</p> <p>HEI have started implementation the "Accounting Policy" which is developed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, for territorial Bodies and Budgetary Organizations operating in the sphere of its governance.</p> <p>The Financial reports, certify correctness, fairness and fullness of financial information.</p> <p>The university has financial resources provide for 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.</p> <p>The University budget allocates adequate financial means for funding activities of students, academic and scientific staff, post-doctorate students, such as participation in conferences, publishing articles in international journals, functioning and constant development of the library etc.</p> <p>The University managerial accountability, financial management and control system, is fragmented. HEI separately present components of the financial management process - accounting, budgeting, treasury, procurement, management, monitoring, are in place, but there is lack synchronization process, which is reflected on action plan implementation, reports, there is not shown KPI development. Which makes it difficult to evaluate the development of the organization according to the criteria of economical, efficient, and productive.</p>

<p>The university never did an individual external or Internal audit. In 2023 Public Audit office have done consolidate financial report audit of the ministry of education and science, in which was included Akaki Tsereteli State University.</p> <p>According that there are sufficient risks in direction of the lawful, transparent, economical, efficient, and productive use of resources. University should make external audit in the whole tree directions Financial, efficiency and compliance Audit, it should be ensured that auditor Should have valid IPSAS certificate.</p> <p>According These aggregate challenges experts obtained only Partially assurance about the universities lawful, transparent, economical, efficient, and productive use of resources for the achievement of HEI goals.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Evaluation Report; • Site visit; • ATSU webpage; • ATSU budget; • Dynamics of income and expenses; • Financial statements; • ATSU Strategy and action plans.
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>7.4.1. University should carry out an external audit in the whole three directions: Financial, Efficiency and Compliance. The auditor should have the valid IPSAS certificate.</p> <p>7.4.2. The University should increase transparency there are sufficient risks - in direction of the legal, economical, sustainable, efficient, and productive use of resources.</p> <p>7.4.3. University budget should be formed according to the action plan, be traceable and connected to the respective KPIs.</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>N/A</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>N/A</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements