



განათლების ხარისხის განვითარების ეროვნული ცენტრი
NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

**Higher Education Institution Authorisation Experts’
Final Report
LEPL Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University**

Expert Panel Members

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Members:

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Tinatin Gabrichidze, New Vision University, Georgia

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Authorisation Report Resume

General information on the educational institution

LEPL Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University (TESAU), is an autonomous state higher education institution that was awarded state university status in 1999. The University has a long history of continuous evolution as a higher education institution from Ikalto Academy (XII Century), Telavi Philosophical and Theological Institutions (1758-1782), Theological Seminary (1782-1801), Theological School (1818-1918), Teachers' Professional College (1924-1939), Teachers' Professional Institute (1939-1951) and Pedagogical Institute (1951-1999).

The University comprises four faculties, namely, Humanities, Agrarian Natural Sciences and Technologies, Educational sciences, and Social Sciences Business and Law.

The faculties offer a total of 25 educational programmes of which 12 are Bachelors, 7 are master's, one is a one-cycle integrated Bachelor/Master programme and 3 (1 jointly with Tbilisi State University) are Doctoral programmes. Two non-degree programmes, one in teacher training and one in Georgian language preparation are also offered. The teaching language in all programmes is Georgian. Currently, there are 1,457 active students enrolled at the University, while 973 students have suspended status. Of the active students, 1,186 are on bachelor's programmes, 63 on master's programmes 131 in the one cycle integrated programme, and 10 on Doctoral programmes. There are also 45 students enrolled on the 60-credit teacher training programme. The University employs 293 staff of which 82 are academic staff (79 affiliated) and 75 are invited.

The mission of Telavi State University, as stated in its website is to:

Introduce learning and teaching focused on modern teaching methods in all three levels of higher education and professional training and retraining, considering academic, cultural, social and economic factors in order to:

- *prepare specialists of various fields, who are highly qualified, morally perfect, competitive in the country's labor market, committed to the ideals of democracy and humanism*
- *take into account the specificity of the region to create, accumulate and share knowledge in the direction of agricultural sciences*
- *strengthen the direction of tourism for the development of the region and promote the development of the direction of education*
- *meet the educational requirements of society; to organize events promoting lifelong learning and internationalization of education.*

The Vision of the University as declared in its website is to:

- *become the most demanded institution for the population of the Region and ethnic minorities living in Kakheti*
- *become one of the innovative universities in the fields of Tourism, Education and Agriculture*
- *make a significant contribution to the economic, public and social development of Kakheti region and country.*

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

LEPL Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University (TESAU) submitted an extensive Self Evaluation Report (SER) to the NCEQE accompanied by supporting documentation for all the standards in Georgian and some in English language. The previous authorization for the Institution was in 2018; along with the documentation provided by TESAU, the report of the previous authorization was also made available to the panel. The panel would like to express its gratitude for receiving a very detailed report including identification of strengths and areas of improvements in each area, that was analytical and well informative. Another source of information was the University's website, in Georgian and English language versions, although limited information was available in the later.

The site visit was organized for three and a half consecutive days – Monday (half day) thru Thursday, June 24-27. Before the visit the Panel had an initial introductory meeting on Monday, June 10, via Zoom, during which work was allocated according to the expertise of the panel members, followed by a teleconference preparatory meeting on Wednesday June 19.

During the first day, the panel visited the two sites in Telavi and reviewed the facilities available to support the teaching and learning process (auditoriums, classrooms, computer rooms, library, spaces for students and academic staff) and also facilities for hosting the administrative services, First-aid rooms, sanitary facilities, etc. The panel had also the chance to visit dormitory facilities for students (which are not yet functional) and other spaces for student recreational activities. Following the visit to the facilities at the main campus, the panel visited the area of agricultural land where staff and students of the agrarian department use for practical training and research work in rare grape varieties, and finally a winery facility in proximity to Telavi, which cooperates with the university in offering internship and participates in joint research and development projects.

The next three days, the panel had the chance to meet and interview the University management team (Rector, Deputy rectors, Head of Administration), the SER team, members of the Academic council, members of the Representative Council, Faculty Deans, members of Faculty Councils, head and members of QA Department, the Heads of the Programmes, members of the Academic staff, members of the Invited staff, students from all study levels (BA, MA, PhD), Student Self-Government. The panel had also meetings with representatives of administrative units, specifically: Internationalization and public affairs office, Center for commercialization of scientific research and development of innovations, Legal Office, Legal Clinic, Centre of Caucasian Studies, Human resources management and student career development service, Study process management office, University grant office, Internal Audit Service, Center for commercialization of scientific research and development of innovations, Legal Office, Legal Clinic, Centre of Caucasian Studies, Human resources management and Student career development service, Study process management office, University grant office, Internal Audit Service, Professional Education Centre, Centre of professional development and innovative teaching, Centre of social researches, Center of academic conscientiousness and students' consulting, Library, Office of information Technologies, Chancellery, Culture coordinator, Sports' coordinator. Meetings with graduates, employer representatives and review of MA and PhD theses were also included in the agenda.

Requests for additional documents and evidence during the visit were handled professionally and efficiently.

At the end of the fourth day the panel presented the key findings to the administration and personnel of the institution.

The panel would like to express sincere thanks for the cooperation of all participants and their participation in fruitful discussions during the visit.

Response to argumentative position of LEPL Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University

On September 3, 2024, the panel received the argumentative position document, which included the remarks of TESAU on the recommendations made by the panel.

The panel, after examining the arguments of TESAU, notes the following:

- i. Compliance of HEIs to the authorization standards is examined regarding the University's capacity of being fully prepared and ready to start the operation on the day of the evaluation, therefore any gaps that were identified during the TESAU authorization process (e.g. indication of willingness to implement or starting stages of action with no evidence of results yet) are stated as recommendations that the university should continue to address.
- ii. Many of the argumentative positions are well or partially accepted by the University. When factual mistakes are identified like in the case of 2.1.6, the recommendation was revised. In many cases the University states that changes have already been made or are in progress or have been planned. Although, this is appreciated by the panel, the authorization report reflects the situation at the time

of the visit; thus, recommendations are based on the documentation that was provided before and during the visit, vis-à-vis **evidence derived during the interviews** and the **physical visit at the facilities**. In certain cases additional clarifications are provided in the corresponding narrative part (Indicatively 1.2.1, 2.1.1 and 2.1.7. In other cases facts mentioned in the narrative parts that support the recommendations are ignored (indicatively 1.2.2)

- iii. The panel cannot take into consideration the additional documentation provided by the HEI along with its argumentative position, as this evidence is received after the submission of the draft authorization report, (e.g., SWOT analysis) especially when reference to those were made during the visit. Furthermore, where the institution claims that they are doing something according to the law (implicitly implying rejection of the recommendation), the rationale of the recommendations is that looking for the enhancement of the practice is still good even if there is compliance with law, as this is what the quality culture is about. In that sense, the panel would like to point out, that all recommendations express the willingness of the ET to support the University's efforts to achieve its ambitious strategic goals in the long term.

Overview of the HEI's compliance with standards

The HEI is:

- **Substantially compliant** with the first standard: ***Mission and strategic development of HEI***

TESAU has a publicly stated clear mission, which reflects the priorities and the vision of the University and expresses its aspirations in being a key agent in the development of the region. The University's mission is welcomed by its academic community (academic staff, students and alumni) and by the employers - most of whom are graduates of the University-, engage in provide opportunities for practical trainings and internships to TESAU students and employment opportunities to graduates and contribute in the development of the TESAU academic programs in their field. Overall, the University enjoys the respect of the local community which considers that TESAU provides valuable services and value to the region. The University will certainly have more opportunities for development in the future in expanding its education and professional trainings portfolio, enhancing its international profile, strengthening its research capacity, and expanding its services to the enterprises in Kakheti region. To pursue its mission the university has presented a strategic plan for its development with main goal to continue improving. Because of lacking a formal SWOT analysis, although it is stipulated by its own regulations, actions are presented somehow fragmented with an operational rather than strategic orientation for the development of the HEI. Such an analysis that reflects the strengths and the opportunities should be public and be part of the main document that portrays the strategy of the University not only internally within the academic community but to outside community, and potential local and international partners in research and development activities. Specific actions that are presented in the Action plan must be checked to include a budget estimate, measurable indicators and consistency between Action plan, Target indicators and University budget.

- **Substantially compliant** with the second standard: ***Organizational Structure and Management of HEI***

TESAU's overall organizational structure consists of faculties and administrative departments responsible for the main tasks of education and research. The functions and responsibilities assigned to the structural units are provided in the relevant provisions, which aim to ensure the effective implementation of the activities determined by the strategic development plan of the university and overall, they do. Several areas for improvement within the structure of the university need to be addressed to ensure alignment with the university's strategic goal on improving the management system and HR resources. Overlaps among different units and reallocation of responsibilities, providing one-point service for students, streamlining the functions of certain entities and elimination of ambiguities can increase the efficiency of the services.

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

TESAU clearly takes quality assurance seriously. This is demonstrated by its range of dedicated Quality Assurance services, both at university and faculty level, by the QA processes and mechanisms in place and by its priority position in planning documents, but in no case, QA should be taken as responsible for the operations that other units perform. The university has an internal system of quality assurance, which considers the cycle of "Plan-Implement-Check-Develop", and QA Service is responsible to ensure that administration units follow the complete cycle and provide examples of good practice so that a Quality culture is promoted within the academic community.

The HEI declares its adherence to the principles of academic freedom. The university community is familiar with and shares the principles of academic freedom.

- **Substantially compliant with the third standard: *Educational Programmes***

Tesau has established procedures encompassing planning, designing, implementing, developing, and annulling to ensure its educational programs align with legislation and university regulations. Market research during the design and development phases ensures that new programs meet current labor market needs, but they should be performed periodically not only during accreditation periods. Program benchmarking is also a good practice currently performed in just one of the BA programs. Implementation staff, administration, potential employers, and other key stakeholders are engaged early –mostly informally- in the design and assessment phases in a way that ensure the program's relevance and effectiveness. Programs are implemented according to the established legal and institutional guidelines adhering to European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System guidelines. Learning outcomes of the programmes are in line with the level of higher education and qualification to be granted; most of are currently using the current National Qualifications Framework (three learning outcomes), while some programmes still define six learning outcomes, and the institution has a deadline to bring the programmes in compliance. All programs at TESAU are accredited and follow the timeline and requirements of the external quality assurance. Regulations for individual learning plan exist but should be reviewed to consider different individual needs of students, beyond accommodation of external or internal student mobilities. Teaching methods, even though mostly standardized, include active, student-centered methods. Students wish to have more opportunities to engage in active learning, group work and other activities promoting students' engagement and enhanced student-centered learning environment, as apparently the share of lecturing and theoretical knowledge transmission is still high. Though some students highlighted the need for more presentations and group work in subjects where they are particularly relevant. It would be beneficial to customize the syllabi and assessment methods to align with the unique requirements of each course.

Achievement of Learning Outcome is effectively evaluated by assessment of several evaluation components like mid-term and final exam, tests, cases, essays, preparing group/individual tasks etc. The TESAU "Rule of Planning, Implementation and Evaluation of the Scientific-Research Component" describes the system of evaluation of the scientific-research component of Master's Thesis and regulations for Doctoral Dissertation, although prerequisites for dissertation (e.g. publications in scientific journals) should be aligned.

- **Substantially compliant with the fourth standard: *Staff of the HEI***

Telavi State University has a personnel management policy founded on principles of fairness, supremacy of university interests and merit-based approaches, which is accompanied by a management plan. University's priority is to have highly qualified academic and administrative staff. Academic staff is selected through competition, while most Invited and Administrative staff by a selection process. Employment contracts include a detailed description of the work to be performed and provide for the rights and duties of the employer and the employee. Several flaws were noted in the presented sample of labor contracts, concerning compatibility with the labor legislation of Georgia.

University policy documents and interviews revealed that TESAU supports professional development of staff through personnel qualification and retraining procedures that are carried out periodically. Staff is entitled to acquire information about various professional activities aimed at their professional development with their own resources, which are financially supported by the university. This support is constantly growing. However, determination of needs and requirements for individual development is not

conducted. The center of professional development and innovative teaching and the service of human resources (HR) management and student career planning are functioning in the university, but during the last years, only one person was employed in the HR service; in the last period one specialist was added. As a result, several functions defined by the statute are not performed as it is impossible to be carried out by just one person. Necessity of increasing activities for professional development of the academic and invited staff in the area of teaching and learning approaches is recognized by the University.

Internationalization of the University's activities, increase in the number of exchange projects, acceptance of English-speaking students, creation of English-language courses for exchange students, etc. are established, but still in limited capacity. The declared desire of the university to strengthen the internationalization of research and teaching is welcomed, though, due to the problems of language competence of the academic and support staff, this goal is very difficult to be achieved under present conditions. It is a disappointment that in the qualification requirements of the staff, only few of their positions (e.g. Internationalization Service) require knowledge of the English language. The university is obliged to implement policies and tactics for increasing the foreign language competence of the staff for achieving its goals in internationalization.

The number and workload of the academic staff is sufficient to ensure that teaching and research processes are effectively supported. The university has submitted an order on the maximum amount of annual workload of academic staff, teachers and specialists. A scientific methodological workload scheme of visiting professors and lecturers, determines the criteria of their workload, more specifically, the volume of annual academic work and hourly standards related to the educational process. In the labor contract and workload distribution schemes, there is no separation of the work hours specified for administrative and academic activities. However, during the interview, the staff could not distinguish what kind of activities would be included in their scientific activity. The university administration is reviewing and evaluating annual academic performance of academic staff, teachers and specialists to the results of the workload of scientific activity. It should be noted that many professors-instructors work in Tbilisi and come to Telavi for lecture hours, therefore, a large part of the lectures, including the practical component (e.g. legal clinic on the law program) are held on Saturdays, which is inconvenient for students.

- **Substantially compliant with the fifth standard: *Students and Their Support Services***

HEI has developed appropriate 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. All information is accessible to interested parties. Information about academic assessments and other matters are accessible to students through the electronic education management system. Some information on HEI's website need to be updated or added. Full information about the activities of certain services is not added, limited information is available in English. A proactive position towards protecting students' rights was evident. HEI has an ethics committee and student self-government has a department for protecting students' rights. The procedures for signing student contracts and reviewing complaints are properly described in the regulations. The student contract includes rights and obligations clearly and reflects the commitment to law enforcement. That is still not well known to students, since students consider applying directly to the dean or rector as a mechanism for protecting their rights. HEI demonstrates a strong commitment to providing comprehensive support and consultations for students. Student consulting services support in order to plan the educational process and improve academic performance.

A career support service that exists in the same administrative unit with HR services should be empowered since it is currently understaffed. Students have opportunities for participation various, scientific, academic, sports and cultural activities. Close collaboration of TESAU with local organizations that provides students with opportunities for developing practical skills should be expanded. HEI ensures students' awareness and involvement in various university-level, local, and international projects and events, and supports student initiatives. However, it should be noted that in the last 3 years, the number of students participating in exchange programs has not increased significantly. Students expressed their interest in

having more English-speaking lecturers/trainers/speakers so that they can have more English-speaking practice.

Student Self-government, which is managed in accordance with the Student Self-government Regulations. Student Self-government ensures the involvement of students in university management and other events. Students are represented in the faculty and representative councils.

Initiatives such as psychological support and orientation weeks contribute to creating an inclusive environment. Financial mechanisms to support low SES students are available through the budget of the University and donor organizations. The University is trying to attract more funds in that direction. Transportation conditions of students to HEI have been improved as a result of taking certain steps, but it still remains a problem.

- **Partially compliant with the sixth standard: *Research, development and/or other creative work***

The institution has a significant scientific, research and creative activity within the specificity of its field, The HEI is engaged in a wide array of research and creative activities mainly in its primary research areas, agriculture, tourism, and education, aligned with its type and the specific fields of study it offers and reflecting its mission and strategic plan. Research projects focus on agriculture, tourism, and education methodologies and supported by specialized centers and laboratories.

From 2018 to 2023, since the previous authorization, the institution has undertaken several research projects funded both internally and externally. A significant increase in the number of research articles published by the university's academic staff is also noted recently – some in high-ranking, internationally indexed journals. Research outcomes are partially integrated into the teaching curriculum, primarily in PhD programs.

Research projects were funded by UNICEF, the Bank of Georgia, the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation and the European Commission. Joint research includes institutions like the University of Cluj Napoca (Romania) and Požega Polytechnic University (Croatia) for programs in veterinary medicine and viticulture.

Each faculty has own Regulatory Rules for Evaluating and Defending Doctoral procedures for dissertation assessment and defense are publicly available. Doctoral supervisors are accountable for the quality, consistency, and effective implementation of the research components, they can supervise up to 3 students, and 40 hours per thesis are allocated annually

TESAU supports research activities and has improved different support mechanisms in the reporting period. Financial support of the research activities has increased, as from the budget of 35 000 GEL in 2018, the budget for research activities is equal to total of 180 000 GEL. Additional support for staff in terms of preparing research grant proposals, through specially designated office, is also provided; two proposals were submitted for funding in HORIZON. However, there are areas for improvement in terms of staff's individual support; staff participation in international conferences, is still low and needs further support. Attention is paid to promote the participation of young scientists, MA and PhD students. in research activities. Internationalization of doctoral education still is a challenge for TESAU. Doctoral students do not have enough opportunities for international exposure – international co-supervisor, international opponent, international conferences, etc.

TESAU has developed a system for evaluating and analyzing quality of research activities that includes minimum requirements for staff and continues work to improve the methodology. Evaluation of individual research activities for staff should be connected to further support for development - current training are more ad-hoc and not specialized to the needs of the staff. The report of the results of the evaluation of the scientific-research activities should become publicly available.

- **Substantially compliant with the seventh standard: *Material, information, and financial resources***

Telavi State University has a significant amount of land and building resources, sufficient considering the number of students at the university. In the recent year the university refurbished some parts of the university building, while construction works of a new campus are still undergoing. Current facilities are well taken care of, clean, and satisfy hygiene and safety requirements. Still, buildings are far from modern, lacking essential infrastructure such as dedicated rooms for PhD students, private offices for academic staff, updated classrooms with advanced technological support to support modern teaching methods, research labs, and collaborative spaces that are necessary to fully achieve its goals stated in its Mission

Statement. The agricultural land owned by TESAU, for the program of the Viticulture-Enology program must be upgraded with basic amenities like restrooms and shelters, necessary for students who spend long hours in the vineyards.

The library is located in a separate, two-story building within the TESAU campus, designed to support educational and research activities of the university and includes spaces library lobby, workspaces properly equipped, assembly hall with 150 seats, spaces for group work, meetings, events, a large reading hall, designated workspaces for library staff and isolated rooms designed for both individual and teamwork. Adaptation of the facilities to allow easy access to persons with special needs to services located to the 2nd floor, who are currently serviced by the library staff meeting them at ground level is required. The library's integrated library system (EVERGREEN) is used to manage its catalogue that includes printed and electronic resources, is accessible online and through the university's internal system, ensuring easy access for students and staff. The library subscribes to various databases, including EBSCO Food Science Source and Hospitality & Tourism Complete, HEINONLINE law database, ScienceDirect, and Elsevier's ScienceDirect® and Scopus®; Cambridge Journals Online; SAGE Journals; Oxford e-books, thanks to its membership in the EIFL consortium facilitating extensive access of TESAU's academic community to the most recent worldwide research and resources. The library staff demonstrated proper competence in managing the library, the resources, and providing assistance by using international library databases.

Information technology services are up to date and in place supporting the successful implementation of teaching and administrative processes and mechanisms for their constant improvement exist. Free Wi-Fi access is available to staff and students. The electronic teaching and learning subsystem and the library's electronic catalogue and services is fully functional; the electronic case management system is in operation. The official webpage of TESAU serves communication and information functions, contains complete information regarding its strategy, structure, info for students, potential students, and the public, promotes research and international activities of the University, and lists employment opportunities – all of that mainly in Georgian. A summary content is available in English, which, given that internationalization is a key strategic goal of the University, it should undergo a major overhaul.

The main financial plan of the institution is a consolidated budget which is composed of the two parts income and expenditure. Most of revenues come for self-paid student tuition fees (almost 1/3 of total fees), and through state-program funding grants and support for socially vulnerable students (ranging from 86.4% of the income in 2018 to 73.9% in 2024). The University is active in pursuing additional funds from various foundations and organizations mainly for funding student scholarships, which have increased from 150 GEL to 300 GEL per month. Funds from research and development grants show a significant increase from 2021 onwards, being almost 3 times larger in 2024 than the corresponding amounts in 2018 and currently account for a 13% of total income. Almost half of the budget is allocated to salaries and remuneration for academic, administrative, invited staff and other persons employed under labour contracts. TESAU supports research activities and has improved different support mechanisms in the reporting period. Financial support of the research activities has increased, as from the budget of 35 000 GEL in 2018, the budget for research activities is equal to total of 180 000 GEL, including 125 000 GEL for research projects, 16 000 GEL for research activities and 45 000 GEL for additional research activities. Through funding obtained via international projects, TeSeU promotes the mobility of employees and students to foreign universities, with the number of participants increasing annually.

The present process of budgeting conforms to accounting standards for state enterprises. But lack managerial perspective. It is not clear who prioritises the expenditures in the budget and what data decision makers consider when planning the budget and strategy of the institution. For example, enhancing research activities and internationalization and improving academic staff skills in English language and research proposal writing is essential according to the strategic plan, yet no explicit budget lines for research laboratory equipment exist. Sub-budget for Faculties, neither for Research & Development projects exist. Furthermore, no budgeting forecast for the 3-year action plan is developed; the main reason being that as a state university is obliged to present a forecast for the next year only at the end of July. Therefore, the managerial aspects that enable prioritization of expenses, monitoring of the action plan, and effective management of resources within the structure of the University are not present.

Summary of Recommendations

1.2.1 Perform a formal SWOT analysis with the engagement of employer and alumni representatives to identify opportunities that could be the basis of defining major strategic goals and preparing a contingency plan.

1.2.2 Ensure continuity and maintain institutional memory in the process of monitoring the performance of Strategic and Action plans. Consider assigning the coordination of the monitoring process to an administrative unit.

1.2.3 Ensure that all actions in the Action plan include a budget estimate, measurable indicators and consistency between Action plan, Target indicators and University budget.

2.1.1 It is recommended that human capital development be established as a core function for HR department, serving purposes, both in management and support at the university level as well as for faculties.

2.1.2 Ensure that all functions are executed efficiently without overlaps between different administrative units. Adjust the mandate of the Internal Audit Department to focus on financial oversight, efficiency improvements, and compliance with regulations without overlapping its functions with functions of faculties and their academic autonomy; this includes limiting their role in monitoring academic activities like lectures and seminars to avoid conflicts with faculty responsibilities, and enhancing its role in increasing the effectiveness of management, by providing continuous, independent oversight of financial controls and risk management.

2.1.3 Establish mechanisms for regular reviews of the Internal Audit Department's activities by an independent body or committee to ensure transparency and accountability. This oversight can include periodic evaluations of the department's impact on achieving university goals and adherence to ethical standards.

2.1.4 Increase the staffing levels for HR department and the career services to align their work with the university's strategic priorities and ensure that these vital services are delivered efficiently and effectively.

2.1.5 Define qualification requirements for the heads of structural units, including relevant educational backgrounds, professional experience, and skills. These criteria should be publicly available and used in the appointment process. Establish a formalized transparent process for appointing heads of departments based on merit and qualifications; This process should involve a review committee that evaluates candidates against the defined criteria

2.1.6 To enhance the Business Continuity Plan of the university, it is recommended develop succession planning, cross-training, and rapid onboarding procedures to ensure personnel continuity and maintain service quality during disruptions.

2.1.7 To strengthen the university's internationalization policy faculties should be empowered in taking initiative to engage in international projects. Establishing clear incentives and collaboration mechanisms will encourage faculty participation in international initiatives, creating a more integrated approach to internationalization. Implementing these changes will enhance the effectiveness of the policy and better align it with the internationalization goals of the university.

2.2.1. It is recommended to enhance a rule of evaluation of scientific-research activity, which considers the quantitative and qualitative evaluation criteria.

2.2.2. Ensure that the PDCA cycle is fully executed by the proper units under the guidance and monitoring of QA services.

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

3.1.1 Conduct a comprehensive analysis of study resource needs, regularly. This process should involve updating educational materials, enhancing staff qualifications, and integrating international best practices.

3.1.2 Enhance the integration of international resources and increasing external stakeholder involvement more formally in the program development process to further improve the quality and relevance of educational offerings.

3.2.1 Revise the rule for developing individual learning plans for students and ensure it considers various needs of students.

- 3.2.2 Ensure that teaching and learning methods applied within the educational programmes are student-centered, promoting student engagement and active learning.
- 3.2.3 Increase the practical component in the BA and MA programs offering more opportunities to students to get experiences in practice locally and internationally. Consider inviting professionals from the regional private and public sector as well as international experts in the field to convey industry experience in the classroom and establish relations with academia.
- 4.1.1 It is recommended that the employment contracts of the University be fully compliant with the Labor Law of Georgia; this implies both material and formal conformity. That includes revising the contracts already signed by the university and those to be signed in the future. In accordance with the legislation, to fully describe the labor and service contracts, their content and conditions. In view of the amendments made to the Labor Code of Georgia in 2020 and the increased guarantees to the employee, it is necessary to conclude new labor contracts with the existing staff.
- 4.1.2 It is recommended that in the contract, the rights and duties of the employees, the job description, the procedure for overtime work, the procedure and conditions for taking leave, the grounds and procedure for terminating the employment contract should be clearly written and distinguished. Accordingly, it is recommended to accurately and comprehensively develop the regulations and policy documents of university services, along with a mechanism to ensure that the function-duties mentioned in the regulations are performed by the employed personnel.
- 4.1.3 Introduce the practice of recruiting invited academic staff through an open competition to access a larger pool of candidates.
- 4.1.4 To identify, plan and implement the need for the professional development of staff by the Professional Development Center on research of employers' (both academic, administrative and support staff) individual needs. Increase the frequency and number of activities planned.
- 4.1.5 It is necessary to strengthen the foreign language competence of the academic staff of the university and consider the issue of language competence in the selection process of employees (considering the internationalization goals of the institution).
- 4.1.6 Carry out continuous training and/or retraining of academic staff in modern teaching methods and implementation of these methods, in order to strengthen practical skills, including technical skills
- 4.2.1 It is recommended to strengthen staff reporting mechanisms in accordance with the workload.
- 4.2.2 It is necessary, in case of applying disciplinary measures, that this should be provided in detail in the internal regulations of the university.
- 4.2.3 It is recommended that staff is provided with timely and comprehensive information about the distribution of the load and the results of the works provided by the load scheme.
- 4.2.4 Staff workload hours for educational programs will be distributed evenly, within the weekly schedule, so that students have maximum access to the learning process without interruption.
- 5.1.1 HEI must ensure raising the level of awareness for students about various mechanisms of protection of their rights.
- 5.2.1 HEI must ensure further increase and diversity of opportunities for student involvement in international activities, including encourage projects that will help improve students' English language competence.
- 6.1.1. Further advance research capabilities, increase the productivity of research publications, and integrate research outcomes into the educational process. This involves enhancing international collaborations, securing additional funding for research projects, and implementing new standards for doctoral programs and research publications.
- 6.1.2. Ensure high-quality doctoral research and publication by mandating that all PhD candidates publish scientific papers in English in high-ranking international journals with an ISSN code and an international editorial council (or scientific committee) as a prerequisite for defending their PhD thesis.
- 6.1.3 Elaborate a mechanism to encourage Doctoral students evaluate their supervisors.
- 6.2.1 Increase the level of involvement of international professors in the process of supervising/co-supervising doctoral students.
- 6.2.2 Ensure admission of doctoral students with sufficient level of English to conduct international scientific activities to ensure achievement of the learning outcomes and support internationalization of the doctoral education – English-language publications, participation in international (English-language

conferences and overall communication with the scientific community on English. Ideally, the English language competency level can be increased to C1 by the end of their doctoral studies, or at least, the requirement of B2 at entrance should be monitored and safeguarded more closely.

6.2.3 Further support academic staff to increase their level of English language proficiency, as without sufficient number of academics with relevant level of English, internationalization of research activities will remain a challenge. Intensify efforts to attract young researchers that could work in collaboration with the academic/scientific staff.

6.2.4 Increase international opportunities available for PhD students, or academic staff at TESAU.

6.2.5 Ensure staff is well informed on the research strategy of TESAU and how one's activities can contribute to the priorities, like internationalization or commercialization. Elaborate an integrated plan (scientific, business, legal, staff awareness, etc.) on how to achieve these strategic priorities.

6.3.1 The reaction mechanisms on the staff not meeting the minimum requirements set by the rule for evaluating research mechanisms should start with the staff development activities, identifying the individual development needs/plan for the staff. This will promote development-oriented approach towards evaluation of research activities and will lead to the development of the quality of research activities.

6.3.2 It is recommended to further develop the mechanism for evaluating quality of research activities and research productivity of the university. It should provide more comprehensive, in-depth analysis, mapping the areas for development and relevant recommendations, not only the information on staff meeting or failing to meet the minimum requirements. The analysis should also be linked with the research strategy of the institution.

6.3.3 More explicit communication with staff in terms of research activities' evaluation is necessary, to ensure that first of all, staff are well aware of the existing mechanism and its follow-up procedures and on the other hand, how their activities are promoting research activities and strategy of the institution and how they can be further developed.

6.3.4 Ensure publicity of information on implemented research activities.

7.1.1 Invest in basic infrastructure around the vineyards, including restrooms, shelters, and storage facilities. This will improve the learning environment for students in this program.

7.1.2 Update classrooms and other teaching spaces with modern technology and equipment specific to each program's needs. For example, create simulation labs for Business Administration and model classrooms for Teacher Training.

7.1.3 Allocate dedicated rooms for PhD students and private offices for academic staff. This will enhance research productivity and provide a conducive environment for academic work.

7.1.4 Specify the number of computers and other technological upgrades planned during the next strategic development cycle, along with associated costs. Additionally, include plans for development of modern outdoor/indoor recreational spaces and innovative teaching areas to foster a collaborative and engaging learning environment. This includes creating areas for group work, and informal learning spaces.

7.1.5 Upgrade restrooms to be accessible, with wide doorways, grab bars, and sufficient space for maneuvering wheelchairs. Provide single-occupancy restrooms for privacy and ease of use.

7.1.6 Develop adapted sports programs and ensure that student clubs, organizations, and campus events are inclusive and held in accessible locations, with accommodations such as sign language interpreters and captioning as needed.

7.2.1 Upgrade the library facilities to be easily accessible by persons with special needs.

7.2.2 Intensify efforts to enrich the library resources especially in areas that relate to the priorities of the University.

7.3.1 It is recommended that the TESAU website be kept up to date and information is complete (according to narrative part of this substandard and also 3.3 and 5.1) and accessible to English language speakers as well, in view of TESAU's international ambitions

7.4.1 Develop a managerial oriented budget that provides allocation of funds to faculties related to corresponding development plans, and separate sub-budgets for major Research & Development projects.

7.4.2 Develop 3-year rolling budget forecasts that reflect the development of the TESAU according to Strategic action plan.

7.4.3 Ensure allocation of more funds to activities related to increasing internationalization, staff development, strengthening the cooperation with employers and alumni.

7.4.4 Provide funds for the adaption of the library space as proposed in 7.2.

Summary of Suggestions

- Consider institutionalizing the cooperation with local professionals, forming a body of "Professional Advisory Committee", to the founders and top administration bodies of the HEI.
- AI is already playing a substantial role in university. Therefore, the expert panel suggestion is to reflect in the university regulation the general regulations on use of AI.
- Improve the frequency and formality of the communication with the external stakeholders, mainly employers and employed graduates in their corresponding field.
- Enhance the integration of international resources and increase frequency and formality of external stakeholder involvement in the program development process to further improve the quality and relevance of educational offerings.
- Consider Benchmarking of the programs against programs offered in the same scientific areas, internationally.
- Enrich the English language webpages to include the descriptions of the programmes in English language, as a basic prerequisite for achieving one of the University's stated strategic goal of being more active internationally. Provide an English language catalogue of offered programs.
- Revise the instrument for graduate survey, so that it provides information on academic development of graduates, as well as their career development.
- Include appeal's procedure in program and subject descriptors.
- Promote the formation of thematic clubs for students.
- Offer more financial support mechanisms to students.
- Advocate with state officials to provide students with access to transportation from the regions.
- Elaborate an efficient mechanism for evaluation PhD theses by international reviewers.
- Consider maintaining a daily data backup on a rolling weekly basis
- Consider the allocation of budget at faculty level

Summary of the Best Practices

- The university's participation in many international research and capacity building projects in recent years, and good quality of impact of projects for management processes could be considered as an example of Best Practices.
- The recently established Innovation Lab -a structural unit aiming to support the university staff and students in the development and commercialization of innovative business ideas through technical consultation, legal guidance, and business model creation.

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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Educational Programmes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.1	Design and development of educational programmes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.2	Structure and content of educational programmes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Research, development and/or other creative work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.1	Research activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.2	Research support and internationalisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.3	Evaluation of research activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signature of expert panel members

1. Pandelis Ipsilandis (Chair)



2. Lali Giorgidze (Member)



3. David Makhviladze Name (Member)

4. Tinatin Gabrichidze (Member)

5. Zhuzha Khachapuridze (Member)

6. Ekaterine Bakaradze (Member)

7. Nino Lipartia (Member)

8. Nino Javakhishvili (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

The University Mission Statement was formed through deliberations with the academic community and contributions from the local community in which Telavi State University (TESAU) operates. Evidence from employers and graduates shows that contributions of employers and alumni were mostly through informal meetings and discussions, since the University has closed ties with employers in the region. According to its mission, the University aims in *"introducing learning and teaching focused on modern teaching methods in all three levels of higher education and professional training and retraining, taking into account academic, cultural, social and economic factors to prepare specialists of various fields, who are highly qualified, morally perfect, competitive in the country's labor market, committed to the ideals of democracy and humanism; to take into account the specificity of the region to create, accumulate and share knowledge in the direction of agricultural sciences; to strengthen the direction of tourism for the development of the region and promote the development of the direction of education; to meet the educational requirements of society; to organize events promoting lifelong learning and internationalization of education"*. It is evident that the mission of the University has a strong emphasis at the University's role in regional development as it focuses on scientific fields that relate to the economic and social development of the regional area of Kakheti, where TESAU is located.

Contribution to the development of society is achieved through the provision of high-quality university-level and vocational education and lifelong learning, as well as accumulation and sharing knowledge, specifically in areas that are important for the economic development of the region but also in providing educators for the youth in the region. One of the main axes of the strategic plan aims in strengthening internationalization, which shows remarkable increase in relative active in the last years.

In parallel with its academic perspective, the mission of TESAU focuses on the development priorities of Kakheti region and especially in supporting integration of ethnic minorities into the Georgian society. The operation of a teacher's training program and a program in Georgian language preparation confirm the alignment with those aspects of its mission. As explained in the next session, most opportunities do exist for TESAU to expand in Lifelong Learning in the region of Kakheti.

Overall, the University aims in raising high-minded generations inspired by democratic and humane values that lead to the continuity of the development of language, culture and intellect.

The vision statement of the University which is publicly available through the University's website: *"By 2031, to become the most innovative and sought-after higher educational institution in the region for the population and ethnic minorities living in Kakheti; to become one of the innovative universities in the direction of agriculture, economy, education; to make a significant contribution to the Kakheti region and in the economic, public and social development of the country"* expresses the aspirations of the University to becoming an agent of reforms, fostering development in the Kakheti region and occupy an important place in the Georgian education area

Interviews with the Rector, the Academic council, Deans of the Faculties as well as employers, and students and graduates revealed the commitment of the university to accomplishing its mission. Interviewed employers representing organizations in the fields of priority for TESAU -Agriculture, Tourism, Education- emphasized the importance of the presence of the University in the region of Kakheti and its contribution in providing skilled graduates and also cooperating with local enterprises and organizations in sharing and dissemination of knowledge, referring to specific cooperation of

TESAU with wineries, hotels and teachers in local schools the great majority of whom (in certain cases over 90%) are graduates of the University. Accordingly, graduates and students emphasized the role of the University in providing opportunities to locals, who otherwise couldn't have access to HEIs located elsewhere because social and financial conditions wouldn't allow them. Most of the interviewed graduates are now employed in their field of work at the region.

Although the HEI, employs many professional as academic and invited staff and has direct involvement in the professional field, it would still be beneficial for the University to consider institutionalizing the cooperation with local employers, and municipality organizations forming a body of "professional advisory committee", according to international standards. Besides enabling a more holistic approach in further development, this will boost the image and the significance of the University for the region and help in attainment of additional support from public authorities regarding its future development. Overall, the mission and vision of the University fully determine its characteristics, in accordance with its role as a regional university and its main directions of activity.

Evidences/indicators

- *Mission and Strategic Plan of TESAU*
- *Self-Evaluation Report*
- *Interviews with the Academic Council, Academic and Scientific Staff, Students, Alumni, and Employers*

Recommendations:

Suggestions:

- Consider institutionalizing the cooperation with local professionals, forming a body of "Professional Advisory Committee", to the founders and top administration bodies of the HEI.

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

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

1.2 Strategic Development

- 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

A new 7-years strategic plan (2025-2031) with a great degree of similarity to the previous one (2018-2024), that is replacing, was presented. The 2025-2031 includes the same 9 Strategic goals, as the previous strategic plan, plus strategic goal 10: Contribution to the Development of Society.

The main priorities in the development strategy of the University are:

- i. Promoting Students' Learning, Student Life, Employment and Career Advancement
- ii. Improvement and Development of Higher Educational Programmes in accordance with the Labor Market Demands and Development of New Programmes
- iii. Supporting Research Activities
- iv. Improvement of University Management System and Human Resources
- v. Improvement of Quality Assurance Mechanisms
- vi. Promotion of Internationalization of the University
- vii. Ensuring Financial Sustainability
- viii. Improvement of Educational Infrastructure and the Material Base
- ix. Renewal of Library Resources
- x. Contribution to the Development of Society

Overall, the strategic goals and actions, as presented, are aligned to the mission of the University.

Within this framework, a detailed Action Plan has been established where specific activities are connected to an implementation schedule, short term (3 years: 2025-2027) or longer term (7 years: 2025-2031). The action plan follows a hierarchical structure based on the identified Strategic Goals (10), which are analysed into strategic aims and finally into actions (82). Faculties' strategies, along with short- and long-term strategic actions regarding education, research and long life / vocational learning are also included in the strategic action plan. Measuring indicators, responsibility of implementation and monitoring mechanisms are defined for each specific action for the short-term plan. Overall, the strategic plan and action plan are fully aligned with the mission and the goals of the University and focus on improvements in vital areas of the university activities such as teaching and learning, research, long-life learning, contribution to the development of society and internationalization.

It is noted that many of the actions included in the strategic goals are also the same as the ones in the previous plan. Of course, development of the University happens in continuum, therefore continuation of some actions is expected and the main theme in strategic goals is "improvement". This approach however shifts attention from the achievement of major development goals to a list of improvements in operations that have to be carried out; indicatively: *"Student and staff survey and analysis"*, *"attract competitive and career development-oriented staff"*, *"modify the institutional strategy of research development periodically"*, *"modernize current educational programmes taking into consideration the modern standards"*, *"conduct student and graduate employment research, to create database"*, *"development of the portal"*, etc. On the other hand, major strategic oriented actions, very significant for the development of TESAU, although they were thought of by the administration, as it was evidenced during the site visit, such as: support of innovative startups, commercialization of research results, expansion of Lifelong learning, etc. are hidden in detail instead of being promoted to major strategic goals.

During the interview with employers, the panel had a fruitful discussion regarding the role of the university in the region, during which opportunities for the university to provide commercialized services to local enterprises were identified. Besides commercialization of research results, for which there is already interest from international enterprises, other areas such as specific professional trainings for employees, scientific laboratory analysis (e.g., soil, wine) for which university is the only place in the region with such capacity (scientific equipment and expertise), tourism market research, etc. could be services that TESAU can provide to the public on a fee-based basis.

Interviews with administration and academic staff established evidence of the contribution of the University to the development of society at large and Kacheti region specifically. This is done in a variety of ways including its academic operations as offering of education and training opportunities to population - specifically through the provision of qualified teachers to schools in the region, the sharing of research results and knowledge / recommendations with the farmers in the field of viticulture, as well as activities which directly and indirectly result in development of regional tourism economy but also social activities such as the operation of the University's Legal Clinic that provides free services to the public, and students involvement in various social actions like charity concerts to help vulnerable families, participation in City Council meetings and participating, along with teaching staff in the process of solving problems of interest to society.

According to *"The Rule of Strategic Planning"* of TESAU, *"The new plans/challenges/goals of the university should be set based on the SWOT analysis/assessment of the previous strategic development plan"*. However, no evidence of a SWOT analysis for the current plan exists, as confirmed during the visit when this was mentioned to administration and repeated at the presentation of summary results, thus no new plans / challenges / major goals are defined, and most elements in the strategic development plan follow those of the last period's plan. As a consequence, proposed actions in certain cases, resemble conventional operations which should have been already taking place (e.g., *Student and staff survey and analysis*), in other cases they refer to expected outcomes not specific actions (e.g., *improve internal and external communication through the university website, send students by mobility to international exchange projects*- this is the result of other actions: agreements, organization of mobility, enhancing language skills, etc.), or being vague and not specifically addressing challenges/problems to be tackled (e.g., *develop modern(?) quality assurance mechanisms* – without indicating what exactly is planned, etc).

The need of drawing a formal SWOT analysis with the involvement of faculties, representatives of employers, alumni is obvious. SWOT analysis will be the basis on which a strategic plan addressing the major challenges and the realization of TESAU's vision is formed.

Nevertheless, for every action in the proposed plan, responsibilities are defined clearly, along with criteria and indicators which in most cases are defined in a realistic and meaningful way, although certain cases do need attention so that corresponding indicators are set in a way that they are measurable and quantifiable (indicative example of difficult to measure or difficult to define metrics are: *Flexible e-mail services, Number of offered innovative(?) ideas, Results(?) of realized scientific research, Number of competitive(?) staff, Systematized expert and consulting services, Number of trainings* – perhaps number of trainees is also important, etc.)

Very few items of the 3-year Action plan are associated with specific budget. In most cases "University funds" is the answer, which, perhaps, is justified for the many actions in the plan represent status-quo operations. Even so, no budget projections for the 3-year action plan have been provided, thus making it difficult to justify the financial feasibility of the 3-year Action plan. For several actions, funding is expected from Donnor organizations. In the SER, "Attracting funds" has been identified as an area for improvement but no specific plans on how this will be achieved are presented. Identifying additional sources of income was indicated as a major priority by the top management of the University

According to the "Rule of Strategic Planning", *"it is necessary to evaluate and analyze the performance of the previous strategic development plan developed by the university"*. A monitoring groups is formed on and-hoc basis by decision of the Academic Council, with no formally specified criteria. Interviewed members of the Academic Council reported that this is done on an annual basis and therefore a totally new monitoring committee could be appointed in consequent years. Furthermore, no administrative unit is designated to have the responsibility of coordinating the monitoring process, therefore the panel is concerned about the robustness and efficiency of the strategic plan monitoring process, especially since it is noticed that actions that were not implemented in the previous plan are repeated in the new plan without any explanation as to why. Indicatively: -MA Archaeology not implemented in 2018-2024 is included in 2025-31 plan again for 2030, MA Subject Teaching Methodology was planned for 2019 seems that it didn't go ahead, -Same with Creation of MAs in English in the field of education, etc.

Another of the panel's main concerns is the absence of a contingency planning, which is also the results of not performing a proper SWOT analysis. Given that, as it appears in the Action plan, the financial support for many scientific and/or internationalization actions include Donor organizations, contingency planning is necessary to identify and manage possible risks.

As internationalization is one of the top priorities of TESAU it is necessary that the Strategic plan of the University to be described in a very clear way to convey the right message to potential international partners. The University should consider presenting the SWOT analysis and Strategic planning in a more descriptive narrative style in English language (as it appears in TESAU website in Georgian language), rather than an Excel worksheet which is more appropriate for presenting the Action plan internally for control and monitoring purposes.

Evidences/indicators

- *The Strategic Development Plan (2025-2031) and the Action Plan (2025-2027) of TESAU*
- *The Rule of Strategic planning methodology (2017)*
- *University budget for 2024*
- *Self-Evaluation Report*
- *University Structure*
- *Interviews with Rector, Dean of Faculty, Head of Administration*
- *Interviews with Employer representatives*

Recommendations:

1.2.1 Perform a formal SWOT analysis with the engagement of employer and alumni representatives to identify opportunities that could be the basis of defining major strategic goals and preparing a contingency plan.

1.2.2 Ensure continuity and maintain institutional memory in the process of monitoring the performance of Strategic and Action plans. Consider assigning the coordination of the monitoring process to an administrative unit.

1.2.3 Ensure that all actions in the Action plan include a budget estimate, measurable indicators and consistency between Action plan, Target indicators and University budget.

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

- ☐ Complies with requirements
- ☐ Substantially complies with requirements
- ☒ **Partially complies with requirements**
- ☐ 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

- 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

TESAU's overall organizational structure consists of faculties and administrative departments responsible for the main tasks of education and research. A good number of central offices for key tasks in management and support, and the university leadership structure with an academic council and a representative council on the one hand and the rector, the head of administration and the QA service on the other. The functions and responsibilities assigned to the structural units are provided in the relevant provisions, which establish one of the foundations for effective implementation of the activities determined by the strategic development plan of the university. However, the experts' team (ET) has identified several areas for improvement within the structure of the university that need to be addressed to ensure alignment with the university's strategic goal 4 on improving the management system and HR resources. Firstly, this relates to the recent establishment of the Internal Audit Department at TESAU. This change comes from legislation and aims at enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the management processes at the university, as well as financial oversight, and response to official misconduct. This department has the potential to contribute to the strategic goals of the university by ensuring that financial resources are managed appropriately and by upholding high standards of accountability and transparency. However, several aspects of the Internal Audit Department raise concerns. Control of the activities of all structural units and employees, access to all types of information, response to misconduct, development of various recommendations, etc. needs more detail and pre-approved standard procedures. Internal audit processes should ensure a supportive and collaborative environment and standard operational procedures should outline how this will be achieved. Article 5 of the Internal Audit Regulation provides information about the structure of the unit and the appointment of the Head of the unit. According to point 1 of Article 5 the head of the Internal Audit Department is appointed by the Head of Administration in agreement with the Rector, based on the competition. But the competitive appointment of the Head of the department without clearly defined qualification requirements further adds to the ambiguity and potential for misuse of power. Even though Internal Audit service being accountable to the Representative Council is a positive

step, it may not be sufficient to ensure full transparency and objectivity. The audit department could encounter cases involving the administrative council itself, creating a potential conflict of interest if oversight is limited to the representative council. Additionally, having an independent committee to periodically review the activities of the unit would enhance impartiality and ensure that the audit service operates in alignment with both ethical standards and the strategic goals of the university.

The ET also noted that there are no qualification requirements or selection criteria defined for heads of departments/structural units (e.g. Library, Innovations Lab, Financial Department, Support Center for Students with Special Educational Needs, Quality Assurance, Human Resources Department), as evidenced in regulations of structural units. Without established criteria, the process of selecting and appointing leadership may lack transparency, consistency, and objectivity, potentially leading to the appointment of individuals who may not possess the necessary qualifications to effectively manage their units. This can result in suboptimal performance, misalignment with the university's strategic goals, and a potential decline in the quality of education and services provided. To address these issues, it is crucial to develop and implement a clear set of qualifications and competencies for all heads of structural units, as they are also involved in decision-making processes. This should include specific educational backgrounds, professional experience, and leadership skills aligned with the university's mission and strategic objectives. Additionally, a formalized selection and evaluation process should be established to ensure that only the most qualified candidates are appointed, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and integrity of the university's leadership.

In view of the size of the university this structure is adequate, although the SER is rightly critical on the ratio between the academic staff and a relatively large administrative/support staff. TESAU wants to have a better balance by 2026.

The procedures of appointment and election of specialists and their task descriptions are clear and in line with legal requirements. The university's management bodies are formed based on elections, according to the law of Georgia "On Higher Education", the university's charter, and in accordance with the regulation "On the procedure for the election of university and faculty management bodies". Elections are held in accordance with the principles of transparency, equality and fair competition.

In view of the further development of the university in terms of academic quality, international visibility and connectivity, the human capital factor deserves dedicated management and support. This will enable TESAU to design a coherent approach on HR development. As it is also explained in standard 4, the panel noted that HR shares responsibility regarding Staff development with other administrative units, while at the same time the specific unit is also responsible for student career development services, the functions of which are not carried out. The department's functions, as outlined in the HR department regulation, focus predominantly on administrative tasks related to personnel management, including recruitment, staff assessment, labor contract administration, and maintaining personnel records. These functions are crucial for effective HR management but fail to address the career support needs of students, which is one of the functions of this department and one of the key strategic goals of the university. Strategic objectives of TESAU are to develop a comprehensive development-oriented HR policy, recruit international staff, and offer career development courses to students, yet it appears that this important function is not formally included in the department's official regulations. This omission may have been an oversight but is nonetheless significant, as it impacts the clarity and effectiveness of service delivery. Presently, only one individual is tasked with managing career support services, which is a considerable challenge given the needs of the student body. In addition, interviews with students showed that there is no single point regarding provision (or at least guidance) of students' services. This limited staffing may not only hinder the effectiveness of the career services but also place undue pressure on the existing personnel. Moreover, the HR department, with its current staffing of just two employees, faces difficulties in fully implementing its core HR responsibilities while also supporting the strategic development goals of the university. These goals, particularly in relation to human resource management, are outlined as priorities in the university's strategic development plan. To address these challenges and ensure that both HR and student support functions are managed effectively, it would be beneficial to formally include career services within the HR department's regulation. Additionally, increasing the staffing levels in both the HR department and the career services function would better align resources with the university's strategic priorities, ensuring that these vital services are delivered efficiently and effectively. The panel was also wondered what the functions of a newly established Internal Audit Service are, without obtaining a clear answer as to the purpose and the role of this unit – The answer to the question whether the subject of possible

audit(s) is financial, operational, personal, the only answer that was received is that financial audit is done by the state authorities.

In evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of university leadership and management bodies the expert panel noted that there is a solid practice of collaboration and joint deliberations. There is an obvious priority area in the digital portals system of data collection, communication and evaluation, which greatly contributes to the efficiency of many administrative processes. To ensure the efficiency of the management system, the university has "Uniform Rules of Procedure" and "Management Effectiveness Monitoring Mechanisms and Evaluation System". In addition, the university uses the following modern technologies: electronic document circulation system (eflow.emis.ge) and electronic education management system (ea.tesau.edu.ge; tunels.tesau.edu.ge). The addressee is notified of the decisions made by the management bodies of the university using the electronic document circulation system.

TESAU has a Business Continuity Plan (BCP) which includes the list of risks/incidents and corresponding actions to address these. One of the measures outlined as a backup plan is to work on accrediting programs in the event of program accreditation cancellation. While this is a necessary step, it is not sufficient on its own. Accreditation processes can be time-consuming and may not address the immediate concerns of current students, faculty, and stakeholders. A more comprehensive plan should include immediate actions such as establishing temporary partnerships with other accredited institutions to allow students to continue their studies seamlessly. Additionally, a clear communication strategy is essential to keep all stakeholders informed and reassured during the accreditation recovery process. The BCP also mentions that in the event of personnel leaving, the backup plan is simply to replace them. This approach is inadequate, as it does not consider the potential impact on continuity and quality of service. Recruitment can be time-consuming and may not immediately fill the gap left by departing staff. The university should develop a more robust strategy that includes succession planning, cross-training current staff to cover essential roles temporarily, and maintaining a pool of qualified candidates who can be quickly onboarded. The ET notes that the current resources of HR department of the university are not sufficient to fulfill these tasks. To be sufficient, the BCP should include detailed strategies for both immediate and long-term solutions. For accreditation, this involves accelerated processes, alternative certifications, and continuous program improvement. For personnel, it requires proactive succession planning, cross-training, and quick onboarding procedures. Succession Planning involves preparing for the replacement of key personnel in an organization. It identifies potential future leaders, trains them, and develops their skills so they are ready to step into critical roles if needed. This ensures the organization can continue to function smoothly despite changes in leadership or key positions. Cross-Training refers to training employees to perform tasks or roles outside their usual job responsibilities. This practice enhances flexibility within the organization, allowing employees to cover for each other, fill in gaps during absences, or address skill shortages. Cross-training can improve overall efficiency and resilience by ensuring that more team members are capable of handling a variety of tasks and roles. These measures along with onboarding training programmes will ensure a more resilient and responsive approach to managing disruptions, thereby maintaining stability and confidence in the university's operations.

Support of TESAU leadership for international cooperations and more in general the process of internationalization is unequivocal as efforts were intensified over the last years but there is still a need for further enhancements. It is one of the key tasks of the rector and a partial responsibility of relatively many other specialists. From this point of view, the university's participation in many international research and capacity building projects should be highlighted. The university's internationalization policy, with a focus on student and staff exchanges, is commendably supported by the International Relations Office, which effectively manages international projects. This centralization has proven beneficial, ensuring coherent and strategic implementation of international initiatives. However, the policy's effectiveness could be significantly enhanced by expanding its scope to include greater faculty involvement. Currently, the faculties have limited roles in internationalization efforts, which could restrict the breadth and impact of such initiatives. An important barrier identified is the lack of English proficiency among academic and administrative staff, compounded by the absence of English language requirements in recruitment processes. This language barrier poses a significant challenge for faculty members, hindering their participation in and contribution to international projects. To address this, it is crucial to integrate English language proficiency into recruitment criteria and provide ongoing language training for current staff. Additionally, empowering faculties to actively

engage in internationalization efforts is essential. This can be achieved by fostering stronger collaboration between the International Relations Office and the faculties, offering resources and support for faculty-led international initiatives, and encouraging a more inclusive approach to internationalization. By addressing these areas, the university can enhance its internationalization strategy, ensuring a more comprehensive and effective implementation. Academic staff more should be more empowered in taking initiative to engage in international projects, and the University should consider establishing clear incentives and collaboration mechanisms that will encourage faculty participation in international initiatives. According to th information provided by the University, 4 international projects have been funded that were initiated by academic staff but the interviews showed that it was still International Office majorly engaged in this direction, it is good to have incentives and collaboration mechanisms that will encourage faculty participation in international initiatives but the panel has not seen outcomes of this e.g. there were no data in the SER how many academic staff members have received this incentives.

All in all, TESAU partially complies with standard requirements in these areas, with some avenues for improvement.

It is worth noting that the university's management and leadership, especially over the past two years, have implemented many commendable changes. The progress is evident, and with time, the university is likely to significantly enhance its performance in the given substandards criteria.

Evidences/indicators

- *Self-evaluation report and its annexes*
- *All core documents contributing to the observations of the expert panel*
- *Interviews with management bodies, Faculty Deans, Head of Administrative services and representatives of administrative units*

Recommendations:

2.1.1 It is recommended that human capital development be established as a core function for HR department, serving purposes, both in management and support at the university level as well as for faculties.

2.1.2 Ensure that all functions are executed efficiently without overlaps between different administrative units. Adjust the mandate of the Internal Audit Department to focus on financial oversight, efficiency improvements, and compliance with regulations without overlapping its functions with functions of faculties and their academic autonomy; this includes limiting their role in monitoring academic activities like lectures and seminars to avoid conflicts with faculty responsibilities, and enhancing its role in increasing the effectiveness of management, by providing continuous, independent oversight of financial controls and risk management.

2.1.3 Establish mechanisms for regular reviews of the Internal Audit Department's activities by an independent body or committee to ensure transparency and accountability. This oversight can include periodic evaluations of the department's impact on achieving university goals and adherence to ethical standards.

2.1.4 Increase the staffing levels for HR department and the career services to align their work with the university's strategic priorities and ensure that these vital services are delivered efficiently and effectively.

2.1.5 Define qualification requirements for the heads of structural units, including relevant educational backgrounds, professional experience, and skills. These criteria should be publicly available and used in the appointment process. Establish a formalized transparent process for appointing heads of departments based on merit and qualifications; This process should involve a review committee that evaluates candidates against the defined criteria

2.1.6 To enhance the Business Continuity Plan of the university, it is recommended develop succession planning, cross-training, and rapid onboarding procedures to ensure personnel continuity and maintain service quality during disruptions.

2.1.7 To strengthen the university's internationalization policy faculties should be empowered in taking initiative to engage in international projects. Establishing clear incentives and collaboration

mechanisms will encourage faculty participation in international initiatives, creating a more integrated approach to internationalization. Implementing these changes will enhance the effectiveness of the policy and better align it with the internationalization goals of the university.
Suggestions:
Best Practices (if applicable): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The university's participation in many international research and capacity building projects in recent years, and good quality of impact of projects for management processes could be considered as an example of Best Practices. ✓ The recently established Innovation Lab -a structural unit aiming to support the university staff and students in the development and commercialization of innovative business ideas through technical consultation, legal guidance, and business model creation.
Evaluation <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="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>TESAU clearly takes quality assurance seriously. This is demonstrated by its range of dedicated Quality Assurance services, both at university and faculty level, by the QA processes and mechanisms in place and by its priority position in planning documents.</p> <p>The university has an internal system of quality assurance, which considers the cycle of "Plan-Implement-Check-Develop".</p> <p>Internal evaluation of quality assurance at the university includes the following aspects: evaluation of educational programs; evaluation of program implementation; assessment of provision of teaching with human and material resources; Studying the opinions and attitudes of stakeholders (employers, academic staff, students; graduates) in the process of program development. For the evaluation of the programs, a corresponding need is determined in each semester, around which relevant studies are planned among specific target groups (employers, academic staff, students, graduates).</p> <p>During the interviews, the representatives of the university confirmed the relevance and compliance of the information presented in the self-evaluation report. However, the need requires for the university to strengthen the internal evaluation mechanism of scientific research activities, using quantitative and qualitative criteria.</p> <p>Also in certain instances the panel detected some confusion about the role of the QA regarding operations at TESAU. Indicatively when the question to Students career services about monitoring the career development of graduates, the response was that QA is planning to do it; Similarly when students were asked where do they address complains one or two of them mentioned that QA was the responsible unit. This perhaps is a sign of the consideration regarding the importance of QA service in the academic community of TESAU, however the role of QA should be clear within the administrative structure of the University.</p> <p>The next step would be to work on establishing a quality culture in the university at all levels and in all its parts. A sure way to achieve this is to ensure that the PDCA cycle is fully executed, with emphasis given in the „Act“ part in order to make results of QA practices evident to all members of TESAU.</p> <p>Hallmark of quality culture is widely shared awareness of and responsibility for good quality.</p>

<p>Solid procedures for student body planning as well as study program planning are in place.</p> <p>The expert panel has not detected any indications of insufficient provisions.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Self-evaluation report and its annexes</i> • <i>All core documents contributing to the observations of the expert panel</i> • <i>QA procedures and documents</i> • <i>Interviews with management bodies, Faculty Deans, Head of Administrative services and representatives of administrative units</i> • <i>Interview with Head and members of QA services</i>
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>2.2.1 It is recommended to enhance a rule of evaluation of scientific-research activity, which considers the quantitative and qualitative evaluation criteria.</p> <p>2.2.2 Ensure that the PDCA cycle is fully executed by the proper units under the guidance and monitoring of QA services.</p> <p>2.2.3 It is recommended that quality culture establishment be an overall goal in quality assurance system (implying mainstreaming quality responsibilities as well as multi-faceted assessments).</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</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>TESAU has a good code of ethics in place and several procedures to check compliance. The code includes a detailed prescription for various categories of staff and students. A university ethics committee evaluates cases of plagiarism and other infringements of ethical standards.</p> <p>The University's Code of Ethics establishes principles and standards of university ethics, provides principles of academic freedom, protects freedom of belief, expression, discussion and research, and provides staff and students with guiding principles by which they can act in accordance with ethical standards. The code of ethics which is applicable in the university provides for appropriate response procedures in case of violation of ethics norms. In case of violation of the ethics norms of the university, based on the statement of the interested person, the issue will be discussed by the ethics committee of the university. The complaint will be sent to the addressee at the same time. The ethics committee includes representatives of each faculty (2 academic staff and 1 student).</p> <p>The TESAU self-evaluation report, as well as University legislative acts do not mention AI tools and their unethical/ethical use.</p> <p>TESAU collaborates with Turnitin's central office in procuring licenses, thereby ensuring the effectiveness of plagiarism prevention and detection mechanisms. The university has set a higher</p>

<p>standard for responding to plagiarism cases. In particular, if plagiarism is confirmed, instead of a warning, the person will be given a reprimand.</p> <p>To detect plagiarism, an electronic check for plagiarism is mandatory to publish an article in the collection of scientific works of Telavi State University. The paper is uploaded to the electronic platform of TURNITIN and if similarities are found, the paper is checked by a specialist in the field. When plagiarism is discovered, the field specialist will refer the matter to the plagiarism commission for consideration. In case of confirmation of plagiarism, the plagiarism commission returns the work to the interested person, with the appropriate conclusion, and applies to the university's ethics committee to apply the appropriate disciplinary sanction.</p> <p>In case of plagiarism in the thesis, the following disciplinary responsibility applies to the staff: reprimand; or termination of the contract.</p> <p>The issue of termination of the contract will be considered based on the examination of the circumstances and will be decided within discretionary powers.</p> <p>In the TURNITIN electronic program, students' bachelor's, master's and doctoral theses are also checked during the mid-term and final evaluation. Also, certain types of written assignments for educational courses.</p> <p>To raise the standards of academic integrity, the TESAU created an academic integrity and student counseling center, the main task of which is to carry out activities necessary to ensure academic integrity in the university, to facilitate university researchers and students to conduct research responsibly and equip them with academic writing skills. In terms of increasing academic integrity, the center provides for the organization trainings and information meetings for students and researchers that will contribute to the improvement of the research activities carried out by the university and the introduction of research reliability and integrity mechanisms, the preparation of necessary instructions, training and support materials, etc. Academic freedom, as one of the highest values, is declared in the university statutes, faculty regulations and Tesau's strategic development plan.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Self-evaluation report and its annexes</i> • <i>TESAU Code of Ethics</i> • <i>All core documents contributing to the observations of the expert panel</i> • <i>Interviews with management bodies, Faculty Deans, Head of Administrative services and representatives of administrative units, students and graduates</i>
<p>Recommendations:</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ AI is already playing a substantial role in university. Therefore, the expert panel suggestion is to reflect in the university regulation the general regulations on use of AI.
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</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>

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

The institution has established procedures to ensure its educational programs align with legislation and university regulations. These procedures encompass planning, designing, implementing, developing, and occasionally annulling educational programs. Initially, the program head conducts market research to ensure the new program meets current labor market needs. This research informs the design and development phases but occurs mainly during accreditation periods. Based on the documents provided by the HEI it can be said that in the process of program development in most cases mostly internal stakeholders are involved. Accordingly, it is **suggested to improve the frequency and formality of the communication with the external stakeholders, mainly employers and employed graduates in their corresponding field.** Implementation staff, administration, potential employers, and other key stakeholders are engaged early in the design and assessment phases to ensure the program's relevance and effectiveness. Evidence from employers shows that they provide input to the design of the programs, informally and continuously as some of them have close cooperation with the the heads and academic staff.

Since enhancement of internationalization has been declared as a strategic goal, it is suggested that TESAU consider the benchmarking of its programs against international programs in the corresponding fields. Currently the only evidence that derived in this area is regarding the BA program in English Philology.

After the initial design, the program proposal undergoes detailed discussions starting at the department level. Post-departmental approval, the proposal is reviewed by the faculty and is submitted to the university's quality assurance office for the relevant processes. Following these reviews, the program is presented to the Academic Council for final approval before submission for accreditation.

Once accredited, in line with the *Instruction of planning, designing, implementing, developing and annulling academic educational programs*. Tthe program is supported by human and material resources for its implementation. The Methodology for Determining Staff and Student Ratio and Student Enrollment Threshold describes in a detailed way the methodology for calculating academic/invited personnel involved in the program. The program is implemented according to the established legal and institutional guidelines, ensuring compliance and governance. According to SER and the regulatory documents, the program head coordinates ongoing development, focusing on updating educational resources, enhancing staff qualifications, and integrating international practices.

To ensure that academic educational programs remain effective and comply with legal and institutional guidelines, it is recommended that the program head conducts a comprehensive analysis of study resource needs at least annually. This process should involve updating educational materials, enhancing staff qualifications, and integrating international best practices. Though it is recommended that the program head identifies and analyses the need of study resources regularly, at least on a yearly basis. University Quality Assurance Office conduct evaluations to ensure the program remains effective and relevant. Decisions to annul programs are made through a structured process involving the Faculty Council, the Quality Assurance Office, and the Academic Council. If a program is annulled, the institution ensures affected students can complete their education through alternative programs or through mobility to other institutions.

Following previous authorizations, the HEI conducted an optimization process, annulling a significant number of programs. This reflects the university's self-awareness and adaptation to regional specificities.

The SER, relevant documents and interviews with the university community reveal adherence to prescribed regulations. The HEI, based on the specificity of the region, has defined several priority directions, such as the field of Education, tourism, and Agrarian directions. It has quite a good potential to develop in the priority fields and it would be recommended by the experts to enhance the integration

of international resources and increasing external stakeholder involvement more formally in the program development process to further improve the quality and relevance of educational offerings.

Evidences/indicators

- *Instruction of planning, designing, implementing, developing and annulling academic educational programs*
- *The methodology for calculating academic/invited personnel involved in the program*
- *Educational programs, with syllabi*
- *Analyses of labor market research*
- *satisfaction survey and result analysis of students, graduates, employers*
- *Monitoring results of students' academic performance*
- *Graduates' research in connection of career and academic development*
- *Regulating rule of learning process.*

Recommendations:

3.1.1 Conduct a comprehensive analysis of study resource needs, regularly. This process should involve updating educational materials, enhancing staff qualifications, and integrating international best practices.

3.1.2 Enhance the integration of international resources and increasing external stakeholder involvement more formally in the program development process to further improve the quality and relevance of educational offerings.

Suggestions:

- Improve the frequency and formality of the communication with the external stakeholders, mainly employers and employed graduates in their corresponding field.
- Enhance the integration of international resources and increase frequency and formality of external stakeholder involvement in the program development process to further improve the quality and relevance of educational offerings.
- Consider Benchmarking of the programs against programs offered in the same scientific areas, internationally.

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

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

3.2 Structure and Content of Educational 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

TESAU follows current legislation and European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System guidelines while creating an educational programme. Learning outcomes of the programmes are also in line with the level of higher education and qualification to be granted. Majority of the programmes are currently using the current National Qualifications Framework (three types of learning outcomes), while some programmes still define six types of learning outcomes grouped in six competencies. However, fields-based timeline provided for the educational programmes, TESAU has the following year to modify the programmes. Namely, for the programmes in the field of education sciences, programmes in Ecology (0522), Food Technology (0721) and Agronomy (0811) the timeline for provision of self-evaluation on

the compliance with the NQF and classifier of the fields of study to the NCEQE is in 2025. Additionally, there is the program in Public Administration, still with six classifications and it is in the process of abolishing – new programme is being developed, and students will be transferred there, and the MA programme in Business Administration, which was updated for the cluster accreditation of business programmes.

Learning outcomes for the fields where the field characteristics are applicable, are also in line with the relevant requirements.

The structure of the programmes is in compliance with the legislative requirements and have the structure, allocation of credits among components as envisaged by the legislation. All programmes at TESAU are accredited and follow the timeline and requirements of the external quality assurance. The programmes provide students with the opportunity to select non-compulsory components of an educational programme and the learning outcomes in certain fields (where applicable) are based on the field characteristics.

During the interviews with students, BA students mentioned the need for more practicals, while MA and Doctoral students pointed out the need for opportunities for practical experience abroad.

TESAU has the rule for developing individualized education programmes, which is defined in the "Regulation for Learning Process" (approved by the representative council, March 14, 2018, minutes #5, Last change initiated based on minutes #21, 01.12.2023).

The regulation, however, based on the content, defines the individual learning plan as the tool for supporting students that were enrolled at TESAU based on external or internal mobility, who changed the minor educational programme or had the status suspended for a substantial period of time. Therefore, individual learning plan does not consider different individual needs of students, e.g. health issues, individual needs in terms of learning difficulties, etc. The regulation for individual learning plan development also does not include information on provision of education to convicted students. The non-existence of a mechanism for supporting students' various needs was also verified at the interviews; students were not aware of such a mechanism in place at TESAU, also, when the expert panel requested the existing individual learning paths/plans for students, only the plan for the mobility student was provided. Therefore, it is recommended for the TESAU to revise the rule for developing individual learning plans for students and ensure it takes into account various needs of students. Finally, it should be noted that the same recommendation was issued by the experts during the previous cycle of authorization.

The teaching methods described in the programmes and syllabi, even though mostly standardized, include active, student-centered methods. Staff are offered training on teaching and learning methods, including through the international capacity-building projects. However, the interviews have shown that the integration of the interactive and student-centered teaching methods in practice is low. Students wish to have more opportunities to engage in active learning, group work and other activities promoting students' engagement and student-centered learning environment, as, apparently the share of lecturing and theoretical knowledge transmission is still high.

The catalogue of educational programmes is uploaded on the webpage and serves as the information source for interested parties. However, there is still a need to have the descriptions of the programmes in English language, as a basic prerequisite for achieving one of the University's stated strategic goals of being more active internationally.

TESAU conducts and analyzes alumni survey according to the programmes implemented at the university. The surveys include questions regarding alumni employment, and it is a good practice that the institution conducts and analyzes surveys per programme, providing information for the development of individual programmes, especially as the survey includes open questions. However, the survey does not include questions on whether the graduate developed academically (i.e. followed a consequent level of higher education). It is suggested to update the survey instruments so that they provide information on the academic development of graduates.

Evidences/indicators

- *Learning process management regulation (Annex 6 of the folder 3, authorization documents)*
- *Article 3 of the Learning process management regulation, on the provision of the individual learning plan (Annex 6 of the folder 3, authorization documents)*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Interview results</i> • <i>Sample of individual learning plan – additionally requested documents</i> • <i>Educational programmes and syllabi</i> • <i>SER</i> • <i>Survey results.</i> • <i>Sample of individual learning plan.</i>
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>3.2.1 Revise the rule for developing individual learning plans for students and ensure it considers various needs of students.</p> <p>3.2.2 Ensure that teaching and learning methods applied within the educational programmes are student-centered, promoting student engagement and active learning.</p> <p>3.2.3 Increase the practical component in the BA and MA programs offering more opportunities to students to get experiences in practice locally and internationally. Consider inviting professionals from the regional private and public sector as well as international experts in the field to convey industry experience in the classroom and establish relations with academia.</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Enrich the English language webpages to include the descriptions of the programmes in English language, as a basic prerequisite for achieving one of the University's stated strategic goal of being more active internationally. Provide an English language catalogue of offered programs. ○ Revise the instrument for graduate survey, so that it provides information on academic development of graduates, as well as their career development.
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <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
<p>3.3 Assessment of Learning Outcomes</p>
<p>HEI has law-compliant, transparent and fair system of learning outcomes assessment, which promotes the improvement of students' academic performance.</p>
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>Assessment of learning outcomes in the HEI is regulated by the Article 8 of the "Instruction for Planning, Designing, Implementing, Developing and Cancelling Academic Educational Programs", based on which evaluation of learning outcomes is measured by the students' achievements that are evaluated in the various subjects of the curriculum, regarding both the acquired theoretical basic knowledge and their practical skills.</p> <p>Interviewed members of academic and invited staff referred to teaching and learning methods used to achieve the learning outcomes of the educational program which include a mixture of the following: lectures, work in working groups, seminars, practical work, Study Practice, Homework/Report, Essays, E-learning, Thesis at the appropriate level of study that differ according to the subject characteristics. Accordingly, achievement of learning outcomes is checked via various assessment methods which are differentiated by the specifics of the field and the orientation of the subject. A plurality of methods to assess the achievement of LOS is defined in the programme descriptions and further elaborated at subject descriptors, where assessment criteria are also described. These include group work, individual assignments, preparation of research papers, practical's, mid-term and final examinations. Final examination is evaluated at no more than 40% of total subject score. At the interviews with academic and invited staff some of the participants mentioned that they do use student discussion, case studies and group assignments in their teaching approaches. While all interviewed teaching staff stated that</p>

they provide feedback to students on their assessment, students' response was not clear, although a large part responded that they receive feedback through the electronic learning management system. Students can appeal within 10 days against their assessment results through the office of learning process management. Interviewed students were aware of their right to appeal but not so clear as to the process.

Though some students highlighted the need for more presentations and group work in subjects where they are particularly relevant. Moreover, there is an opportunity to expand practical/laboratory components. It would be beneficial to customize the syllabi and assessment methods to align with the unique requirements of each course.

According to the rules of the University and evidence derived during the interview of academic and invited staff, credit is given based on several evaluation components that include– midterm evaluations and final exams. Most often used evaluation forms and components are mid-term and final exam evaluation forms and evaluation components-oral, written enquiry (test, case, open and closed question, essay, etc.), preparing group/individual tasks and their presentation. Assessment methods and score distribution is given in the relevant syllabi. The minimum competency threshold in each is defined as not exceeding 60% of the final assessment. Practical work components are evaluated by both the work supervisor (60%) and the teacher of the course (40%).

The student's knowledge is evaluated according to the following scheme in accordance with the current legislation in Georgia according to the following scheme:

- (A) Excellent - 91-100 points
- (B) Very good – 81-90 points
- (C) Good – 71-80 points
- (D) Satisfactory – 61-70 points
- (E) Sufficient – 51-60 points.

There are two types of negative assessment:

(FX) Unsatisfactory – 41-50 points, which means that the student needs more work to pass and is allowed to take the additional exam once after independent work,

(F) Fail – 40 or less points, which means that the work done by the student is not sufficient and he/she has to restart learning of the subject.

The evaluations allowed by the evaluation system (5 positive and two negative - Fx and F) are in full compliance with the Georgian legislation and are reflected in the syllabus of each course. The document also regulates procedures for scheduling an additional exam when receiving FX.

The TESAU "Rule of Planning, Implementation and Evaluation of the Scientific-Research Component" describes the system of evaluation of the scientific-research component of Master's Thesis and regulations for Doctoral Dissertation councils the doctoral education program. The panel had an opportunity to review whether the corresponding regulation are applied during the interviews with MA and Doctoral students.

Master Thesis

Master's thesis is evaluated once after its defense. During the evaluation of the master's thesis, the evaluations of the supervisor, reviewers and the commission should be determined in accordance with the relevant proportions. Rules and criteria are defined in the syllabus of the master's thesis or in the relevant annexes of the educational program. The master's thesis is evaluated with a 100-point grading system according to the following scheme:

- (A) Excellent - 91-100 points
- (B) Very good – 81-90 points
- (C) Good – 71-80 points
- (D) Satisfactory – 61-70 points
- (E) Sufficient – 51-60 points.

There are two types of negative assessment:

(FX) Unsatisfactory – 41-50 points, which means a repeated defense is scheduled during the next semester,

(F) Fail – 40 or less points, which means that the work will not be defended again. The student is allowed to write a new paper on a different topic, with the same or a different supervisor.

Detection of cases of plagiarism in the course of the master's thesis is the basis for not issuing or confiscating the diploma certifying the academic degree of the master. Such a decision is made by the Academic Council based on the reliable reasoning of the Faculty Council.

Doctoral Dissertation

Completion and defense of the dissertation is a mandatory element of the research component for the doctoral educational program. Before the completion of the scientific-research component, the doctoral candidate must present colloquium-1 and colloquium-2 in the department. The colloquiums reflect the results of the doctoral student's research, are not awarded credit, and are one of the mandatory prerequisites for admission to the defense.

The right to go to the defense of the dissertation is granted to the doctoral candidate who has completely accomplished all the rest of the components provided for by the educational program, made a report on the dissertation (preliminary defense) within the deadline set at the extended session of the department, submitted the necessary documentation to the Dissertation Council

Evaluation system of the scientific-research component of the doctoral educational program:

- a) excellent (summa cum laude) – excellent paper (91-100 points);
- b) very good (magna cum laude) – a result that exceeds the requirements in every way (81-90 points);
- c) good (cum laude) - the result that exceeds the requirements (71-80 points);
- d) average (bene) - an average-level paper that meets the basic requirements (61-70 points);
- e) satisfactory (rite) - the result, which despite the shortcomings, still meets the requirements (51-60 points);
- f) insufficient - a work of an unsatisfactory level, which cannot meet the requirements due to significant gaps in it (41-50 points);
- g) completely unsatisfactory (sub omni canone) – a result that does not fully meet the requirements (0-41 points).

The panel received conflicting information from doctoral students regarding the prerequisites of the defense regarding publications in scientific journals. This point is elaborated more in sub standard 6.1 since it is related more to transparent and fair procedures for the assessment and defense of dissertations.

Evidences/indicators

- *The Instruction for Planning, Designing, Implementing, Developing and Cancelling Academic Educational Programs*
- *The Rule of Planning, Implementation and Evaluation of the Scientific-Research Component*
- *BA, MA, PhD Program descriptions*
- *Interviews with academic and Invited Staff*
- *Interviews with Students*
- *Interviews with graduates*

Recommendations:

Suggestions:

- Include appeal's procedure in program and subject descriptors.

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

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

4. Staff of the HEI

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

4.1. Staff Management

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

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

Telavi State University has a personnel management policy and a management plan. The main document of the personnel management policy was approved by the Academic Council on March 27, 2018, and changes were made on December 15, 2023. According to the personnel management policy document, personnel management in the university is based on fairness, supremacy of university interests and merit-based approaches.

The university uses internal and external sources to recruit personnel. The university considers it a priority to have highly qualified academic and administrative staff. Academic staff is selected through competition; an employment contract is signed after recruitment. According to the policy document, the subject of the work, the work to be performed, the term of the contract, the employer's rights and duties, the amount of remuneration, the manner of terminating the labor contract, etc. are specified in the labor contract. According to this procedure, 80 academic staff have been selected and the labor contracts signed with them.

Interviews with Invited staff showed that in all cases of the present representatives, they were selected by the Head of the corresponding program. Of course, Heads would like to select competent persons, but this process deprives the University of having access to a larger pool of competent candidates, and certainly does not facilitate the achievement of the above stated priority goal.

According to sample of labor contracts that were provided to the panel, they include a detailed description of the work to be performed as *"stipulated by the law on higher education, the employer's charter, the internal labor regulations and the faculty regulations"*, which includes *"conducting training courses at various levels, carries out research and publications, supervises students' works, etc."* The contract also provides for the rights and duties of the employer and the employee. The text of the contract signed with affiliated and non-affiliated academic staff is identical to the text of the fourth article 4.1.2, 4.1.4 of this contract.

It should be noted that the presented samples of the labor contract have several flaws, which are manifested in the problem of compatibility with the labor legislation - no compliance with the Labor Code of Georgia. Sample contracts do not contain some of the essential conditions stipulated by Article 14 of the Labor Code in full [i.e., (a) information about the parties to the labor contract; b) date of commencement of work and duration of employment relationship; c) working time and rest time; d) workplace and information about different workplaces of the employee, if his permanent or main workplace is not defined; e) position (indicate rank, rank, category, etc., if any) and the type or description of the work to be performed; f) salary (indicate salary, as well as, if applicable - allowance) and its payment method; g) overtime payment method; h) salaried Duration of vacation, duration of unpaid vacation and the procedure for granting these vacations; i) the procedure for terminating the employment relationship by the employer and the employee]

Also, the university presented a previous contract, the need of which is absolutely incomprehensible. As a result of its detailed review, it was confirmed that its content is identical to the labor contract, although in what situation, need and in what case it is used is unknown, and it cannot be determined from the content of the document. In addition, the concept of forward agreement is not provided for by the legislation of Georgia. As for the preliminary contract, its purpose and content should be different from the main contract.

University policy documents and interviews revealed that the university supports staff professional development. In particular, personnel qualification and retraining procedures are carried out periodically. In addition, the staff is entitled to acquire information about various professional activities

with their own resources, aimed at their professional development and strengthening. In such a case, the university supports them and allocates financial resources in case of need.

As a result of the interviews, it was determined that this support is constant and growing. Accordingly, additional information was requested about the events organized by the university in the last three years. According to the information provided, in 2021, the seminar "Scientific Aspects of Psychological Typology of Personality" was held, in 2022 "Information Technologies in Science", in 2023 "Research Methods in Science", as well as the lecture "Artificial Intelligence Competence Framework for Teachers", technology-enhanced learning and teaching in Georgian higher education institutions. The list provided by the university, which included the development activity they organized, is rather sparse, and it mainly includes the activity carried out within the framework of the project Horizon.

The center of professional development and innovative teaching and the service of human resources, management and student career planning are functioning in the university. As a result of interviews with the authorized persons of the mentioned services, it was established that the activities of the Center for Professional Development and Innovation Training are directly reflecting the information provided by the QA service regarding requirements and needs. Determination of needs and requirements for individual development is not conducted.

The Human Resources management and Student Career Planning Service operates in the university. According to the regulations of the said service, the function of the service is quite extensive: 1. Participate in the organization of the recruitment/searching and selection process of personnel in the university; 2. Participation in the process of organization of attestation/competition and selection of support personnel; 3. Work in coordination with the relevant structural units of the university, in developing the personnel management policy; 4. Participation in the development of personnel management monitoring rules; 5. Participation in the implementation of personnel management monitoring rules; 6. Evaluation of personnel and participation in its analysis; 7. Preparation of drafts of documents related to personnel work and other types of legal relations; 8. Signing, recording and keeping labor contracts with the staff in accordance with the law; 9. Controlling the term of validity of the labor contracts signed with the staff and in this regard, submitting relevant information to the rector of the university and the head of the administration; 10. Production of personnel personal files and their storage in accordance with the law; 11. Creation of an electronic database based on the personnel's personal files; 12. Registration and control of personnel reporting to work through the electronic management system; 13. Issuing notices about the labor activity of the personnel (the work to be performed, the position held and the amount of the labor remuneration); 14. Placing and controlling public information on the university's website within the scope of competence; 15. Performing other functions defined by the legislation of Georgia and legal acts issued by the university.

During the years, only one person was employed in the HR service, in the last period one specialist was added. As a result of consultation with the head of the service, it was determined that a number of functions defined by the statute are not performed and it is impossible to be performed by one person. As a result of the survey, it was confirmed that the Human Resources Management Service is not involved and does not carry out staffing needs research, need identification and related activities. In addition, his involvement in the process of career planning and development of students is completely unclear.

The statute of the service does not even contain any reference to the career planning and development of students, which should be one of the directions of the service. The head of the service could not name at least one career development activity of the staff or students, which was implemented by the service based on the need. However, despite the questions, it could not be determined how the career growth and development of the staff is promoted, as well as the planning, development and implementation of the career development of students. As a result of staff turnover, not even one professional development activity was identified that was independently sought by an employee and supported by the university. In order to determine this, a list of such activities was requested, although the information provided does not contain such a list. The document provided by the university indicates that on May 31, 2024, Telavi State University's Human Resources Management and Student Career Development Service held a meeting with the staff to familiarize them with the innovations included in the internal rules of the institution. Staff were also provided with information on the annual assessment-survey and ongoing issues. The mentioned information was not confirmed as a result of the interview with the head of the service.

A potential employee at the university is selected depending on the need, both through a competition and directly through the conclusion of a contract. Internationalization of its activities, increase in the number of exchange projects, acceptance of English-speaking students, creation of English-language programs, etc. are established as goals and declared by the university. For this purpose, some steps were taken at the university in the past years and 2 foreign language students visited the university for one semester. Obviously, such a declared desire of the university to strengthen the internationalization of research and teaching is welcomed. However, due to the problems of language competence of the academic and support staff represented, this goal is extremely difficult to be achieved under current conditions.

The qualification requirements of the staff were presented by the university. Only a few of positions at TESAU require a high level of foreign language competence. In particular, this concerns the Internationalization Service. In other vacant positions, knowledge of a Western foreign language is not necessary for staff. Therefore, the vast majority of the staff cannot speak English, which impedes accepting foreign language students, introducing English-language subjects in programs, and of course creating English-speaking programs. Accordingly, the issue of university staff research, internationalization of teaching, and the perspective of accepting foreign language students within the framework of the exchange program is called into question. Among them, the issue of participation in international projects, conferences and events planned for the purpose of professional activity is unclear. The personal materials of the staff provided by the university itself confirm that the competence of the foreign language is scarce. In particular, most of them cannot speak any European language. In addition, it is indicated that it is possible to speak English only with the help of a dictionary.

Also, the presence of technical skills in the academic staff it was raised as an issue by students, during the interview. Students mentioned that it is desirable to see academic staff to use educational technical means frequently during the lecture course (including Ms Office). According to them, a large part of the staff does not possess the necessary technical skills. In addition, students' desire to prepare team presentation tasks or on-site preparatory tasks, which according to them is not implemented in the university, was recorded.

To date, representatives of the business sector are minimally involved in the teaching process, and there is limited practical teaching component that will help the student to apply theoretical knowledge in practice and prepare him for the labor market. Invited staff is undergoing an induction process. Both Invited and Academic staff confirmed that a peer-review system for new lecturers is in place.

Evidences/indicators

- *University personnel management policy*
- *Qualification requirements and job descriptions*
- *Samples of contracts signed with personnel*
- *Documentation confirming staff qualifications*
- *The results of the staff performance evaluation and satisfaction survey and their use*

Recommendations:

4.1.1 It is recommended that the employment contracts of the University be fully compliant with the Labor Law of Georgia; this implies both material and formal conformity. That includes revising the contracts already signed by the university and those to be signed in the future. In accordance with the legislation, to fully describe the labor and service contracts, their content and conditions. In view of the amendments made to the Labor Code of Georgia in 2020 and the increased guarantees to the employee, it is necessary to conclude new labor contracts with the existing staff.

4.1.2 It is recommended that in the contract, the rights and duties of the employees, the job description, the procedure for overtime work, the procedure and conditions for taking leave, the grounds and procedure for terminating the employment contract should be clearly written and distinguished. Accordingly, it is recommended to accurately and comprehensively develop the regulations and policy documents of university services, along with a mechanism to ensure that the function-duties mentioned in the regulations are performed by the employed personnel.

<p>4.1.3 Introduce the practice of recruiting invited academic staff through an open competition to access a larger pool of candidates.</p> <p>4.1.4 To identify, plan and implement the need for the professional development of staff by the Professional Development Center on research of employers' (both academic, administrative and support staff) individual needs. Increase the frequency and number of activities planned.</p> <p>4.1.5 It is necessary to strengthen the foreign language competence of the academic staff of the university and consider the issue of language competence in the selection process of employees (considering the internationalization goals of the institution).</p> <p>4.1.6 Carry out continuous training and/or retraining of academic staff in modern teaching methods and implementation of these methods, in order to strengthen practical skills, including technical skills.</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>
<p>4.2. Academic/Scientific and Invited Staff Workload</p>
<p>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</p>
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>Telavi State university introduced the contract of academic staff, teachers Annual teaching and scientific methodological workload scheme of visiting professors and lecturers, which determines the criteria of their workload, more specifically, the volume of annual academic work and hourly standards related to the educational process.</p> <p>The number of academic staff of the university is 80, 79 of them affiliated. The number of educational programs at the higher education level of the university is 24. The ratio of personnel according to the programs is determined to be approximately 4:1. Accordingly, the number and workload of the academic staff provides the opportunity to conduct the teaching and research process properly.</p> <p>The workload of the academic staff of the university is determined by 1000 hours.</p> <p>Academic staff, teachers, contract visiting professors and Annual teaching and scientific-methodological workload of lecturers. The scheme determines the norms of their workload, specifically, annually related to academic workload and educational processes hourly standards.</p> <p>It was noted at the meetings that the university administration is reviewing and evaluating Annual academic conference of academic staff, teachers and specialists to the results of the workload of scientific activity. The university will clearly present of professors, associate professors, assistant professors and assistants Weekly load report. In addition, an incentive form is used that relates to the results of the evaluation report. In particular, if it is established that at least three components described in the report have been fulfilled by the personnel, a monetary reward is provided for this, and in case of less than three components - a form of disciplinary punishment is provided.</p> <p>The university has submitted an order on the maximum amount of annual workload of academic staff, teachers and specialists invited by the agreement.</p> <p>According to the mentioned document, "3. The constituent components of the annual workload of academic staff, teachers and guest professors and lecturers are: 3.1 learning workload: auditory work (lecture, group work, practical/seminar and laboratory works); proofreading of written works; individual work with students (consultation); conducting the exam and evaluating the student;</p>

development, updating/modification of the educational program, syllabus; leading and conducting training, production, pedagogical, professional, field and other types of practice and others; 3.2 Scientific work: monograph preparation, publication, editing, reviewing; preparing, updating, publishing, editing, reviewing textbooks or lecture courses; implementation of methodical joint researches; preparation, publication, review of a scientific article; membership of the editorial board of scientific publications; organization-leadership of the scientific conference; participation in a scientific conference; preparing students for the scientific conference; leadership of students' scientific circles; submission of a scientific grant project; participation; supervision of master's and doctoral theses, review of master's and doctoral theses; assessment and other types of scientific activities; Other activities: participation in various professional seminars and trainings/workshops; Undertaking an internship and other similar activity, which is confirmed by presenting a relevant certificate or diploma, and other types of activities.

In accordance with the same order, 7.1.1 the annual workload of the professor shall be determined by 400 hours. Of these, 180-240 hours are devoted to the educational component (weekly workload 6-8 hours); 7.1.2 The annual workload of an associate professor should be determined by 400 hours. Of these, 240-300 hours are devoted to the teaching component (weekly workload 8-10 hours); 7.1.3 The annual workload of an assistant professor should be determined by 400 hours. Of these, 300-360 hours are devoted to the training component (weekly load 10-12 hours).

In the labor contract and workload distribution schemes, there is no separation of the hours specified for administrative and academic activities. However, during the interview, the staff could not distinguish what kind of activities would be included in their scientific activity.

In addition, it should be noted that a major part of professors-instructors works in Tbilisi and come to Telavi for lecture hours, therefore, a large part of the lectures, including the practical component (e.g. legal clinic on the law program) are held on Saturdays, which is inconvenient for students.

Evidences/indicators

- *Results of the interviews*
- *On awarding a bonus to academic staff based on the indicator of scientific productivity activity*
- *The procedure for evaluating the academic productivity of the staff*

Recommendations:

4.2.1 It is recommended to strengthen staff reporting mechanisms in accordance with the workload.

4.2.2. It is necessary, in case of applying disciplinary measures, that this should be provided in detail in the internal regulations of the university.

4.2.3 It is recommended that staff is provided with timely and comprehensive information about the distribution of the load and the results of the works provided by the load scheme.

4.2.4 Staff workload hours for educational programs will be distributed evenly, within the weekly schedule, so that students have maximum access to the learning process without interruption.

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

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

5. Students and Their Support Services

HEI ensures the development of student-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

It is confirmed by the presented evidence that for each of the educational levels, HEI has developed appropriate 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. All information is accessible to interested parties.

Students are provided with information about their academic assessments and existing academic debts through the electronic program operating at HEI, known as the electronic education management system. The publication of individual administrative-legal acts related to students' status occurs within the terms established by law through the electronic document circulation system operating at HEI.

Despite this, some information on HEI's website has not been updated or added. For example, the applicant's handbook is only for 2023, the calendar of the last academic year is 2022-2023, the full information about the activities of certain services is not added, in case of switching to the English version of the site, the regulations are not available in English, and so on.

During the interview with the representatives of HEI, a proactive position towards protecting students' rights was evident. HEI has an ethics committee. In addition, the student self-government has a department for protecting students' rights. The procedures for signing student contracts and reviewing complaints are properly described in the regulations. The student contract includes rights and obligations clearly and reflects the commitment to law enforcement.

At the level of regulations, any step of the procedures concerning student rights and legal interests is fair and relevant to the acting law. However, during interviews with students, it was revealed that they consider applying directly to the dean or rector as a mechanism for protecting their rights. In case of various problems, they are not properly informed about what procedures exist to protect their rights. It is obviously good that the students consider the dean and the rector to be the protector of their rights. Still, the official mechanisms that HEI has under various regulations should be well known to the students so that, if necessary, the students can choose the right and effective way to protect their legal interests with the proper support of various structural units.

Evidences/indicators

- *Study programs*
- *Self-evaluation report*
- *Interviews*
- *Regulatory Provision of the Study Process*
- *Regulation of the Educational Process Management Service*
- *Rules for declaring the completion of education (ECTS credits) obtained during the learning period*
- *Sample of the contract between the HEI and the student*
- *Code of Ethics*
- *Procedures for enrollment at the university*
- *Provisions for conducting exams*
- *University website - tesau.edu.ge*

Recommendations:

5.1.1. HEI must ensure raising the level of awareness for students about various mechanisms of protection of their rights.

Suggestions:
Best Practices (if applicable):
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 <p>It is confirmed by the presented evidence that HEI has student consulting services in order to plan the educational process and improve academic performance. HEI demonstrates a strong commitment to providing comprehensive support and consultations for students.</p> <p>HEI has a career support service. In particular - Human Resources Management and Student Career Development Service. To ensure that this service can effectively provide students with appropriate counseling and support regarding employment and career development, it is sensible that HEI strengthens the mentioned service and increases the staff. The issue is also discussed in detail at the Standard 4 – Staff Management of the report.</p> <p>HEI excels in integrating students into the university space and international projects. The wide array of activities, including conferences, sports events, and international exchanges, demonstrates HEI's commitment to providing diverse opportunities for student engagement. HEI closely collaborates with various organizations to enhance student services. All information is accessible to interested parties.</p> <p>HEI has an active relationship with the business sector, research centers, plans initiatives, signs memorandums that will support the employment of young scientists and the implementation/commercialization of research results. Students have the opportunity to gain practical experience in partner organizations of the university. Every year, HEI participates in employment fairs, science festivals and weeks. Furthermore, the university is committed to approaching the target indicators of the employment rate of graduates in accordance with the obtained qualifications.</p> <p>However, it should be noted that students and graduates. during the interviews, expressed their desire to closely collaborates with various organizations to enhance student services. Therefore, it would be relevant if HEI offered students various sports or cultural clubs. The idea of creating a swimming club among students was particularly popular. Especially since HEI has a swimming pool and it would be desirable if it takes into account the wishes of the students and finds resources for the restoration and functioning of this pool.</p> <p>HEI ensures students' awareness and involvement in various university-level, local, and international projects and events, and supports student initiatives. However, it should be noted that in the last 3 years, the number of students participating in exchange programs has not increased significantly. HEI should take more active care to offer more international opportunities to students. In addition, it would be good to organize meetings in the format of sharing experiences of students returning from exchange programs. As mentioned in the interviews, students also want HEI to offer more English-speaking lecturers/trainers/speakers so that they can have more English-speaking practice. So it is advisable that HEI robust international partnerships contribute significantly to the enrichment of the academic experience for students.</p>

HEI has a Student Self-government, which is managed in accordance with the Student Self-government Regulations. Student Self-government ensures the involvement of students in university management and other events. Students are represented in the faculty and representative councils, which ensures that the legitimate interests of students are protected and taken into account. Moreover, the independent student club "Erekle II" was founded at HEI by students' initiative.

HEI prioritizes the cultural, social, and academic integration of students. Initiatives such as psychological support and orientation weeks contribute to creating an inclusive environment. HEI has mechanisms, including financial mechanisms to support low SES students. HEI offers students various scholarships established by private businesses. However, there would be a need for more financial support mechanisms within the university, since the number of students with suspended status due to non-payment of fees is quite large.

It is known to the group of experts that HEI, together with the representatives of the state, has improved the transportation conditions of students to HEI as a result of taking certain steps. Despite this, students note that transportation from the regions remains a problem. Therefore, it is necessary for HEI to continue advocating the interests of students in this direction, so that students from the regions can use public transport effectively.

Evidences/indicators

- *Study programs*
- *Self-evaluation report*
- *Interviews*
- *Regulations of Human Resources Management and Student Career Development Service*
- *Regulation of Internationalization and Public Affairs Service*
- *Internationalization policy*
- *Rules of activity for sports and culture coordinators*
- *Implemented student initiatives/projects*
- *Rule of payment of tuition fees*
- *Regulation of TESAU Student Self-Government*
- *Graduates' research results regarding their careers (including the employment rate in accordance with the received qualifications) and academic development*
- *Results of support for socially vulnerable students.*
- *Information about Partner Universities*
- *University web-site - tesau.edu.ge*

Recommendations:

5.2.1 HEI must ensure further increase and diversity of opportunities for student involvement in international activities, including encourage projects that will help improve students' English language competence.

Suggestions:

- Promote the formation of thematic clubs for students.
- Offer more financial support mechanisms to students.
- Advocate with state officials to provide students with access to transportation from the regions.

Best Practices (if applicable):

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 HEI is engaged in a wide array of research and creative activities aligned with its type and the specific fields of study it offers. The institution has established four main departments: Agrarian, Natural Sciences and Technologies; Social Sciences, Business and Law; Education Sciences; and Humanities. Each department focuses on specific research profiles aligned with regional needs. The HEI has identified agriculture, tourism, and education as its primary research areas, reflecting its mission and strategic plan. This focus includes projects on agriculture, tourism, and education.

The university supports its research activities through various specialized centers and laboratories. These include the Caucasus Scientific-Research Center, which focuses on historical and contemporary social and political issues in the Caucasus region and neighboring countries, and three specialized laboratories: the Laboratory for Chemistry and Technology, which studies wine, grapes, and canned products; the Agricultural Laboratory, which researches soil, crops, fertilizers, and pesticides in the region; and the Biology Laboratory, which investigates microorganisms, particularly those affecting agricultural crops. Additionally, Pilot Research and Demonstration Plots facilitate agricultural innovations, which are integral part of the institution's research infrastructure.

From 2018 to 2023, since the previous authorization, the institution has undertaken several research projects funded both internally and externally. Key projects include the development of innovative tourist routes, agricultural research on grape varieties, and interdisciplinary studies on the cultural and historical aspects of the Caucasus region.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of research articles published by the university's academic staff. Some of them are published in high-ranking, internationally indexed journals such as SCOPUS, Web of Science, and include monographs and textbooks across different scientific fields. Based on the information provided in the documents (*Report on Scientific Activities of Academic Staff (2018-2024)*) approximately 90% of the affiliated academic staff at the university confirm their productivity according to the internal evaluation system. The evaluation system includes various categories of scientific activity, and it requires that academic staff engage in multiple areas to confirm their productivity. The criteria emphasize the importance of publishing in internationally refereed journals as an area needing improvement, indicating that it is a significant metric in their evaluation of academic productivity. The interviews revealed that the university management and staff is focused on improving the number of international publications as part of their goals for enhancing research productivity.

The Faculty of Education Sciences participated in UNICEF-funded studies focusing on the mental health of young people and the transition of children with special needs to school. Apart from this, the institution obtained funding from the Bank of Georgia. Collaborations also include projects funded by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation and the European Commission. Collaborative efforts regarding joint research include institutions like the University of Cluj Napoca (Romania) and Požega Polytechnic University (Croatia) for programs in veterinary medicine and viticulture. The institution also engages in patenting innovations, particularly in agricultural technologies, namely, the academic staff have developed modern churchkhela technology and plant hail protection devices.

During the site visit and interviews, it was identified that research outcomes are partially integrated into the teaching curriculum, primarily in PhD programs. It is crucial to integrate research outcomes in teaching activities to enrich the educational experience with up-to-date scientific knowledge. This integration can be facilitated through the publication of textbooks, participation in international scientific conferences, and the involvement of students in research projects. Accordingly, **it is recommended to further advance research capabilities, increase the productivity of research publications, and integrate research outcomes into the educational process. This**

involves enhancing international collaborations, securing additional funding for research projects, and implementing new standards for doctoral programs and research publications.

Each faculty (Faculty of Agrarian, Natural Sciences and Technologies; Faculty of Social Sciences, Business and Law; Faculty of Educational Sciences) has own Regulatory Rules for Evaluating and Defending Doctoral Theses. Based on field, each faculty sets own criteria for Evaluation and Defense Procedures. The procedures for dissertation assessment and defense are publicly available, ensuring that students, staff, and other stakeholders can easily find and understand the requirements. To ensure that all involved parties are aware of the PhD defense standards the university publish guidelines and criteria for dissertation assessment and defense on its official website. This ensures that all involved parties are aware of the expectations and standards. The procedures emphasize evaluation based on predefined criteria, which ensures that all dissertations are assessed fairly.

After submitting the PhD thesis to the scientific board, the paper is evaluated by three official reviewers, with at least one being international reviewer. This practice is implemented within the doctoral program in Food Technology, which includes mandatory involvement of international professors as thesis evaluators. International evaluators are invited from Croatia, Italy, and Germany. Such international collaboration enhances the quality and credibility of the university's doctoral programs. However, the dissertation is written in Georgian and only the abstract is sent to the international reviewer. The reviewer's final opinion regarding the thesis cannot be based only on the short version of the document. **Therefore, it is recommended that the HEI elaborates an efficient mechanism for evaluation PhD theses by international reviewers.**

According to the *Regulatory Rule for Evaluating and Defending Doctoral Theses (article 6.2 - Presentation of the dissertation thesis)*, the right to defend a dissertation is granted to a doctoral student if their thesis is free of plagiarism, they have completed all other requirements of the educational program, have no outstanding financial obligations, have presented both colloquiums on their current research work to the appropriate committee, and have conducted a preliminary defense where it's recommended to invite qualified specialists in the relevant field to review the dissertation. The rule sets the requirements, criteria and procedures that the PhD candidate has to undergo as a prerequisite for the defence: "Papers reflecting the main results of the research related to the dissertation topic published in accordance with established rules. These papers include at least three scientific articles, along with materials from scientific conferences, seminars, forums, congresses, and symposiums, including at least one report..." The panel received conflicting information from doctoral students regarding the prerequisites of the defense regarding publications in scientific journals. Indeed doctoral studies regulation documents are not consistent in this aspect: Based on the "Rule of Planning, Implementation and Evaluation of the Scientific-Research Component", which contains parts of Faculty regulations regarding doctoral studies, doctoral students in the Faculty of Agrarian, Natural Sciences and Technologies are required to "*independently prepare and publish at least three publications, including one necessarily in a journal indexed in an international scientific database (Scopus / Tomphson / Erih Plus)*". The latter is not part of the doctoral studies regulations in the Faculty of Social Sciences, Business and Law and the Faculty of Education Sciences. On the other hand, the program description for PhD in Educational Sciences set a prerequisite of "*publishing the following two types of scientific publications- (Peer-reviewed) scientific articles in such high-ranking international journals which have ISSN code and have international editorial council (or scientific committee) which are spread in international scale and are open for international cooperation. Among these two publications, one should be published in such international journals (conference materials) which has index of Scopus or Web Science, or ERIH PLUS –for those doctorate students only, who work in the bases of Kartvelian studies or Caucasiology direction*". Also, the description of the Doctoral studies program in Food Technology, set prerequisites "*the publication of articles about the thesis by the doctoral student in scientific journals and participation in at least one international conference*".

Since the skills of implementing research projects based on latest achievements of the science, demonstrating innovativeness and independence and presenting results in the international academic community are generic for all doctoral programs, and doctoral graduates are expected to work in international research projects, prerequisites for dissertation should be aligned and ensure that graduates are able to present their results internationally. Accordingly, **it is recommended to ensure publication of scientific papers in English as a mandatory component of defending the PhD thesis for all PhD programs.**

Besides, the rule specifies the requirements for the PhD thesis as follows: "report to the session the main provisions of his/her work and the obtained results, clearly establishing the relevance, scientific novelty, and practical value of the work". Based on the analysis of the PhD papers, interviews with the PhD students and alumni, it can be recommended to **ensure high quality of doctoral research by defining high standards for PhD publications.**

According to the SER and the interviews, doctoral supervisors are accountable for the quality, consistency, and effective implementation of the research components. To facilitate this, an academic workload scheme allocates 40 hours per year for doctoral thesis supervision and maintains a supervisor-to-doctoral student ratio of 1:3. This approach ensures that supervisors have sufficient time and resources to provide high-quality guidance and support to their doctoral students. According to SER, to further enhance the supervision process, the HEI has developed questionnaires for doctoral students to provide feedback on their supervision experience. During the interviews the PhD candidates acknowledged the support undertaken by their thesis supervisors, but they also admitted that since the evaluation process is not mandatory, they are not engaged in the evaluating processes.

It is desirable that there exists a mechanism within the HEI that encourage Doctoral students to evaluate their supervisors.

The university's regulatory rule for the evaluation and defense of doctoral theses includes provisions for appealing decisions related to dissertation assessments and defenses. Dissertation Council in each faculty handle appeals from students who contest their dissertation outcomes. PhD candidates can submit a formal appeal if they believe their dissertation was not assessed fairly. The appeal must be based on specific grounds, such as procedural errors or biases in the assessment process. Upon receiving an appeal, the Dissertation Council or an independent committee reviews the case. This review involves re-evaluating the dissertation and the assessment process to ensure fairness and adherence to established criteria. The outcome of the appeal is communicated to the applicant. If the appeal is upheld, the necessary corrective actions, such as re-assessment or a new defense opportunity, are implemented.

Since 2018, the university has taken significant steps to establish better standards for doctoral research. For instance, a doctoral program in Applied Economics and Food Technology were accredited recently. Similarly, an accredited joint doctoral program in Education, implemented in collaboration with Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, and Kutaisi Akaki Tsereteli State University, contributes to the establishment of high standards in doctoral education. These efforts contribute to the fact that the doctoral programs at TESAU have significant potential to enhance opportunities and provide high-quality doctoral research, reinforcing the university's commitment to academic excellence and contributing to the development of the strategic fields identified by the university.

The interviews and documentation revealed that the HEI collaborates with various economic agents through memorandums to facilitate research in agriculture, environmental sustainability, and tourism. Partnerships with companies like "Shukhman Wines Georgia" LLC and "Twins Winery" LLC support agricultural studies, while collaborations with the Caucasus Environmental Network (CENN) and financial backing from USAID and local banks promote sustainability initiatives and scientific projects. Additionally, a memorandum with the Georgian Tourism Association enhances tourism research, addressing post-pandemic challenges and contributing to regional development.

Evidences/indicators

- *Scientific-research strategy - fundamental and applied scientific research focused on institutional development*
- *Scientific-research/creative activity projects*
- *The regulatory rule for the evaluation and defense of doctoral theses*
- *Regulations of the Dissertation Councils of Faculties*
- *Agreements signed with international colleagues*
- *Site visits and interviews*

Recommendations:

6.1.1. Further advance research capabilities, increase the productivity of research publications, and integrate research outcomes into the educational process. This involves enhancing international

collaborations, securing additional funding for research projects, and implementing new standards for doctoral programs and research publications.

6.1.2. Ensure high-quality doctoral research and publication by mandating that all PhD candidates publish scientific papers in English in high-ranking international journals with an ISSN code and an international editorial council (or scientific committee) as a prerequisite for defending their PhD thesis.

6.1.3. Elaborate a mechanism to encourage Doctoral students evaluate their supervisors.

Suggestions:

- Elaborate an efficient mechanism for evaluation PhD theses by international reviewers.

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

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

6.2. Research Support and Internationalisation

- 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

TESAU supports research activities and has improved different support mechanisms in the reporting period. Financial support of the research activities has increased, as from the budget of 35 000 GEL in 2018, the budget for research activities is equal to total of 180 000 GEL, including 125 000 GEL for research projects, 16 000 GEL for research activities and 45 000 GEL for additional research activities. Therefore, the progress of institution in terms of financial support of research activities should be commended, and based on the SER, share of research funding is planned to increase by 2030. University funds research projects implemented at university, and based on the SER and interviews, university has defined priority areas, which are: Agrarian field, Tourism and education. However, how the research priorities are translated in priority funding of projects, or the budget allocated to them is not clear, as for example, only budget for research in Agrarian field is higher than of the other priority, or non-priority fields (e.g. in the priority field, Tourism, budget for research projects in 20 000 GEL, including donation from the "Bank of Georgia", the same budget is allocated to Caucasian studies, which is not a priority field, or Humanitarian field). While this topic was addressed during interviews, representatives of different schools mentioned that the priorities are not tied to funding specific school, or research area. The existing mechanisms for research funding are fair and transparent, the regulations are public and accessible.

The institution has a strategy for attracting young scientists, which became of special focus for institution since previous authorization, based on the SER and interviews. Institution aims to support young scientists and provide them with a platform for development, provision of support mechanisms and networking opportunities. The activities carried out by the university resulted in decreasing the mean age from 65 to 50 in the Agrarian field.

University also ensures institutional support for staff in terms of preparing research grant proposals, through specially designated office, which is responsible for capacity-building of staff, provision of trainings and awareness-raising activities. The office implements trainings for staff on Horizon Europe projects preparation and submission and two proposals were submitted for funding. There are areas for improvement in terms of staff's individual support, which is described in detail in the standard component 6.3.

SER includes information on staff participation in international conferences, which is still low and needs further support. Staff mobility information, provided additionally, include information on the

ERASMUS+ exchange or capacity-building projects' activities. Information on supporting initiatives from staff includes funds allocated for participation in conferences, in 2023 it was equal to 3 889, which is higher than 1180 in 2022, but low considering the number of academic staff at TESAU and costs associated with international conferences. It should be also noted that funded costs of publication of articles in high impact journals is 0 since 2021, when it was 3162. It is acknowledged that the budget for publications and other research activities can be included in the overall budget for research provided above, however, the history of funding is an indicator for the activity.

TESAU supports inclusion of young scientists, MA and PhD students in research activities. According to the SER and interview results, during the reporting period, TESAU has lowered the mean age of the staff and has managed to increase involvement of MA and PhD students in research projects. Based on the statistics, since academic year 2021-2022 (3 academic years), 16 MA students were involved in 8 research projects. The list provided by the institution "projects implemented by involvement of young scientists and MA students" includes only named projects and respective numbers. Based on the number of MA and PhD students, TESAU needs to foster involvement of MA and PhD students in research projects.

During the visit, list of PhD students with international supervisors was requested. The information is provided based on faculties. E.g. on the PhD programme of applied economics, 4 international academic staff are thought to be potential supervisors of doctoral students. There is no information on the actual number of students being supervised. On the PhD programme in Education, 1 Student has international supervisor, 4 students have/had – international reviewer. 1 PhD student from the PhD programme in Alcoholic and Non-Alcoholic Beverages has the international co-supervisor, and 1 had international reviewer. The numbers are low and institution should foster support of inclusion of international supervisors in the process.

Internationalization of doctoral education still is a challenge for TESAU. Doctoral students do not have enough opportunities for international exposure – international co-supervisor, international opponent, international conferences, etc.

During interviews with doctoral students, English-language barrier was evident, which would also question effectiveness of work with international supervisor (if any). While asked about international opportunities, conferences, etc. PhD students named conferences in Georgia – other universities. Publication of English-language, international articles is also not compulsory in every field, the issue was already addressed in standard component 6.1. TESAU also holds scientific conference of PhD students and academics, which, based on the program, does not include international peers in organizational committee, or as speakers. Same for conference of BA and MA students. Based on the documents provided by TESAU, since 2019, 4 international conferences were held at university. The documents include the list of members of organizational committee, speakers and topics. One of the conferences, even though is named as international, does not include any international member either as the member of the organizational committee, or the speaker.

English-language competence is the challenge for internationalization of staff research activities as it is evident during interviews, and/or CVs. The effort of the institution should be noted, as English language classes/trainings are offered to the staff. Based on the attendance list of the courses provide by the institution, courses for levels beginner and pre-intermediate were offered to staff. The effort of TESAU should be continued and strengthened, as implementation of international research activities require sufficient level of English. Accordingly, the scientific research activity should be strengthened by young researchers being involved jointly with academic staff.

Commercialization of research and collaboration with industry is one of the priorities for TESAU. Even though it is a challenging area not only for TESAU, but in Georgian higher education system overall. TESAU has made a significant progress in terms of industry collaboration [sharing research results and](#) knowledge with local wine makers and creating expression of interest by German wine industry on certain varieties of local vineyards that are the subject of research at TESAU. During the interview with employers, the panel had a fruitful discussion regarding opportunities for commercialization of research results that can enhance the role of the university in the region, during which opportunities of exploiting the capacity of TESAU research laboratories (e.g., soil, wine) to providing scientific laboratory analysis services in regional industries, as the University is the only place in the region with such capacity. Increasing commercialization of research activities is one of the strategic priority areas for TESAU, and

therefore the University must elaborate an integrated plan (scientific, business, legal, staff awareness, etc.) on how to achieve this strategic priority.
Evidences/indicators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The list of projects implemented with the involvement of young scientists and MA students</i> • <i>List of international staff involved in PhD supervision</i> • <i>List of staff participating in the English language trainings</i> • <i>SER</i> • <i>Funding of staff initiatives</i> • <i>Interview results</i> • <i>Web-page of TESAU</i>
Recommendations: <p>6.2.1. Increase the level of involvement of international professors in the process of supervising/co-supervising doctoral students.</p> <p>6.2.2 Ensure admission of doctoral students with sufficient level of English to conduct international scientific activities to ensure achievement of the learning outcomes and support internationalization of the doctoral education – English-language publications, participation in international (English-language conferences and overall communication with the scientific community on English. Ideally, the English language competency level can be increased to C1 by the end of their doctoral studies, or at least, the requirement of B2 at entrance should be monitored and safeguarded more closely.</p> <p>6.2.3 Further support academic staff to increase their level of English language proficiency, as without sufficient number of academics with relevant level of English, internationalization of research activities will remain a challenge. Intensify efforts to attract young researchers that could work in collaboration with the academic/scientific staff.</p> <p>6.2.4 Increase international opportunities available for PhD students, or academic staff at TESAU.</p> <p>6.2.5 Ensure staff is well informed on the research strategy of TESAU and how one's activities can contribute to the priorities, like internationalization or commercialization Elaborate an integrated plan (scientific, business, legal, staff awareness, etc.) on how to achieve these strategic priorities.</p>
Suggestions:
Best Practices (if applicable):
Evaluation <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
6.3. Evaluation of Research Activities
HEI has a system for evaluating and analysing the quality of research/creative-arts activities, and the productivity of scientific-research units and academic/scientific staff.
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements <p>TESAU has developed a system for evaluating and analyzing quality of research activities, and scientific productivity, which is implemented, followed by implementation of reaction mechanisms, closing cycle of evaluation. The institution also works to continuously improve the methodology itself. Existing methodology for evaluation of research productivity is the updated (year 2019) version of the 2017-2018 document. The major change is that the components of the evaluation are grouped in 5 categories.</p> <p>However, based on the analysis of existing practice and experience of TESAU in terms of the research activity evaluation, there are several ways the institution can improve in the area of research activity evaluation.</p>

Firstly, TESAU has developed minimum requirements for the staff in terms of research activities and their reports are evaluated based on whether the staff meets the minimum threshold. There are reaction mechanisms for the staff who did not meet the requirements, and all of them are negative.

With TESAU's research activities needing further support and development, the help and development should be offered to the staff as well. For the staff members, not meeting the requirements set by regulation, development activities, based on their individual needs should be offered and only after development activities are offered to the staff, other mechanisms should be implemented.

The issue was addressed during interviews as well. The institution's position is that staff is offered development activities regularly. However, the offered trainings, as based on the study of the list of trainings offered to staff are more "ad-hoc" and not offering individualized approaches to the need of staff. A mechanism, tool, regulation as the part of the reaction mechanisms for evaluation will better serve the purpose described above.

The second area for improvement is closely tied to the above-described issue. Staff members, while discussing the mechanisms of evaluating scientific-research productivity, were not well informed on the procedure, or the follow-up/reaction procedures. It is essential to better inform the staff and involve them in the full cycle of the process.

Also, it is also not evident, neither from the documents, nor based on the interviews, how the individual evaluation of staff in terms of research productivity and quality, or of the institution, are used to further develop research quality. Namely, even if the most staff meet the requirements of the minimum threshold, there will still be a room for development. Feedback and communication with staff, as well as further, more detailed and comprehensive analysis, providing the insight on ways for improvement, and linked to the institution's research strategy must be at place.

TESAU also implements external evaluation of the quality of research activities in some of the fields. Namely, in the field of Agrarian research, the research carried out by the university is evaluated by the Georgian Academy of the ministry of Agriculture. The external evaluation is used to develop future activities.

The results of the evaluation of the scientific-research activities, as mentioned, are provided in the unified report, which, is not to be found on the webpage of the institution. While it might be internal document and institution might restrain from uploading it on the webpage, the information on research projects was still blank during the time of the visit. Therefore, TESAU does not regularly publishes reports on implemented research activities.

Evidences/indicators

- *Self-evaluation report*
- *Mechanism for evaluating scientific-research activities and its results*
- *Samples of evaluation of the scientific-research productivity*
- *Interview results*
- *Web-page of TESAU.*

Recommendations:

6.3.1 The reaction mechanisms on the staff not meeting the minimum requirements set by the rule for evaluating research mechanisms should start with the staff development activities, identifying the individual development needs/plan for the staff. This will promote development-oriented approach towards evaluation of research activities and will lead to the development of the quality of research activities.

6.3.2 It is recommended to further develop the mechanism for evaluating quality of research activities and research productivity of the university. It should provide more comprehensive, in-depth analysis, mapping the areas for development and relevant recommendations, not only the information on staff meeting or failing to meet the minimum requirements. The analysis should also be linked with the research strategy of the institution.

6.3.3 More explicit communication with staff in terms of research activities' evaluation is necessary, to ensure that first of all, staff are well aware of the existing mechanism and its follow-up procedures and on the other hand, how their activities are promoting research activities and strategy of the institution and how they can be further developed.

6.3.4 Ensure publicity of information on implemented research activities.
Suggestions:
Best Practices (if applicable):
Evaluation <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

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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>LEPL Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University has a significant amount of land and building resources, which include 88,435 m² of non-agricultural area and 160,000 m² of agricultural land. The university's buildings cover 18,438.95 m², with 4,394.77 m² dedicated to educational spaces, including two educational buildings and a library, and 14,044.18 m² of auxiliary areas. The total area is sufficient considering the number of students at the university. The university refurbished some parts of the university building in recent years and construction works of a new campus are still undergoing. However, the analysis reveals several deficiencies (outlined below) that hinder the university's ability to fully achieve its mission and the goals stated in its Mission Statement.</p> <p>All areas are clean and very well kept. The divided sanitary units including a unit for students with special needs, are constantly supplied with hot and cold water, sanitary and hygienic norms are observed and provided with continuous lighting and ventilation. The space is provided with a central heating system. Air-conditioning system is installed in the certain areas. Fire equipment is located on each floor of the building, in visible areas, with detailed instruction of use, and evacuation doors are marked properly.</p> <p>Modern teaching methods require updated classrooms with advanced technological support, research labs, and collaborative spaces for supporting students learning, and ensuring competitive graduates. While the panel appreciates progress in refurbishment works that the university has undertaken recently the university buildings are still far from modern, lacking essential infrastructure such as dedicated rooms for PhD students, private offices for academic staff (one of the critical areas for supporting high-quality education and research opportunities). The university has agricultural land for the program of the Viticulture-Enology program but lacks essential infrastructure around this land, such as basic amenities like restrooms and shelters, which are necessary for students who spend long hours in the vineyards. Modern teaching in other fields requires updated laboratories, technology-enhanced classrooms, and specialized equipment. For instance, the Business Administration program would</p>

benefit from simulation labs and business incubators, while the Teacher Training program needs model classrooms equipped with the latest educational technology.

The university has outdoor area which has a potential of becoming a recreational space but currently it is not well-maintained and exhibits slightly wild and untidy appearance (with no benches around, walkways with cracks due to lack of maintenance). Indoors recreation area is limited to a small cafeteria space on the ground floor which can accommodate up to 10 students. The ground floor could be well used as innovative learning area for students where they could engage collaboratively in learning. The strategic development plan mentions modernizing computers but does not provide details on the number of computers or associated costs, nor does it address the need for innovative teaching spaces.

There are no dedicated rooms for PhD students, who number around 20, nor do academic staff have their own offices. This lack of private workspaces hampers research productivity and the ability to adequately conduct in-depth study and/or mentoring and supervision sessions. Dedicated areas for PhD students and academic staff are crucial for fostering a research-driven academic environment.

The university has installed a ramp at the back entrance of the university but there is no entrance door with even surface, and of enough width fitting the wheelchair. An adapted environment for special needs at a university entails modifications and accommodations that ensure that not only students, but the faculty, and staff with disabilities can access and participate fully in all aspects of university life. This includes physical adaptations like ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and adjustable desks, as well as technological supports such as screen readers, hearing aids, and accessible digital resources (if needed). Social inclusion is also crucial, with adapted sports programs, accessible recreational facilities, and inclusive campus events. Unfortunately, these essential adaptations are currently absent at TESAU, particularly highlighted by the lack of an accessible library for individuals with special needs.

The university representatives mentioned that there are no students with special needs, but this approach fails to recognize that the absence of special needs students and staff may be due to the lack of accessible facilities and support services, which can deter potential students and staff from enrolling or seeking employment. Moreover, accessibility is a fundamental right and ensuring an inclusive environment is essential for fostering diversity and equality. By proactively creating an accessible and inclusive environment, the university can attract a broader range of students and staff and fulfill its commitment to providing equitable educational and employment opportunities for all.

Evidences/indicators

- *TESAU Self Evaluation Report*
- *Visit and review of facilities*

Recommendations:

7.1.1 Invest in basic infrastructure around the vineyards, including restrooms, shelters, and storage facilities. This will improve the learning environment for students in this program.

7.1.2 Update classrooms and other teaching spaces with modern technology and equipment specific to each program's needs. For example, create simulation labs for Business Administration and model classrooms for Teacher Training.

7.1.3 Allocate dedicated rooms for PhD students and private offices for academic staff. This will enhance research productivity and provide a conducive environment for academic work.

7.1.4 Specify the number of computers and other technological upgrades planned during the next strategic development cycle, along with associated costs. Additionally, include plans for development of modern outdoor/indoor recreational spaces and innovative teaching areas to foster a collaborative and engaging learning environment. This includes creating areas for group work, and informal learning spaces.

7.1.5 Upgrade restrooms to be accessible, with wide doorways, grab bars, and sufficient space for maneuvering wheelchairs. Provide single-occupancy restrooms for privacy and ease of use.

7.1.6 Develop adapted sports programs and ensure that student clubs, organizations, and campus events are inclusive and held in accessible locations, with accommodations such as sign language interpreters and captioning as needed.

Suggestions:

- Prioritize the refurbishment of the student dormitory and the professor housing. This will provide better support for students from rural areas and attract international faculty, enhancing the university's academic profile (envisaged by strategic development plan).

Best Practices (if applicable):**Evaluation**

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

7.2. Library Resources

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

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

The HEI library supports educational and research activities of the university. The library is dedicated to continuously improving its services, resources, and infrastructure to meet the needs of students and staff. The university library operates under the guidance of Georgian legislation, the university charter, and library regulations. The institution ensures the library functionality by providing necessary material and technical support, developing and maintaining library work processes. The library is located in a separate, two-story building within the TESAU campus, designed to support library services through various spaces: library lobby, workspaces with necessary equipment; assembly hall with 150 seats for group work, meetings, and events. Additional amenities include a wardrobe, an electrical kiosk, a lunchroom, and bathrooms. The second floor is equipped with a large reading hall, designated workspaces for library staff, and isolated rooms designed for both individual and teamwork. Students and staff can access an information-computer center, complete with internet-connected computers, alongside the head librarian's office and a bookstore. It should be noted that the library has a rich and unique resources of Georgian literature of the previous centuries and rare manuscripts. The subscription area on this floor facilitates the circulation of library materials. Currently the second floor is not accessible for persons with special needs; library personnel meets and service their request at the ground level of the building.

The library collection is diverse and includes necessary reference literature indicated in the course syllabi, scientific publications, textbooks, and specialized corners for various fields, such as: Professional Development of Teachers; NATO Information, UN Modeling; European Union; Disaster Risk Reduction. University students have access to a broad spectrum of information from the library.

It should be noted that from 2018 to 2023, the library budget increased, funding rose from 18,400 GEL in 2018 to 72,872 GEL in 2023. The library also collaborates with other higher education institutions and scientific foundations enriching its collection. According to presented documentation and the site visit it can be concluded that though the **library bears all materials indicated in the course syllabi, the study resources need to be updated.**

Students can borrow books available in multiple copies for varying durations, while reserved lecture materials are offered for short-term loans to support specific coursework. Policies are in place to manage the timely return of borrowed items and handle replacements if necessary.

The library's information-computer center provides users with computers connected to the internet and assistance from knowledgeable staff in accessing electronic databases and locating necessary information. The library uses an integrated library system (EVERGREEN) to manage its catalog, which includes printed and electronic resources. The catalog is accessible online and through the university's internal system, ensuring easy access for students and staff. The library subscribes to various databases, including EBSCO Food Science Source and Hospitality & Tourism Complete, HEINONLINE law database, ScienceDirect, and Elsevier's ScienceDirect® and Scopus®; Cambridge Journals Online; SAGE Journals; Oxford e-books, thanks to its membership in the EIFL consortium.

Students and staff at the university have access to international electronic library databases across all fields of study. These databases are available on any computer connected to the Internet, whether in the library or elsewhere on the university premises. External access is specifically available for the EBSCO and HEINONLINE databases. According to 2023 data, TESAU ranks second in Georgia for active use of EBSCO databases. The SER and materials provided indicate that database usage statistics are quite high. For instance, the 2023 Database Usage Report shows 1,608 requests for the Food Science Source Database and 1,364 requests for the Hospitality & Tourism Complete Database.

This extensive access ensures that TESAU's academic community can engage with the most recent worldwide research and resources. During the visit and interviews the library staff demonstrated proper competence in managing the library, the resources, to provide assistance by using international library databases. Additionally, the library offers trainings to its users for accessing electronic databases. The library staff participates in national and international library events, to foster professional development for its staff and enhancing library services, thus ensuring that the library's services are relevant.

TESAU has several initiatives planned to further improve its library services, such as expanding library's resources, acquiring additional electronic databases focused on priority areas, and providing more working rooms within the reading hall to foster a collaborative learning environment. There are also plans to create a seasonal media library around the library building, offering an innovative space for users to engage with media resources.

Evidences/indicators

- *Documentation confirming ownership of the book collection*
- *Electronic catalog available on the webpage <http://tesau.edu.ge/biblioteka/literaturis-eleqtronuli-sadziebeli>*
- *Documentation confirming involvement in the international electronic library network*
- *Statistics tracking the usage of electronic library databases*
- *Site visit and interviews*

Recommendations:

7.2.1 Upgrade the library facilities to be easily accessible by persons with special needs.

7.2.2 Intensify efforts to enrich the library resources especially in areas that relate to the priorities of the University

Suggestions:

Best Practices (if applicable):

Evaluation

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

7.3 Information Resources

- 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

TESAU has an up-to-date information technology management and infrastructure in place which is compliant with business processes of the university and supports the successful implementation of

teaching process. Electronic services and electronic management systems are implemented and mechanisms for their constant improvement are in place.

IT infrastructure is accessible to students and staff except the computers in laboratories during scheduled classes. Information systems are accessible both in campus and remotely except certain scientific bases that are accessible only through the campus intranet.

The university has an official web-page which serves communication and information functions, contains contact and other useful information, including the mission of TESAU, its activities, structure, catalogue of educational programs, enrolment criteria, expected learning outcomes and qualifications to be granted, procedures for teaching-learning and assessment, administrative/academic/scientific staff, library electronic catalogue, regulation documents, strategic development plans, ongoing and implemented research (results), accessible services, employment opportunities. All this information is in Georgian. The website has summary content in English. There are no annual reports, financial reports, basic statistics comprehensive annual reports.

Moreover, as mentioned in 3.3 and 5.1 information on HEI's website has not been updated or added (indictively: description of programs, the applicant's handbook, the academic calendar, the full information about the activities of certain services,).

To promote and enhance the quality of university activities, various e-services and electronic management systems have been implemented:

- Unified document circulation system (eflow.emis.ge) facilitating university documentation traffic, accounting, and management procedures, conforming to the university's work structure and processes, and ensuring permanent and stable operation.
- Electronic education management system (tunnels.tesau.edu.ge/ea.tesau.edu.ge) facilitating the management of the university's educational process, providing access to administrative and academic personnel, as well as students' information data, based on the university's educational structure and procedures, and available on the principle of permanent and stable operation.
- Electronic services system (moodle.tesau.edu.ge) facilitating the use of modern educational activities and resources in the university's educational process for students and academic staff, including "Turnitin" for plagiarism checking of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral theses.
- Library management system (tesau.edu.ge/biblioteka) ensures the quality and efficiency of using library resources and services for university staff and students. Operates with the principle of permanent and stable operation.

The document Rules for the administration of electronic services describes the procedures that ensure the smooth operation of the electronic services. Interview with the IT administrator informed the panel that data secure and protection is outsourced to a company responsible for maintaining weekly backup of the data in the cloud. This minimizes the risk of data loss, however a rolling in house backup can further mitigate risks.

Evidences/indicators

- *SER*
- *Unified document circulation system* www.eflow.emis.ge
- *Electronic education management system* www.tunnels.tesau.edu.ge/ea.tesau.edu.ge
- *Electronic services system* www.moodle.tesau.edu.ge
- *Library management system* www.tesau.edu.ge/biblioteka

Recommendations:

7.3.1 It is recommended that the TESAU website be kept up to date and information is complete (according to narrative part of this substandard and also 3.3 and 5.1) and accessible to English language speakers as well, in view of TESAU's international ambitions

Suggestions:

- Consider maintaining a daily data backup on a rolling weekly basis

Best Practices (if applicable):**Evaluation**

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

7.4 Financial Resources

- Allocation of financial resources described in the budget of HEI is economically achievable
- Financial standing of HEI ensures performance of activities described in strategic and mid-term action plans
- 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

The main financial plan of the institution is a consolidated budget which is composed of the two parts income and expenditure. TeSau presented the 2024 detailed budget, along with summaries of financial data for the period 2018 to 2023 that show the dynamics of the financial situation. Tuition fees -paid by students themselves (almost 1/3 of the total fee income), as well as through state-program funding grants and support for socially vulnerable students - constitute the primary revenue stream (ranging from 86.4% in 2018 to 73.9% in 2024). The University is active in pursuing additional funds from various foundations and organizations such as the Gudavadze-Patarkatsishvili Foundation, Environmental Agency, and Green Scholarships, on an annual basis, besides the state scholarships. During the interview with employers the panel was also informed that the Bank of Georgia committed funding to finance tuition fees for excellent and socially vulnerable students. The university itself awards a state scholarship to students with high academic performance. In 2023, the scholarship for each student increased from 150 GEL to 300 GEL per month.

Funds from research and development grants show a significant increase from 2021 onwards, being almost 3 times larger in 2024 than the corresponding amounts in 2018 and currently account for a 13% of total income derived from all sources in 2024, somehow lower from the previous two years, perhaps because certain international projects have completed, although a large number of proposals is still under consideration for funding from EU and other sources.

Almost half of the budget is allocated to salaries and remuneration for academic, administrative, invited staff and other persons employed under labour contracts. Investments in fixed assets including buildings and machinery and equipment (uninterrupted electrical supply, computers, optical devices, furniture, etc,) and library book stock and other resources) amount to over 1 million GEL out of which 206 thousand GEL (3.5% of total expenses) for library resources. Other expenses aim to improving the working environment, including utilities costs, safety and hygiene, etc.

TESAU supports research activities and has improved different support mechanisms in the reporting period. Financial support of the research activities has increased, as from the budget of 35 000 GEL in 2018, the budget for research activities is equal to total of 180 000 GEL, including 125 000 GEL for research projects, 16 000 GEL for research activities and 45 000 GEL for additional research activities.

Through funding obtained via international projects, TeSeU promotes the mobility of employees and students to foreign universities, with the number of participants increasing annually.

The budget formation includes formation and approval stages. The Head of Administration oversees the budget planning before it gets approved by the Representatives Council. Representative council is also responsible for approving actions that relate to the execution of the budget through the year. Administrative units and Faculties provide input for the budget planning through their contribution to strategic and action plans. The allocation of financial resources is generally based on the priorities outlined in the Strategic Development Plan.

However, it is not clear who prioritises the expenditures in the budget and what data decision makers consider when planning the budget and strategy of the institution. For example, enhancing research

activities and internationalization and improving academic staff skills in English language and research proposal writing is essential according to the strategic plan, yet no explicit budget lines for research laboratory equipment exist – probably related costs are included in “other machinery and equipment” or other budget lines. Only 15,000 GEL are allocated in total to “*Staff training-retraining, qualification raising and internship expenses*”, “*expenses for financing research and development activities - 180000 gel*” is included as a note “*in rest of the expenses incurred for other goods and services*”, not as a special budget line.

Overall, the funds available are sufficient to support the operation of the University under present conditions; however, it may not be sufficient to support the ambitious planning for the coming years that focus on increasing internationalization, strengthening and commercialization of research activities, renovation of buildings, etc. The panel asked to see the forecast of the budget for 2025 which is the first year of the new strategic planning period, during the meeting with representatives of the Financial-Material resources management service but it was informed that the University is obliged to submit the forecast for the 2025 budget to the ministry in July 2024, and therefore not available at the time of the visit.

The University should pay special attention to the distinct difference of two forms of budget. The one presented is according to the format required by accounting rules for public organizations. Although this is the efficient way for accountants and audit purposes, it lacks the managerial aspects that enable prioritization of expenses, monitoring of the action plan, and effective management of resources within the structure of the University. For example: i) Faculties (and possibly programmes) must now the amounts allocated to them for their laboratories, research projects, international activities, scientific activities of their academic staff, acquisition of book or other library resources, etc. this way, they plan accordingly and the execution of those activities can be monitored, so that, allocation of the resources can be optimized to achieve overall efficiency; obviously this will increase accountability and responsibility of actions at faculty and program level. ii) A rolling 3-year forecast is needed to reflect the developments foreseen according to the strategic and action plans in terms of programs, student enrolment, infrastructure and facilities, scientific and social activities so that they depict a financial picture of a development roadmap.

Finally, when the panel asked why the HEI has not requested a financial audit by eligible auditor/audit company, the answer given by the staff of the Financial Material Resources management unit was that such an audit is not necessary since the Ministry of Education is responsible for approving the annual budget and approves the report on budget execution.

Evidences/indicators

- *TESAU 2024 budget*
- *TESAU budget dynamics 2018-2023*
- *TESAU Strategic and Action plans*
- *Interview with Rector and Chief Administrator*
- *Interview with Academic Council and Representative Council*
- *Interview with Head of Financial and Material Resources Management*

Recommendations:

7.4.1 Develop a managerial oriented budget that provides allocation of funds to faculties related to corresponding development plans, and separate sub-budgets for major Research & Development projects

7.4.2 Develop 3-year rolling budget forecasts that reflect the development of the TESAU according to Strategic action plan.

7.4.3 Ensure allocation of more funds to activities related to increasing internationalization, staff development, strengthening the cooperation with employers and alumni.

7.4.4 Provide funds for the adaption of the library space as proposed in 7.2

Suggestions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Consider the allocation of budget at faculty level
Best Practices (if applicable):
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