



განათლების ხარისხის განვითარების ეროვნული ცენტრი
NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

Higher Education Institution Authorisation Experts' Final Report LLC Free Academy of Tbilisi

Expert Panel Members

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Members:

Ekaterine Natsvlishvili, Higher Education Expert, Professor, LLC European University, Georgia

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Tbilisi
2024

Authorisation Report Resume

General information on the educational institution

LLC "Free Academy of Tbilisi" has a rich history, dating back to its establishment in 1996. Originally known as the University of International Relations, it received a license from the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Georgia in its founding year. Over time, it underwent several important developments:

- In 2007, the University of International Relations obtained institutional accreditation for a 5-year period.
- In 2012, the successor higher education institution, known as "Georgia," received authorization for another 5 years.
- By 2018, the institution was granted authorization for a 6-year period by the Higher Education Institutions Authorization Council.
- In 2019, the institution underwent rebranding and adopted the name "LLC Free Academy of Tbilisi." This rebranding also involved changes in strategy, tactics, and branding.

The Free Academy of Tbilisi currently operates two schools: the School of Business Administration and the School of Social Sciences and Law. Within these schools, a total of eight accredited programmes are accredited:

1. Undergraduate Educational Programme in Business Administration;
2. Undergraduate Educational Programme in Psychology;
3. Undergraduate Law Education Programme;
4. Georgian Language Training 60-Credit Programme for Ethnic Minorities;
5. Teacher Training Educational Programme for Elementary Level (Georgian language and literature, mathematics, natural science - I to IV classes);
6. Teacher Training Educational Programme Elementary Level (I to VI Grade) Mathematics;
7. Georgian as a Second/Foreign Language Teacher Training Programme (Primary-Basic-Secondary level);
8. English-language business administration undergraduate programme.

Currently, Academy has 223 active (as it was reported in the SER) and 117 students with suspended status across all years of study. The majority of students are Georgian students. Institution has 130 staff: 65 academic staff, 37 invited staff involved in teaching and 28 administrative and support staff. Currently Academy has authorization to recruit 300 students but requested within the Self Evaluation Report that this should be increased to 900.

At present the status of Free Academy of Tbilisi is a "College", but the institution has applied in 2024 for permission to acquire the status of the "Teaching university, however, a change was made in the legislation and there are only 2 types of institutions (university and college). "Teaching universities" will be "Universities". Also, the main goal of the Free Academy of Tbilisi is integration into the European space.

As stated in SAR "the priority of the Free Academy of Tbilisi is the development of fundamental and applied research, the introduction of innovative education, the implementation of joint research".

The academy now occupies a modern infrastructure located in the heart of Tbilisi, specifically on Jurkha Nadiradze Street N461.

The Academy has made progress since the last authorization and underwent successful evaluation within the framework of planned monitoring, during which the final report of the group of experts on authorization of higher educational institutions was prepared at the end 2023. According to the conclusion, it was confirmed that Free Academy of Tbilisi has achieved full compliance with all seven standards of authorization.

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

Background of the review

Georgian Law on Higher Education requires all higher education institutions to undergo an authorization process once every six years, in order to ensure meeting of standards necessary for the implementation of appropriate activities in order to issue an education certificate recognised by the State.

The decision with regard to authorisation is made by the Authorisation Council for Higher Education Institutions.

The goal of authorization is to promote quality development educational activities at HEIs and to ensure student centered learning environment. During the authorization process all the activities of a higher education institution is assessed, including its resources, regulations, carried out, current and planned activities, results achieved and feasibility to achieve intended goals (relevant planned activities, mechanisms for their implementation, and allocated resources).

Review Process

The 2024 review of Free Academy of Tbilisi was conducted in line with the Authorisation process described in the Charter on Authorization of Educational Institutions, approved by the order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia, and in accordance with the Authorisation standards.

The review panel for the authorization of Free Academy of Tbilisi was appointed by the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement.

On 12 of July, 2024 the review panel received Academy's self-evaluation report (SER). On 23 July 2024, EQE organized an online panel meeting. The key points of focus included the procedures for conducting a review and authorization standards. Subsequently, the review panel participated in one additional online meeting to discuss the content of the SER and to prepare for the site visit.

Self-assessment report

Free Academy of Tbilisi established internal working group to prepare the SER already in 2023. The working group was tasked not only with analyzing and preparing a complete self-evaluation report, but also with bringing the structure of the Academy into compliance with the authorization standards. Throughout this process, a lot of Academy's staff members were actively involved. Two international partners were also involved to internally assess the institution's compliance with the authorization standards and presentation of the conclusion. The SER clearly lists the responsibilities of the working group.

During the authorization preparation period, Free Academy of Tbilisi conducted meetings with employers and partner organizations to discuss the institution's development. The insights

and recommendations shared during these meetings were incorporated into the Academy's action plan.

At a later stage, the report was finalised and sent to EQE.

The review panel found the document informative and complete. However, the self-critical analysis was relatively concise. Additionally, the panel asked to present a number of documents that would support implementation of Academy's activities. The documents were received till the end of the site visit.

Site visit

The expert panel had an opportunity to visit the Free Academy of Tbilisi during 12th – 14th of August 2024. Each of the panel experts was responsible for review of 1 or 2 of the Standards for which they had expertise and agreed to take a lead role in the review of these Standards. All members were invited to review all standards and supporting documents and prepared areas of enquiry for all aspects of the site visit.

Agenda of the site visit was agreed prior to the visit, and it included meetings with representatives of the relevant stakeholder groups: the management, academic and administrative staff, students, graduates and employers. All members of the expert panel asked questions to Academy representatives. At the end of the visit the informal feedback was given to the Free Academy of Tbilisi.

Overview of the HEI's compliance with standards

Summary of Recommendations

Standard 1.

- When refining a mission statement for the Free Academy of Tbilisi, consider the possibility of more explicitly incorporating research and third mission activities into the mission statement.
- Consider emphasizing what sets the institution apart. Explore options to more concretely define the institution's distinctive characteristics within the mission statement. These could be related to specialized programs, interdisciplinary approaches, or a commitment to social impact.
- The Panel recommends in the upcoming planning period to focus on increase of research productivity and its quality.
- The Panel recommends that the Academy addresses the issue of its impact on society development in its Strategy to provide a framework for its core activities, and define or identify a small number of indicators for measuring its impact on society development. It is also encouraged to consider benchmarking with other higher educations in terms of impact on society development.
- The Panel recommends that the Academy define clearly a set of data necessary to assess its impact on society development and put in place a mechanism for collection and analysis of such data.
- Enrich the strategic planning process by engaging more actively external stakeholders.

Standard 2.

- It is recommended to revise the Senate's functions and duties to clearly define its role in supporting scientific research.

- Considering this responsibility, it would be both logical and transparent to formally integrate the Assembly/Council of founders into the institutional structure.
- It is crucial to update all relevant documents to accurately reflect the current situation as promptly as possible.
- The institution should clearly document and make transparent the process for electing Senate members by establishing formal guidelines for selection and election, including eligibility criteria and the method of election. It is also essential to inform all students and all staff about Senate membership opportunities and responsibilities. Moreover, all Senate members, not just the chair, should receive comprehensive training on their roles and key governance issues.
- It is recommended that FTA revises the regulations governing the Department of Financial and Material Resources to clearly delineate the responsibilities between the senior specialist, who also serves as the department head, and the other specialist.
- It is necessary to strengthen the culture of cooperation between structural units.
- It is recommended that all structural units, particularly relatively new staff members, develop an understanding of their responsibilities.
- It is recommended to do a detail execution plan of the international activities in Strategic/action plan.
- The International relations service should have more information on the institution's strategic and action plans (especially international activities), internationalization processes taking place in the institution. In addition, the institution should assess the effectiveness of internationalization processes.
- The Quality management service should activate the implementation of the quality assurance mechanisms described in the quality policy. In addition, QA office must fully support the full execution of the PDCA cycle, with special emphasis on staff workload.
- The institution should strongly support the involvement of graduates in the internal quality assurance process.
- The Quality management service should ensure that annual reports sent to all structural units as well as feedback from them is systematic.
- The Academy shall inform the staff regarding the staff evaluation process. It should be also ensured that all staff are involved in the assessment process.
- In case of increasing student quota, it is recommended that the higher education institution provide a detailed rationale and supporting evidence for increasing the student quota. This should include an analysis of current and projected resource capacity, student demand, faculty availability, and the institution's ability to maintain educational quality at the proposed enrolment level. By substantiating the need for this increase, the institution can ensure that the decision is well-founded and aligned with its strategic goals.
- It is recommended that the academy should carefully develop a policy to set staff benchmarks.
- It is recommended that the Academy revises its policy to specify the acceptable percentage of text resemblance, rather than plagiarism is acceptable.

Standard 3.

- It is recommended to increase the external stakeholder participation of graduates and employers in the process of program planning and development.
- The Academy should ensure the implementation of the regulations in practice: the academic and invited staff should be informed of how to evaluate the degree of difficulty of the syllabus of the training course in relation to the group's capabilities after each semester. As a result of the analysis of these data, a periodic review should be carried out in order to enhance the educational programmes and improve the learning results.

Standard 4.

- It is recommended that affiliated academic staff fully understand their rights and responsibilities.
- It is recommended that affiliated academic staff should be involved in decision-making processes;
- It is recommended, provision of relevant training related to the work field for development of all of your staff members.
- It is recommended that the Academy have to support its staff for participation in events that are organised abroad, which is especially relevant for research activities.
- It is recommended that the Academy timely update the staffing chart, both internally and in the QMS base, so that staffing in other institutions is clear;
- It is recommended to develop a specific methodology for determining the number of staff in relation to students, depending on the programmes.

Standard 5.

- It is recommended to create a special page on the web-site for foreign degree seekers to have information publicly regarding the admission process and admission criteria.
- It is recommended to train relevant personnel regarding international students' enrolment procedure.
- It is recommended to offer exchange mobility programs to student.
- It is recommended to replace social media for academic purposes - increase the usage of Student's Base.

Standard 6.

- In order to change Academy's status as a "college" into the status of "university", institutional support for scientific research activities should be paid special attention and the emphasis on research should be strengthened in the strategy, as well as in everyday activities.
- In elaborating the new Research Development Strategy and Action Plan for the upcoming period there should be a higher focus on research priorities of the institution to ensure the implementation of the Mission and Strategic Goals of the Academy, and development of educational programmes.
- In order to involve students into research projects, Academy should achieve high level of research of its affiliated academic staff that would felicitated further integration of research results into the educational process.
- Academy should clarify further the meaning of research activities in HEI, making emphasis on high level publications, to focus on research projects that are important for the Academy and are in line with strategic priorities.
- To ensure the scientific research activities of the Academy, increase opportunities of commercialization Research products and support for the development of educational programmes, institution should define and set research priorities in accordance with the fields, in which educational programmes are implemented.
- Ensure the effective implementation of the institution's new arrangements for evaluating the quality of research activity and the scientific productivity of staff.
- Increase budgeted for improving the research support system to ensure the adequate financial support for staff research activity and the institution's internationalization policy particularly in the field of R&D, and for promoting the development of fundamental research.

- For enhancing the research and scholarly activity and scientific-research productivity of affiliated staff Academy should develop a strategy, with clear and assessable targets, relevant action plan with achievable objectives and tasks for Scientific Research Center, as well as a clear procedure, with valid and measurable criteria for research projects selection and evaluation.
- Foster further internationalization of research by taking part in international networks and projects as only international partnership could boost research results and would encourage the academic staff to be more active in this respect.
- The procedure for the internal assessment of scientific research activities of an independent scientific research projects/units of the Academy should be in accordance with the international standards of the scientific research activities' assessment (such is participation of foreign assessors in the process of assessment, use of various forms of scientific bibliometrics, etc.).
- Consider whether the Strategic Development Plan and the four year Action Plan give sufficient attention to the target scientific/research activity, that should be relevant to the implemented cycles of educational program's (Master's level), and ensure that both documents provide an appropriate range of indicators for assessing the institution's and individual staff performance in this area.

Standard 7.

- It is recommended to install notifications/warnings on the walls that Video surveillance camera recording is in progress.
- It is recommended to increase the budget for scientific activities, internationalization policy and research support.

Summary of Suggestions

Standard 1.

- In elaborating the new strategic plan for the upcoming period there should be a higher focus on priorities of the institution.
- Develop a strategic and systemic approach on lifelong learning and integrate it into the internal quality assurance system.

Standard 2.

- Should there be a substantial increase in the number of students or staff, it may become necessary to re-establish the position of Deputy Rector.
- It is suggested to clearly outline all possible circumstances that would lead to the termination of a student member's authority on the school board, including situations such as a suspension of student status or upon graduation.
- Creation of an internationalization strategy may help FTA to support and control the execution of the internationalization activities.
- The Academy should conduct more activities among its academic staff and students to raise awareness of plagiarism detection program capabilities and strengthening skills to use "Turnitin" in real-world practice.
- The institution might regulate the issues of research ethics.
- It is suggested to include invited staff in the Code of Ethics (Article 20) and in the provision of the academy (Article 6, clause 6.1) along with the academic staff.
- Panel suggests introducing regulations for the usage of Artificial Intelligence tools.

Standard 3.

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Standard 4.

- In case the institution lacks additional financial resources to promote a larger number of staff, it would be more equitable to apply additional criteria to differentiate and select those who should be promoted.
- Regarding the personnel, it is advised that the established target marks should be presented more clearly.

Standard 5.

- It is suggested to remove the mandatory requirement for students to participate in surveys. Participation should be voluntary.

Standard 6.

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Standard 7.

- It is preferable to increase and organize the cafeteria space accordingly.
- It is preferable to draw a parking place with appropriate signs.
- Preferably to raise awareness of the usage of research-databases.

Opinion of the experts' team on the argumentative position of the university towards the draft report

On 20 November 2024 the panel has received Academy's comments and has finalized the report. The panel has carefully studied the comments on factual errors, however most of them did not result in amendments. Some of expert's comments regarding Academy's argumentative position:

- **Standard 1.** The position of the Academy is based on previous evaluations of strategic and action plans by external expert and evaluators in 2023. However, the panel had a task delegated by the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement and implemented evaluation in line with the Authorization Standards for Higher Education Institutions. The Academy did not question the recommendations of the panel, but only noted that previously current Standard was assessed to be "in compliance with the requirements". Therefore, the panel does not see the basis for changing its recommendations and assessment of Standard 1. In addition, it is worth considering the fact that the strategic and action plans of the Academy are valid until 2024, all this limited the assessment of the credibility of the Academy's future visions, (which should be the matter of their interest) as there was lack of material evidence.
- **Standard 2.** The argumentative letter mentions that expert group members artificially increased the number of recommendations and recommendations do not aim on the development of the institution. The panel though stresses that all recommendations are based on very detailed argumentation, which is described in the text of the report in an extremely detailed manner. To provide further clarity and context, we can present once more, very detailed argumentation supporting these recommendations during the oral hearing. We hope this will address any concerns and underline the rationale behind each recommendation.
- **Standard 3.** The recommendation regarding standard 3 as indicated in the argumentative position, is mainly based on interview results which is one of the evidences.
- **Standard 4.** The two recommendations issued regarding Standard 4 are primarily

based on the results of interviews. Accordingly, the feedback received from the institution does not change the recommendations and they remain the same.

- **Standard 5.** The recommendations for this Standard were made based on interview results, web page and facility observation. Therefore, the panel considers them to be fair and evidence-based.
- **Standard 6.** No remarks for this Standard were in the Argumentative position of the Academy.
- **Standard 7.** The institution's reasoned position is general. It does not address the specific recommendation in a way that would lead to any changes.

Panels' responsibility is to ensure the integrity of the authorization process and provide constructive, objective input for the Academy's continuous improvement. It should be noted that the self-evaluation report and its annexes are not the only source of information for review. Results of the interviews, facility observation, study of web resources constitute the totality of the evidence and form an integral part of the assessment. Panel trusts that these recommendations will be carefully considered, as they are intended to support Academy in achieving its goals and maintaining excellence in higher education.

Summary of the Best Practices

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Summary Table of Compliance of HEI with Standards and Standard Components

	Standard	Compl ies wit h Req uire me nts	Subs tanti ally com plies with requi rements	Parti ally Com plies with Req uire ments	Does not Compl y with Requir ement s
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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2	Strategic development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Organisational structure and management of HEI	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.3	Observing principles of ethics and integrity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Educational Programmes	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.3	Assessment of learning outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Staff of the HEI	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.3	Information resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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. Nora Skaburskienė (Chair)



2. Ekaterine Natsvlishvili (member)



3. Mariam Ghambashidze (member)

4. Ia Mosashvili (member)

5. Nino Bogveradze (member - employer)

6. Natia Maghalashvili (member – student)

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

After rebranding in 2019 the Free Academy of Tbilisi (FTA) which also has brought fundamental changes to the strategy of the academy, a new mission was developed and approved in 2020. The Mission Statement of the academy is clearly formulated, it corresponds to Georgia's and European Higher Education goals and defines its role and place within higher education system and society. The mission of the institution is to promote learning and teaching, continuous education, personal, professional and harmonious development of the individual. The Academy is focused on preparing socially responsible highly qualified personnel in accordance with fundamental values and modern requirements for the labour market in the ever-changing digital age (SER, evidence N1). The mission is accessible on the Academy website <https://freeacademy.edu.ge/cms/en/page/2>

The mission was determined with the high involvement of the Academy community. Institution's academic staff, alumni and students expressed full support and understanding of the mission during the meetings.

The Academy has formulated and set the following goals for the implementation of its mission (SER, P. 15-16):

- to develop and develop higher educational programs not only at the bachelor's level, but also at the master's level; Also, to develop not only Georgian-language, but also English-language programs;
- Facilitate educational and research relations at the international level;
- to create mechanisms for academic staff development and scientific activity;
- To train national, regional and international labour market-oriented, competitive and highly qualified personnel.

In the SER the institution has stated that in the process of developing and implementing strategic plan they understood the institution's role and uniqueness (SER, P.4). However, the uniqueness is not fully reflected in the mission. It could be a topic for further discussions at the institution involving all stakeholders. In SER it was also stressed that the ultimate goal of Free Academy of Tbilisi is integration into European space (SER, P.4). Importance of internationalization was also emphasized throughout the site visit in the meetings with different stakeholders. The panel has observed the progress in this area of activities, but this aspect should be embedded in all spheres of activities, namely studies and research and all supporting processes and reflected in the mission and the vision of the institution.

All of institution's aspirations, such as becoming international institution, having a priority in development of research, changing the status into the university should form the basis for renewed mission that would allow distinguishing Academy from other and showing its uniqueness and potential. The current mission statement clearly emphasizes the teaching process; however, the lack of explicit focus on research and the third mission of a higher education institution suggests an opportunity for further development of the mission statement. A well-crafted mission statement provides direction, while values guide staff behavior in alignment with that mission.

<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission • Strategic Development Plan 2018-2024 • Self-Evaluation Report • Webpage of the institution • Interviews during the Site Visit
<p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When refining a mission statement for the Free Academy of Tbilisi, consider the possibility of more explicitly incorporating research and third mission activities into the mission statement. • Consider emphasizing what sets the institution apart. Explore options to more concretely define the institution's distinctive characteristics within the mission statement. These could be related to specialized programs, interdisciplinary approaches, or a commitment to social impact.
<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>-</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>-</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>1.2 Strategic Development</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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.
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>During the evaluation period Free Academy of Tbilisi has paid a lot of attention to development of strategic documents – mission, strategic and annual plans that would support further development of the institution. Currently, the Academy operates within the remits of 2018-2024 Strategic development plan and 2022-2024 action plan (Evidence No. 2). Both plans were aligned with the mission of the Institution. The work that is being undertaken by the management of the institution and its staff is commendable.</p> <p>For more comprehensive process the institution has developed Strategic planning methodology (Evidence No 4) which foresees 3 main stages of the process:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) development and sharing of the mission, vision and values; 2) formation of strategic goals and objectives, development of an action plan and 3) monitoring mechanisms and response to monitoring results. <p>The methodology foresees that strategic planning should involve all academic personnel of the academy, students, employers, and other stakeholders. During the interviews it was evident that internal stakeholders (management, academic and administrative staff,</p>

students) were engaged in the process, while external stakeholders did not confirm their participation or deeper knowledge of the strategic goals of the Academy.

Both planning documents were developed after rebranding of the Academy and demonstrate institutions' areas of development. The Strategic development plan and action plan cover 5 strategic goals:

- Development and implementation of quality assurance system;
- Optimization, development and implementation of educational programs;
- planning of the contingent of students, their attraction and provision of constant support;
- Implementation of internationalization policy and research support;
- Improvement of material and information resources.

SER clearly describes the process of planning as well as lists monitoring mechanisms (SER, P. 17-18).

The Academy Action plan follows the five strategic goals listed in the Strategic Development plan. It outlines both qualitative and quantitative indicators of success. Budget allocations are associated with each activity as well as responsible structure or person.

When analysing strategic and action plans the panel found out that there is a lack of attention to widening the research activities. Currently, more attention is given to development of the system of assessment and analysis of scientific productivity of academic and invited staff rather to the increase of research productivity and its quality. It is very important to focus more on research area as the Academy has applied for "University" status.

After careful analysis of strategic documents, the panel concludes that the Strategy does not address explicitly the issue of expected impact of Academy's on the development of the society. It does not provide an institutional policy framework within which the three core and any other activities of the institution would fit together and be geared towards achieving impact. Although during the site visit the panel heard about different activities that are offered to the society (trainings, workshops, imitation of national entrance exams, etc.). It is also clear that there is a lack of experience in evaluating the scope of the progress and the efficiency of the impact. The panel recommends that this area of activities should receive equal attention in strategic planning and that the Academy continue to develop the system which would help to monitor the actions and memorialize the achieved results.

In regards to the monitoring, the Strategic Planning Methodology clearly describes the process, however the SER does not provide concrete details of implementation of monitoring procedure (the names of the members of the monitoring group, dates of implementation, examples of recent recommendations and changes). During the interviews the panel heard more about this and can confirm that the institution regularly evaluates implementation of strategic and action plans and uses evaluation results for further improvement of activities.

Evidences/indicators

- Strategic Planning Methodology
- Strategic Development Plan 2018-2024
- Self-Evaluation Report
- Interviews during the Site Visit

Recommendations:

- The Panel recommends in the upcoming planning period to focus on increase of research productivity and its quality.
- The Panel recommends that the Academy addresses the issue of its impact on society development in its Strategy to provide a framework for its core activities, and define or identify a small number of indicators for measuring its impact on society

<p>development. It is also encouraged to consider benchmarking with other higher educations in terms of impact on society development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Panel recommends that the Academy define clearly a set of data necessary to assess its impact on society development and put in place a mechanism for collection and analysis of such data. • Enrich the strategic planning process by engaging more actively external stakeholders.
<p>Suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In elaborating the new strategic plan for the upcoming period there should be a higher focus on priorities of the institution. • Develop a strategic and systemic approach on lifelong learning and integrate it into the internal quality assurance system.
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>-</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p>Please mark the checkbox, which best describes the HEI's compliance with this specific component of the standard</p> <p> <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>

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

<p>2.1 Organisational Structure and Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Organisational structure of HEI ensures implementation of goals and activities described in its strategic plan ○ Procedures for election/appointment of the management bodies of HEI are transparent, equitable, and in line with legislation ○ HEI's Leadership/Management body ensures effective management of the activities of the institution ○ Considering the mission and goals of HEI, leadership of the HEI supports international cooperation of the institution and the process of internationalisation.
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>The governing bodies of the Free Academy of Tbilisi are the Rector and the Senate, which is a governing link on one hierarchical level.</p> <p>According to the provision of the Senate, the Senate is a collegial body responsible for ensuring the educational, academic and scientific work of a higher educational institution and includes: the chairman of the Senate, the Rector, two academic staff represented by the school boards and one invited staff, 2 representative of the student self-government (7 members in total).</p>

The Senate is responsible for all processes in the Academy, including the approval of the mission, strategic/operational/business continuity plans, programs and syllabi, regulations of basic educational and structural units. The Senate is responsible for approving all regulatory documents, including the personnel management policy, internationalization policy, and approving the regulation of the educational process. The Senate approves the Academy's budget, determines the terms and conditions of employment of academic staff, methodology for determining the number of staff and students, etc. According to legal requirements, in addition to its educational and academic responsibilities, the Senate of the higher educational institution is also charged with overseeing scientific work. However, upon reviewing the document that outlines the functions and authorities of the Senate of the Academy, there is no explicit mention of its role in scientific work. During the site visit, when asked about the Senate's contribution to scientific activities, the expert panel was answered with two points: first, that the Senate had approved the provision of a scientific-research center, and second, that it monitors academic staffs' scientific productivity. Given that the Senate is responsible for approving the regulations of all structural units, the first point is not considered as strong indication of the Senate's active role in promoting scientific work. For further details on the monitoring of scientific productivity, please refer to Standard 6.

As previously noted, the Senate's provision indicates its involvement in scientific research activities. However, this was not confirmed during the document review. Additionally, interviews revealed that the Senate's engagement in scientific research activities is minimal. If the Academy has indeed assigned a role to the Senate in this area, it is essential to amend the Senate's functions and duties to explicitly outline its support for scientific research, similar to how its responsibilities are defined in other areas, such as administrative or academic matters. Furthermore, once these amendments are made, it is crucial that those responsible for scientific research activities, as well as Senate members, are informed of these changes.

In the personnel management rules, it is mentioned that the Rector is appointed by the Assembly/Council of founders. There is no information about the Assembly/Council of founders in the structure. Generally, the Assembly/Council of founders plays a significant role in the governance of the institution by appointing the Rector, which is a most important leadership position. Given this responsibility, it would be logical and transparent to include the Assembly/Council of founders as part of the formal institutional structure. Doing so would provide clarity regarding their role and authority within the organization, ensuring that all stakeholders understand their functions and the decision-making processes they are involved in.

The structural units of Free Academy of Tbilisi are: Quality management service; Legal Assurance Service; Human Resources Management Service; Public relations service; Financial and material resources service; Scientific - research center; Register production and information technology service; International Relations Service; Safety and Health Assurance Service; Examination center; Student/Alumni Support and Career Development Center; Library; Publishing house.

Structural units of the organizational structure are aligned with the institution's current operations. However, the expert group advises that if there is a significant increase in the number of students or staff, it may become necessary to reinstate the position of Deputy rector. The Rector herself confirmed that in case of an increase in the institutions' scopes, the issue of changing the structure may arise. At present, the Rector is effectively managing all aspects of the institution's activities, and her human, professional, and time resources are sufficient to meet the institution's needs.

As mentioned, the governing bodies of the Academy are: Rector and Senate. At the school level - the governing body is the School board.

The Rector is appointed by the assembly/council of founders (Evidence No. 16: Personnel management rules).

Regarding the Senate: The self-evaluation document submitted by the Academy states that the Senate is chaired by the Rector. However, during the interview, it was revealed that the Rector is not currently appointed as the chair. It was clarified during the site visit that the Rector is no longer chairing the Senate, as elections held in 2024 resulted in the head of Business administration program being appointed as the Senate chair. According to the Senate, these elections took place in February 2024, by which time SER had already been sent to NCEQE. However, NCEQE received the self-evaluation report in May 2024. When the expert group requested documentation confirming the approval of the new Senate, no official order regarding the Senate's updated membership was provided. It is crucial to update all relevant documents to accurately reflect the current situation as promptly as possible. (The same was revealed during the review process of the action plan, when the Deputy rector is mentioned as one of the responsible structural units, while this position has been cancelled at this stage. Deputy rector is also mentioned in the provision of students' self-governance).

Information about the election of Senate members is not found in the presented documentation. Information is found only on the election of the Chairmen of the Senate. In particular, the Chairman of the Senate is elected at the first session of the Senate, although it is not specified on what principle (by majority vote, secret ballot, etc.). When the expert panel asked questions about the selection process for Senate members, the response given was that individuals were offered by FTA to be a part of the Senate. The expert group was unable to obtain any further information regarding the selection criteria or process.

The Senate's provision states that the Senate includes two students who are represented by the student self-government, but it does not specify how these students are selected. The Student Self-Government Regulations also contain a general note affirming the authority of the Student Self-Government to appoint two student members to the Senate. During interviews with representatives from the student self-government and a student member of the Senate, the election process details were confirmed, although these details are not clearly outlined in the documentation. Furthermore, the majority of students interviewed were unaware of who their representatives in the Senate were or the criteria by which these two students were elected.

Additionally, interviews with other structural units, as well as academic and visiting staff, confirmed that they were not informed about the availability of Senate membership or the extent to which they could participate. In addition, it should be noted that some of the members of the Senate did not have information about how long they will have the status of a member of the Senate or in which cases their status as members of the Senate would be terminated. Academic staff representative members did not have information about such important issues as affiliation, or even the meaning of the term itself. The only person having information in different directions was the Chair of the Senate.

According to Article 5, Clause 5.6 of the provision of the Senate, the chairman of the Senate convenes the session of the Senate. Chairmen ensures that the members are informed about the date and agenda of the session - draws up the minutes of the session. With this record, the chairperson of the session draws up the minutes of the session. According to paragraph 5.8 of the same article, the session is documented in minutes, which are signed by both the chairman and the secretary of the session. According to the mentioned point, the meeting has a secretary (During the interview, the chairmen also confirmed) although the document does not specify who occupies the position of the secretary of the Senate or how he/she is chosen.

It is recommended that the process for electing Senate members be clearly documented and be transparent. To address the current gaps, the institution should establish and formalize a clear set of guidelines for the selection and election of Senate members. This should include specifying the criteria for eligibility, the method of election (e.g., majority vote, secret ballot). Additionally, it is crucial to ensure that all students and staff, including

academic, visiting, and administrative personnel, are adequately informed about the opportunities for Senate membership and the associated responsibilities. Furthermore, it is recommended that all Senate members, not just the Chair, receive comprehensive training on their roles, the duration of their terms, and critical governance issues such as affiliation for example. This would ensure that all members are well-prepared to contribute effectively to the Senate's work and that the governance process is both inclusive and transparent.

As for the school board: School board members are selected for a period of 4 years. The School board consists of the dean, deputy dean, head of the programs, affiliated academic staff and students.

The dean chairs the School board, which is elected by the majority of votes of the composition of the board. The secretary of the School board is elected by the members of the School board. All members, except for students, automatically become members of the council. Student members are elected by students once in every 4 years, through elections by students of the school, by secret ballot. Elections are organized by the student self-government. The authority of a student member of the school council is terminated only in case of termination of the student status. It is suggested to clearly outline all possible circumstances that would lead to the termination of a student member's authority on the school council, including situations such as a suspension of student status or upon graduation.

The functions and responsibilities of the structural units are determined by the provision of the Academy and the provision of individual structural units. Personnel qualification requirements are defined in Appendix 1 of the Personnel Management Rule. Functions and duties are clearly defined (A single case is an exception) and correspond to the purpose of the structural unit. An exception is the Department of Financial and Material Resources, where the senior specialist, who also serves as the Head of the department (as he mentioned during the interview), and one other specialist share the same functions. TTA will need to amend the regulations to clearly separate their responsibilities. This adjustment will enhance the transparency of daily operations and make the evaluation process more criteria-based.

Regarding the coordination of work, several areas for improvement were identified. For instance, a gap exists between the International Service and the Quality Assurance Office. According to the International Service, the effectiveness of internationalization efforts is evaluated by the Quality Assurance Service. However, this was not confirmed by the Quality Assurance Service during the site visit, which stated that such evaluations are not within its scope of responsibilities. Similarly, a disconnect was noted between the HR Service and the Quality Assurance Service. While HR monitors staff performance, the Quality Assurance Service does not verify these results. It is necessary to strengthen the culture of cooperation between structural units by promoting open communication (encourage regular communication between different units through meetings, joint projects, etc.) or implement joint training programs (organize joint training sessions or workshops that involve multiple structural units) or promote other activities that would increase collaborative culture.

The experts asked questions to the structural units' representatives regarding their functions and duties; however, the representatives did not have complete information about these aspects. Many employees mentioned that they were newly appointed to their positions, with most having been in their roles for 5-6 months prior to the visit. Despite this, it is expected that they would have acquired a detailed understanding of their responsibilities within this timeframe.

As previously mentioned, the Rector is fully informed of all processes within FTA, encompassing academic, scientific, and administrative matters. It was confirmed that she bases her decisions on QA and other structural unit's analyses and maintains close communication with both staff and students.

Regarding the Senate, the decision-making process for scientific activities has already been outlined in the report. However, since the Senate is less informed about these processes, it

is difficult to assert that the decisions made by the management body are fully effective. The experts have already provided a recommendation on this issue in the preceding text.

The Academy has established clear mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness of management and an evaluation system. These mechanisms include several stages: assessment planning, intermediate assessment, final assessment, analysis of assessment results, and the development of appropriate conclusions and recommendations, followed by feedback. However, it has been noted that not all structural units are fully aware of this process. Further details will be provided in the report under the relevant substandard.

Rules for document processing were presented to the panel during the site visit. The structural unit responsible for the document proceedings in the Academy is the Human Resources Management Service. From April 2024 a new electronic document circulation system - (eFlow) has been implemented in the Academy. Until 2023, FTA used the electronic document processing system - ELMA BPM. Although the Academy already uses the eFlow electronic document processing system, in the area for improvement (SER, Standard 2), it was indicated the following: "Tbilisi Free Academy plans to change the learning process management program "Ini Group" and implement "Eflow"". However, during the interview, it was clarified that there was an error in the formulation of the improvement area. The Academy does not intend to change the INI group but rather to diversify the purchased package. Information was confirmed by the director of the INI group, who provided detailed information about the upcoming updates that will be implemented on the platform starting in September 2024. These enhancements are expected to significantly add value to the Academy's operations and electronic services, which should be evaluated positively.

The Register and Information Technology Service is responsible for maintaining the register of educational institutions, as outlined in the service's provisions. During the site visit, the expert panel reviewed the system and observed how documents are tracked within it. An area for improvement that was evident is the electronic database of staff workloads, which is not fully filled. More information regarding the electronic database of the staff workloads will be described in the relevant sub-standard.

The Academy has developed "Business Continuity Management Mechanisms and Action Plan". The document describes the possible risks, their probability and impact range, the responsible entity/person, the action and the identity of the assessor. The document describes the risks that may affect the operation of the institution. During the interviews, it was confirmed that the staff has information about the process mentioned and the document itself, which was supported by relevant examples from their experience.

The international relations service is responsible for promoting internationalization and deepening international relations, which is confirmed by the regulations of the same service.

In the self-evaluation report, it is mentioned that the Free Academy of Tbilisi achieved significant successes in terms of internationalization during the current period. They noted that the network of international partner universities has been expanded (this fact was proven by documents), the involvement of academic staff and students in the process of international mobility has been introduced and implemented, and an English language program has been developed. Developing a program in English language is a statement that the academy is trying to gain its place in the international arena. In SER it is mentioned that the Academy has become a member of important research organizations, student organizations and other establishments. An international expert, Professor Milan Pol of Masaryk University of the Czech Republic, was actively involved in the process of preparing the authorization self-evaluation report, which can be considered a good practice.

It should be noted that a very large part of those present at the interviews noted that the institution now pays more attention to the English language than before, which is a positive trend in the context of internationalization.

It should be also noted that in a number of documents of the Academy (strategic and action plans, internationalization policy, vision, self-evaluation document), the deepening of international cooperation and experience sharing is emphasized, striving for the institutionalization of internationalization, enrollment of foreign students in the international program, however, the expert panel was not able to determine the aspect of internationalization in the Academy's mission.

The internationalization component is integrated into the strategic development plan, which includes 5 strategic goals and one of the goals is N4: "The implementation of internationalization policy and research support". In the strategic development plan for 2018-2024 (last updated on 09.01.2024) the panel has found the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of the Academy on internationalization.

The Academy noted in its strategic plan that the creation of a strategic development plan for internationalization (which will be aimed at the institutionalization of internationalization) has an important role to play. The Academy stated that the purpose of this process is to create mobility and exchange opportunities between partners in higher education institutions outside the country. Points 4.1 and 4.2 defined in the 4th objective of the strategic plan relate to the implementation of the present goal, namely:

Task 4.1. Sharing and implementation of international experience;

Activity: 4.1.1. Deepening partnership relations/holding joint international scientific conferences;

Activity: 4.1.2. Carrying out activities in accordance with the internationalization policy

Task: 4.2. implementation of international cooperation mechanisms.

Activity 4.2.1. strengthening relations with foreign higher educational institutions

Activity: 4.2.2. cooperation with an international expert

The current action plan presents a broad and collective overview of activities related to internationalization. While it references the internationalization policy for additional details, the policy itself outlines a range of activities, including international exchanges, joint studies and research, creation of joint programs, and various cultural, sports, and educational initiatives. However, it lacks specific timelines and detailed execution plans for these activities. To enhance the effectiveness of the action plan, it is recommended to make improvements such as specifying timelines (include clear and precise timelines for each international activity to ensure timely implementation and accountability) and detail execution plans. Creation of internationalization strategy may help FTA in this process.

According to the internationalization policy, the main priorities of internationalization are classified as follows:

- **For students** - developing exchange programs, developing joint programs, developing English-language programs for the purpose of enrolling foreign students, sending Georgian students to study abroad, having an English language component in the programs.
- **For academic staff** - development of exchange programs, development of joint programs, involvement of foreign professors in programs, joint research work and participation in international conferences
- **To conduct the educational process** - planning the educational process of students, recognition of acquired knowledge, international recognition of education documents, issues of education quality assessment, taking into account international standards and recommendations of foreign experts when developing programs, conducting the educational process taking into account the European model.
- **International cooperation and internationalization** - cooperation with various foreign higher educational institutions.

In the process of determining priorities, the International Relations Office confirmed its close cooperation with the Rector.

Interviewees consistently indicated that internationalization is a primary priority for the institution. They acknowledged, however, that this area requires improvement and expressed a commitment to enhancing internationalization efforts. During the visit, the expert group requested information on exchange programs and related participation statistics; however, the institution was unable to provide the requested documentation. Although there is a reference to the exchange program in the SER evidence section, the provided online link leads to exchange programs of the University of Business and Technology rather than those of the Academy.

According to the action plan, one of the activities involves "implementing activities in accordance with the internationalization policy," with a performance indicator of organizing lectures, meetings, or workshops at least ten times a year. While checking this information during the interviews, the relevant structural unit did not have information about the mentioned activity. In the future, the representative of international office will aim to conduct information sessions rather than trainings or lectures.

Certain areas for improvement were identified in relation to the admission process for international students. During the interview, it was revealed that the International Service has less information regarding the process of enrolling international students. Whereas the institution has already obtained accreditation for the English language programme and studies will start this year.

In addition, it should be noted that the International Service does not assess the effectiveness of internationalization. As mentioned in the text, the head of the international service referred us to the quality assurance service, which, according to her statement, does not include evaluation of the effectiveness of internationalization in functions.

It is worth noting that in the interviews with nearly all the structural units, which had a long institutional memory, it was confirmed that the internationalization activities are particularly increased and supported by the management of the institution.

Evidences/indicators

- Academy Structure
- Provisions/Functions of Structural Units
- Provision of the Academy - rules and procedures for election/appointment in management bodies
- Free Academy of Tbilisi Strategic Development Plan (2018-2024)
- Free Academy of Tbilisi action plan (2022-2024)
- Internal regulations of Free Academy of Tbilisi
- Internationalization Policy
- Memorandums
- business continuity management mechanisms and action plan
- Interviews

Recommendations:

- It is recommended to revise the Senate's functions and duties to clearly define its role in supporting scientific research.
- Considering this responsibility, it would be both logical and transparent to formally integrate the Assembly/Council of founders into the institutional structure.
- It is crucial to update all relevant documents to accurately reflect the current situation as promptly as possible.
- The institution should clearly document and make transparent the process for electing Senate members by establishing formal guidelines for selection and election, including eligibility criteria and the method of election. It is also essential to inform all students and all staff about Senate membership opportunities and responsibilities. Moreover, all

<p>Senate members, not just the chair, should receive comprehensive training on their roles and key governance issues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is recommended that FTA revises the regulations governing the Department of Financial and Material Resources to clearly delineate the responsibilities between the senior specialist, who also serves as the department head, and the other specialist. • It is necessary to strengthen the culture of cooperation between structural units. • It is recommended that all structural units, particularly relatively new staff members, develop an understanding of their responsibilities. • It is recommended to do a detail execution plan of the international activities in Strategic/action plan. • The International relations service should have more information on the institution's strategic and action plans (especially international activities), internationalization processes taking place in the institution. In addition, the institution should assess the effectiveness of internationalization processes.
<p>Suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should there be a substantial increase in the number of students or staff, it may become necessary to re-establish the position of Deputy Rector. • It is suggested to clearly outline all possible circumstances that would lead to the termination of a student member's authority on the school board, including situations such as a suspension of student status or upon graduation. • Creation of an internationalization strategy may help FTA to support and control the execution of the internationalization activities.
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>-</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements
<p>2.2 Internal Quality Assurance Mechanisms</p> <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.
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>A quality assurance unit – a Quality management service - was created in order to systematically assess the educational and scientific-research work of the Free Academy of Tbilisi, as well as to raise the qualifications of the staff. The QA unit is responsible for the effective operation of quality management mechanisms and system development. Based on quality management mechanisms (Evidence No. 9), all structural units of the academy are responsible for introducing the quality culture in the academy. As for the evaluation process, based on the same document, the quality service involves both students and graduates, as well as employers in the evaluation process. The expert panel confirmed that student involvement in the quality assurance process is systematic, as evidenced by the results of regular surveys. The consistency of these surveys was also validated by the academic staff, who provided several specific examples of their active participation in fostering a culture of quality assurance. Notably, interviews with the deans revealed a strong awareness of quality</p>

assurance mechanisms and practices, indicating their significant involvement in the process. However, the involvement of graduates appears limited, as surveys with alumni is not conducted annually, hindering their ability to confirm close collaboration with the institution in continuous quality improvement. On the other hand, employer engagement was positively affirmed, with several examples provided to illustrate their commitment to maintaining high standards in quality assurance.

The Academy conducts surveys with students regarding material, information and human resources. Based on the self-assessment, based on the results of the survey, meetings and discussions are systematically held for the purpose of improving the educational programs, perfecting the teaching methods and methodology, and providing the library with the latest literature and learning materials.

When discussing the resources supporting internal quality mechanisms and its effective implementation, it is important to note that the Quality management service is staffed by only one person. The workload of this individual exceeds what can reasonably be managed by a single person. Additionally, she also serves as the head of a program. Further details on human resources will be provided in Standard 4. Regarding information resources supporting quality assurance, the new package offered by the Ini Group is expected to significantly enhance the effectiveness of these processes. The institution's material resources also support internal quality mechanisms, as confirmed during the site visit. Additional information regarding information and material resources will be given under the standard 7.

Quality management mechanisms include internal and external quality assessment. External evaluation mechanisms include authorization-accreditation evaluations, areas for improvement identified by experts, areas for improvement identified by potential employers, practice facilities, and external evaluators. As for internal evaluation, this process includes the following elements:

- a. Educational programme/programmes and learning - evaluation of the quality of teaching;
- b. Evaluation of teaching and scientific activity of academic and visiting personnel;
- c. Evaluation of learning resources and student support;
- d. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the organization's management;
- e. Annual report of quality management service and application of results.

Based on SER, the Academy conducts a continuous process of evaluation of the programmes, personnel, resources, in which all stakeholders are involved. Assessment tools include attendance at lectures and seminars, survey, collegial attendance, comparison of programmes with international counterparts, monitoring of academic performance, etc. During the site-visit, peer-review form was presented, however, during the interviews not all academic personal, none of the invited personal and none of the students and graduates confirmed the attendance of QA staff/head of the programmes during the lectures. One of the quality assurance mechanisms is focus groups with students, although only one student recalled this experience. Nearly all graduates confirmed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Quality assurance service monitored the punctuality of lecture start times.

As was provided in SER, the Quality management service submits an annual report to the structural units once a year, on which it receives reports on areas for improvement from the structural units. After this process, the report is being submitted to the Rector. However, majority of the structural units could not recall that this process ever happened. The only person who confirmed its systematic nature was the Rector of FTA, who gave the panel detailed information how this process works and shared experiences how certain issues have been improved.

A number of directions were improved as a result of the assessment (SER, Standard 2): in particular, academic, free and recreational zones were organized, the library reading room of the Academy was renovated, meetings, trainings, consultations and workshops were held by

the Student/Alumni Support and Career Development Center in order to popularize the principle of lifelong learning, students were involved in the activities of the Academy.

Based on self-assessment and policy documents, the Academy monitors students' academic performance. Monitoring is carried out on the basis of statistical data of academic records, which are derived from the sources of final exams. The normal distribution of natural sets is modelled by the Gaussian distribution. As a result of the analysis of these data, a periodic review is carried out in order to perfect the educational programmes and improve the learning results. This information was confirmed by different interviewees. Registry and information technology service representatives are involved in the mentioned process.

The Academy has developed a system of staff performance evaluation. The Academy has academic, invited, administrative and support staff.

Evaluation of academic and invited staff. The Quality management service conducts evaluation of the academic and invited staff implementing the educational programmes, which is carried out through surveys of target groups and observation of the educational process. According to the documents, representatives of the Quality management service attend lectures (which was not confirmed during the interviews), evaluate academic and invited staff and the progress of the educational process in accordance with pre-established procedures and criteria. The staff is informed in advance and explained the content and need of the evaluation before the evaluation. The assessment is conducted every semester and can be done fully or selectively. It is mentioned in the documentation that if during the assessment it was revealed that there was a deviation from the syllabus, less activity of students, inadequate methods and criteria for assessing students' knowledge, etc, in this case, after the evaluation is completed, the Quality management service writes a report and develops recommendations to be forwarded to the programme manager/co-manager to correct the deficiency. At the same time, the Quality management service asks the head of the programme to find out the probable causes of the violations. The head of the programme is obliged to study the possible causes of violations and inconsistencies and to create mechanisms for their timely elimination.

Based on the Quality Management Mechanisms document (Evidence No. 9, P.6), quality management assessment tools for academic and invited staff are:

- Evaluation by the School Dean/Deputy Dean
- Evaluation by the head of the programme
- Evaluation by the head of the examination center
- Evaluation by the student
- Evaluation of the study course by the student
- Annual report of scientific research activities.

It is worth noting that the Academy has established a procedure for evaluating the scientific productivity of the staff. See detailed information under the Standard 6.

Evaluation of administrative/support staff. Based on the document of quality management mechanisms (Article 9, Clause 2), the Academy has developed a satisfaction questionnaire for administrative staff to evaluate the effectiveness of management, which is conducted once a year. The report on the shortcomings of the structural units identified based on the survey is provided to the heads of the relevant structural units for further response.

The Academy has developed mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness of management and an evaluation system, which is clearly established. Management effectiveness monitoring mechanisms include several stages: assessment planning, intermediate assessment, final assessment, analysis of assessment results and development of appropriate conclusions and recommendations, assessment feedback.

One of the key areas identified for improvement is the evaluation of administrative staff. Many representatives from various structural units are unaware of the evaluation criteria or the frequency of evaluations. Additionally, it should be noted that some heads of the structural units have lack of information about the evaluation process and have not evaluated their staff.

(this does not apply to those employees who are newly appointed as the evaluation process itself has its own timeliness).

Another area for improvement relates to the full implementation of the PDCA cycle. As previously mentioned, while the HR department monitors staff performance within their workload, the QA Office does not review the outcomes of this monitoring or engage in the feedback process. It is crucial for the QA Office to have a comprehensive understanding of internal quality analysis results and the subsequent improvements to ensure a cohesive and effective quality management system. Additionally, some staff members had limited understanding of how the results of the quality assurance survey results were used. To address this, it is essential to strengthen the feedback mechanism in this area.

Free Academy of Tbilisi has developed a mechanism for planning the student quota. According to the documentation, the academy takes into account the following aspects: material-technical resource/practice implementation facility and human resources.

During the determination of the maximum number of students of the Academy, the compliance of the mentioned aspects with the following target benchmarks are determined:

- Number of professors (at least one professor or associate professor for 40 (forty) students);
- Material base (the marginal number of student seats is equal to or less than the number of seats in the auditoriums);
- Number of administration (at least one administrative staff per 50 (fifty) students);
- Technical base (at least 1 (one) computer per 25 (twenty-five) students).

The quota determined for the institution for the current period is 300 students, and the quota of students requested through the authorization process is 900 students. Attention should be paid to the fact that for the current period, the number of active students is 223, and the number of suspended students is 117. Considering the existing quota and the number of students with active status and the number of students with status suspension is quite high. However, no further information regarding this situation was available.

The expert panel inquired about the basis for determining the student quota of 900 and requested a discussion protocol (minutes of the meeting) for better understanding of the rationale behind this figure. This would have allowed for a more detailed examination of the decision to increase the quota and assured the experts that the institution had thoroughly considered this number. However, the requested document was not provided during the visit.

The institution's representatives explained that the high number of suspended students is due to their financial debts, which limits the academy's ability to admit the full number of students for new programs. Currently, seven programs are operational at the academy, and an application has been submitted for an eighth program at the master's level.

FTA has the necessary material and technical infrastructure to accommodate 900 students, as confirmed during the observation of material resources. Currently, two floors of the institution are rented out because there is no immediate need for their use, and this arrangement generates additional financial resources for the institution, which should be perceived positively. Should the student quota increase, the institution is prepared to meet the demand with its existing material and technical resources. However, it is important to ensure that other institutional processes are properly scaled to support 900 students, rather than the current 300. Further details on these considerations are provided under different standards in the conclusion.

Attention should be paid to the component of the target benchmarks. In particular, in the SER (SER, P. 10) in the data of the target benchmarks, there is a column where institution should write: 1. Current number of the staff; 2. Target Benchmark- meaning that institution should indicate the number of staff they target to have; 3. Estimated date of the achievement.

In the SER of Free Academy of Tbilisi, it is noted under the "estimated date of achievement" that all targets have already been met. If these benchmarks have indeed been already achieved, it reflects the current number of the staff and not a benchmark. Filling this part of the self-assessment as it is filled, causes ambiguity. See copied "Benchmark timetable" from the Self-assessment report.

	Actual benchmark	Target benchmark	Estimated date of reaching the target benchmark ⁸
Ratio of the academic and scientific staff to the total number of the administrative and support staff	3/1	4/1	has been achieved
Ratio of the academic and scientific staff to the total number of the staff	1/2	1/3	has been achieved
Ratio of the academic and scientific staff number to the number of invited staff	2/1	2/1	has been achieved
Ratio of the academic, scientific, invited staff number to the number of students	1/2	1/10	has been achieved
Ratio of the academic, scientific, invited staff number to the number of the higher educational programmes	12/1	15/1	has been achieved
Ratio of the administrative staff number to the number of students	1/9	1/20	has been achieved
Ratio of the affiliated staff number to the total number of academic and invited staff	1/4	1/5	has been achieved
Ratio of the affiliated staff number to the number of students	1/8	1/10	has been achieved

As it is presented, the actual number differs from the target benchmark. It means that Academy is aiming to change the current state of the staff number in future period. But as mentioned, in the estimated date of reaching the target benchmark, it is written that it has been already achieved. Additionally, the Academy should carefully develop a policy to set staff benchmarks, particularly considering their plans to increase the student quota, which will likely lead to significant changes in the current figures.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-evaluation report
- Quality assurance mechanisms and their evaluation system
- Management effectiveness monitoring mechanisms and evaluation system
- Report of quality management service - analysis of survey results
- Methodology for determining the number of students and academic/invited staff
- Provision of quality management service
- Quality management policy
- Methodology for conducting satisfaction research;
- Methodology of planning, development and development of educational programs
- Monitoring of students' academic performance
- Interviews

Recommendations:

- The Quality management service should activate the implementation of the quality assurance mechanisms described in the quality policy. In addition, QA office must fully support the full execution of the PDCA cycle, with special emphasis on staff workload;
- The institution should strongly support the involvement of graduates in the internal quality assurance process.
- The Quality management service should ensure that annual reports sent to all structural units as well as feedback from them is systematic.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Academy shall inform the staff regarding the staff evaluation process. It should be also ensured that all staff are involved in the assessment process. • In case of increasing student quota, it is recommended that the higher education institution provide a detailed rationale and supporting evidence for increasing the student quota. This should include an analysis of current and projected resource capacity, student demand, faculty availability, and the institution's ability to maintain educational quality at the proposed enrolment level. By substantiating the need for this increase, the institution can ensure that the decision is well-founded and aligned with its strategic goals. • It is recommended that the academy should carefully develop a policy to set staff benchmarks.
Suggestions: -
Best Practices (if applicable): -
Evaluation <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
2.3. Observing Principles of Ethics and Integrity
<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.
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements <p>Free Academy of Tbilisi has developed regulations and mechanisms that ensure compliance with the principles of ethics and integrity. The Academy has approved the code of ethics and norms of disciplinary responsibilities, which combines the formulation of ethical principles, values and behavior of the academic, guest, administrative, support staff and students of the Academy, as well as response mechanisms. The types of incentives are described in the same document. The document also defines the principles of integrity within the educational process and the standards of their protection. A disciplinary body - the Disciplinary Council - has been established in the Academy to review and respond to misconduct. The principles of ethics and integrity of the staff of the FTA are also defined by the Academy's bylaws. The bylaws determine the rules of conduct of the administration and academic staff on the territory of the institution, the principles of unwavering protection of obligations established by basic human rights, the standard of attitude towards students and the principles of academic freedom.</p> <p>Almost the full majority of the staff had information on the code of ethics, internal regulations, appeal mechanisms, incentive mechanisms, except for single exceptions. They mentioned that they are informed by their supervisors and the HR representative during the meeting and also via e-mail.</p> <p>In order to introduce mechanisms to detect and prevent plagiarism in educational and research activities, the use of plagiarism detection software - Turnitin has been implemented in the academy. The Student Code of Ethics defines the definitions of plagiarism/dishonest behavior by students and staff - specific steps and sanctions for responding to plagiarism.</p>

Plagiarism awareness is provided by courses in educational programmes that cover issues of academic integrity.

Prevention of plagiarism includes several aspects:

- Awareness of plagiarism at the stage of signing the contract with the student;
- Raising students' self-awareness within the academic writing course;
- Written assignments from the first year of teaching (abstract, essay, article, presentation, etc.);
- Organization of informational meetings regarding plagiarism;
- Organizing public meetings for students and academic staff about the possibilities of checking texts in the plagiarism detection program.

During the interviews, almost full majority of the respondents had information regarding plagiarism prevention and the prevention program - Turnitin. The only exception were students who indicated that they had searched for the appropriate programme themselves and checked their papers for plagiarism. The suggestion of the expert panel is to inform students more intensively in this direction. The students of the teacher training programme were the most informed about the mechanisms of plagiarism, as well as the internal processes of the Academy in general. However, based on results of interviews with staff, students, and graduates, the panel found that most respondents had heard a lot about the program, but are not experienced enough and had no clear understanding of how it works.

Allowing 20% plagiarism as it is stated in the code of ethics is generally not advisable, as plagiarism refers to the unethical practice of presenting someone else's work as one's own. Instead, the policy should clarify that up to 20% (or any range FTA decides) text resemblance is acceptable, accounting for common phrases, citations, or standardized language. It's crucial to distinguish between permissible text similarity and actual plagiarism. This change will ensure that the integrity of academic work is maintained.

Due to the fact that research has become a priority of the institution, a Scientific research center has been created, the institution is expanding, the suggestion of the expert group is that the institution might regulate the issues of research ethics.

In the Code of Ethics, where the mechanisms for avoiding plagiarism are written (Article 20), the regulation concerns only to the academic staff. As the Academy hires invited staff for academic and scientific purposes as well, it is necessary to amend the record to include invited staff as well.

Both document review and interviews confirmed that the institution respects the principles of academic freedom. When asked about the institution's strengths, several respondents highlighted the academic freedom component as a key advantage. This year, the institution has also planned a conference on artificial intelligence.

In the statute of the Academy (Article 27, Clause 27.1) it is determined that the staff is entitled to carry out teaching, research and publication of scientific works without interference. Also, within the framework of the educational programme, independently determine the content of the training course, learning methods and means

In the provision of the Academy (Article 6, clause 6.1) the principles of management of the academy is defined where information about academic freedom is stated: "academic freedom of academic staff and students". As the Academy hires invited staff for academic and scientific purposes as well, it is necessary to amend the record to include invited staff as well.

The Academy takes plagiarism issues into account. However, expansion of Artificial Intelligence tools makes institutions to take into account new dangers. Therefore, FTA should be ready to reflect the usage of artificial intelligence tools in its internal documents and clearly state on which conditions these tools could be used and how this should be made transparent.

Evidences/indicators

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Code of ethics and norms of disciplinary responsibility • Agreement on plagiarism (Turnitin) program • Internal regulations of Free Academy of Tbilisi • Interviews
Recommendations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is recommended that the Academy revises its policy to specify the acceptable percentage of text resemblance, rather than plagiarism is acceptable.
Suggestions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Academy should conduct more activities among its academic staff and students to raise awareness of plagiarism detection program capabilities and strengthening skills to use "Turnitin" in real-world practice. • The institution might regulate the issues of research ethics. • It is suggested to include invited staff in the Code of Ethics (Article 20) and in the provision of the academy (Article 6, clause 6.1) along with the academic staff. • Panel recommends introducing regulations for the usage of Artificial Intelligence tools.
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

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 accredited educational programmes of Free Academy of Tbilisi are grouped around two schools: the School of Business Administration and the School of Social Sciences and Law. Within these schools, the Academy implements 3 (three) undergraduate educational programmes, a teacher training educational programme in 3 (three) directions and an educational programme for training in the Georgian language.

Free Academy of Tbilisi has developed a Methodology for planning, designing and developing of educational programmes (Evidence No. 13), according to which the programme planning and development undergoes various steps. The programme is developed by the programme development group established under the order of the Academy's rector. The development group comprises of various stakeholders such as academic and invited staff, alumni, students, employers, field specialist as proved under the interviews with various panels. The developed educational programme is submitted for review to the Quality management service of the Academy, which verifies the compliance of the programme with the Academy's mission,

<p>strategic development and action plans. After the positive conclusion presented by the Quality management service, the programme is submitted to the relevant school board for review and approval. The programme approved by the School Board is submitted to the Academy Senate for final approval. The interview results showed that the process of programme planning, designing, and development is in general participatory and collaborative involving a number of key actors. However, it is recommended to increase the external participation of graduates and employers in this process.</p> <p>Academy has a system of programme development. Based on the surveys and interviews, quality assurance mechanisms, the Quality management service conducts the analyses and provides recommendations to the Senate. The interview results proved the active participation of academic and invited staff in this process, for example, the Data protection law was implemented in the Law program based on the recommendation of the academic staff, while the Innovation law was introduced in the programme on the initiative of the invited staff.</p> <p>Generally, it can be concluded that the programme planning, designing and development is a well-structured process being in line with the Academy's mission and based on the survey analyses conducted by the Quality management service. Although, the Academy provided the detailed Quality management service report for 2022-2023 years (Evidence No. 11) where among other aspects the analyses of satisfaction surveys with various stakeholders are presented, it is recommended for the Academy to conduct more detailed labor market research to consider its requirements and trends.</p> <p>Apart from regulating the programme planning, designing and development, the Academy has the established regulations for the programme annulment in order to give due consideration to students' legal interests and grant them an opportunity to smoothly complete the programme.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodology for Planning, Designing and Developing of Educational Programs • Quality Management Service Report for 2022-2023 years • Interviews • Educational Programmes • Regulation of the Learning Process document • Self-Evaluation Report
<p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is recommended to increase the external stakeholder participation of graduates and employers in the process of program planning and development.
<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>-</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>-</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>3.2 Structure and Content of Educational Programmes</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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

The Academy implements 3 (three) undergraduate educational programmes, a teacher training educational programme in 3 (three) directions and an educational programme for training in the Georgian language.

The structure of study programmes is up-to-date and reflects all aspects of the educational programmes. The programme components are in line with the Academy mission and follow a logical sequence. Programmes are aligned with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) guidelines and current Georgian legislation. The syllabi of compulsory and elective courses give clear information on the programmes and the number of ECTS/credit hours allocated per course.

Programme syllabus have been prepared in accordance with the instruction provided under the methodology for planning, designing and developing of educational programmes document providing the information on the course title, code, lecturer, learning hours, prerequisites for admission, objectives, learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods, lecture weeks, evaluation system, mandatory/basic literature and other educational materials.

Generally, the programme learning outcomes are clearly stated, learning outcomes for certain fields are based on field characteristics, are logically distributed and are in line with the level of higher education and qualification to be granted. The Academy utilizes various standard methods for measuring programme learning outcomes. The curriculum mapping determines the links between the mandatory courses and the learning outcomes thus providing the achievement of program learning outcomes as a whole.

The programmes offer students flexibility in the choice of elective courses. The process is implemented prior to the beginning of the semester through the student base program accessible by students from any computer connected to the Internet. Students are provided with the information about the mandatory and elective courses offered within the programme to make the choice within the maximum credits allowed in the current semester.

Teaching and learning methods used within the programmes as defined under the syllabus of the relevant programme course, generally reflect specifics of the field (the syllabuses of various courses provide different teaching and learning methods specific to the subject) and ensure achievement of learning outcomes of the programme.

Academy offers the individualized education programmes to students based on the students' needs/interests and academic readiness, thus ensuring their unhindered involvement into the educational process.

Each programme catalogue is accessible to the interested person and is published on the Academy's website www.freeacademy.edu.ge both in Georgian and English languages. The programme catalogue provides the information on the programme title, the prerequisite for admission, the qualification to be awarded, duration of study, the programme credits, the programme structure, programme compliance with the mission, the goals of the programme, programme learning outcomes, learning - teaching methods, the method of evaluation, etc. The programme catalogue is updated according to the changes made in the programme.

Evidences/indicators

- Methodology for Planning, Designing and Developing of Educational Programmes
- Course syllabi
- Interviews
- Educational Programmes
- Academy's webpage
- Self-Evaluation Report

Recommendations:
-
Suggestions:
-
Best Practices (if applicable):
-
Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements
3.3 Assessment of Learning Outcomes
HEI has law-compliant, transparent and fair system of learning outcomes assessment, which promotes the improvement of students' academic performance.
Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements <p>Academy has developed the Mechanisms for evaluating educational programme learning outcomes approved by the Senate (Evidence No. 13). The document describes in detail the methods used by the Academy for measuring programme learning outcomes.</p> <p>The Academy utilizes various standards (direct (student academic performance) and indirect (for example, student employment, various surveys)) methods for measuring programme learning outcomes.</p> <p>According to SER, the Academy has developed mechanisms for monitoring students' academic performance, which measures student achievement at the end of each semester. Within the framework of academic performance monitoring, information is collected on the level of academic performance of the contingent of students. Monitoring of academic performance is carried out based on statistical data of academic performance, which are derived from the sources of final exams. With this approach, lecturers evaluate the degree of difficulty of the syllabus of the training course in relation to the group's capabilities. As a result of the analysis of this data, a periodic review is carried out in order to enhance the educational programmes and improve the learning results. However, the interview results showed that this procedure does not work effectively in practice since apart from one invited lecturer, none of the academic or invited staff were aware of it.</p> <p>Every semester, Academy conducts an anonymous survey of students assessing course lecturers and course syllabus. The relevant surveys are provided to the lecturers thus assisting the improvement of the learning process. Although the surveys are mandatory, none of the students expressed any negativity, on the contrary, the majority of students indicated that they understand the significance of these surveys and it is not a simple formality for them.</p> <p>Assessment system ensures equal and fair approaches. The Academy operates a 100-point student evaluation system with the maximum total score of 100 and the minimum positive evaluation 51 points. In general, the assessment involves five types of positive evaluation: (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 evaluation: (FX) failed – 41-50 points indicating that the student needs to work more and is allowed to take the additional exam once in the current semester; (F) fail - 40 points and below indicates that the work is insufficient, and he/she must retake the course.</p>

<p>Evaluation forms, methods, components and criteria in each course are determined under the course syllabus and are placed in the electronic system which is accessible to each student. Apart from the information on evaluation determined under the syllabus, the students are provided with the relevant information by each lecturer in the first week of studies.</p> <p>Academy has developed a code of ethics and norms of disciplinary responsibility, and regulations of the examination centre available to all interested parties. These documents describe the effective mechanisms and procedures for assessment appealation system ensuring equal and fair approaches.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Educational Programmes • Mechanisms for Evaluating Educational Programme Learning Outcomes • Self-Evaluation Report • Surveys
<p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Academy should ensure the implementation of the regulations in practice: the academic and invited staff should be informed of how to evaluate the degree of difficulty of the syllabus of the training course in relation to the group's capabilities after each semester. As a result of the analysis of these data, a periodic review should be carried out in order to enhance the educational programmes and improve the learning results.
<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>-</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>-</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="radio"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>

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.

<p>4.1. Staff Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HEI has staff management policy and procedures that ensure the implementation of educational process and other activities defined in its strategic plan. ○ HEI ensures the employment of qualified academic/scientific/invited/administrative/ support staff.
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>Tbilisi Free Academy has developed personnel management rules (Evidence No. 16). According to this rule, the staff of the Academy includes academic, visiting, administrative</p>

and support staff. The academic staff consists of a professor, an associate professor, an assistant professor and an assistant. An official in the Academy may be affiliated with the Academy. The selection of academic staff is made through open competition. In the same document, the rules and criteria of the competition commission are defined, the academic staff is selected according to the role, and the procedure for holding the competition is also described. The rules for the selection of invited staff are also defined in the personnel management rule. The same document defines the procedure for selecting administrative and support staff. Note that the Rector is appointed by the decision of the founding meeting. Information about staff incentives and responsibilities is also presented in this document. Qualification requirements for administrative and support staff are presented as an appendix. The incentive mechanism works in FTA, and depending on the activities performed, it is a material incentive. During the interviews, it was confirmed that recently the Academy provided staff incentives of 1000 GEL. Incentives are given only to highly rated staff, for example, those who scored 95% and above this year were only encouraged.

The Academy has also developed a personnel management policy document (Evidence No. 16). This document generally describes the essence, goals and functions of personnel management. Employment policies and procedures include the determination and analysis of new staffing needs and the policies and procedures for evaluating Academy personnel's performance. Academic and visiting staff are evaluated by the Quality management service, and administrative and support staff are evaluated by the Human Resources Management Service, based on the Academy's management effectiveness monitoring mechanisms. During the interviews, it was confirmed that HR evaluates the administrative staff according to a special form, the evaluation is done in points. This assessment is to identify further staff development requirements based on the analysis. As for the satisfaction survey, it is done by the Quality management service.

The questionnaires are well designed, they cover many aspects. It should be noted that surveys have been conducted and their analysis has been carried out, based on the results of which the staff was trained. Trainings in digital learning, support for participation in various events from the academy, as well as internal trainings conducted in the academy, for example, digital marketing and graphic design, English language course for academic staff, IT programs for staff, trainings related to publishing articles, business marketing course organized by the career center, training in psychology.

The survey results are used by the institution for further development. They monitor the effectiveness of the management based on the surveys of the administrative staff. HR conducts survey several times a year: 1. competencies are evaluated in 3-4 months, second – 10-11 months and then the final evaluation is made. Units evaluate their own staff. Analysis is sent to the Financial department and decisions are made for bonuses and other incentives. During the interviews the panel checked whether the heads of the service evaluate their specialists, however, the information received from the services denied this, while the opposite was voiced by the Human resources service. Criteria are given in management effectiveness mechanism. During the graduation ceremonies successful staff are also presented with gifts and bonuses.

However, interviews with staff revealed that the Academy has no cases of supporting staff training abroad, which is particularly important to support research activities. Mechanisms for sharing experience gained abroad should be developed within the institution. It should also be noted that needs-based studies must be tailored to the requirements of specific services, especially in relation to administrative and support staff, to fully meet their qualification requirements, for example in the case of international and career development services.

The personnel management policy document presents the mechanisms of personnel attraction and retention, professional development. The functions of the structural units are spelled out in the relevant services' regulations. Also, in the statute of the Academy, together with the main functions of the services, the functions of the head of the service are presented, as well as the rights and duties of the academic (including affiliated) and guest personnel are

spelled out. During the interviews, knowledge of the affiliation rules could not be confirmed by some staff. Also, according to the school board, Senate members must be affiliated staff, which Senate representatives do not want.

One notable issue concerns the evaluation and promotion process for administrative staff. The highest rating range is 24-30 points. However, when multiple individuals score within this range, those with higher scores are reported to the Finance Department for promotion, while others are not. The rationale behind this distinction is unclear. The HR department mentioned that the number of promotions is predetermined based on quotas set in the previous year—for instance, only four individuals may be promoted. According to HR, those with the highest scores will be selected for promotion. This approach raises concerns about fairness, as the 24-30 point range is already considered the top tier. If the institution lacks additional financial resources to promote a larger number of staff, it would be more equitable to apply additional criteria to differentiate and select those who should be promoted.

FTA presented the personal files of the staff. Personal files of administrative staff mainly consist of CV's, identity, diplomas and certificates confirming qualifications, however, in some cases, only a complete general education certificate is presented in the personal file of administrative staff. It should be noted that the Academy has qualified invited staff who have industry related experience. They are familiar with the academy's environment and are integrated with its rules. Over the past 2 years, the Academy has received both academic and invited staff, their number has increased.

The Academy has presented samples of contracts signed with staff, namely, administrative staff contract, affiliated staff contract, academic and invited staff contract. The rules and conditions of academic staff affiliation have been developed as a separate document. As it can be seen from the interviews, the invited staff of FTA can be the head of the programme, which puts the sustainability of the programme at risk. It was noted that the institution did not face such risk, although it creates certain risks.

Evidences/indicators

- Personnel management rules
- Personnel management policy
- Samples of contracts signed with personnel
- Personal affairs of staff
- Statute of the Academy
- Provisions of structural units
- Results of the interviews

Recommendations:

- It is recommended that affiliated academic staff fully understand their rights and responsibilities.
- It is recommended that affiliated academic staff should be involved in decision-making processes.
- It is recommended, provision of relevant training related to the work field for development of all of the staff members.
- It is recommended that the Academy have to support its staff for participation in events that are organised abroad, which is especially relevant for research activities.

Suggestions:

- In case the institution lacks additional financial resources to promote a larger number of staff, it would be more equitable to apply additional criteria to differentiate and select those who should be promoted.

Best Practices (if applicable):

-

Evaluation

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

4.2. Academic/Scientific and Invited Staff Workload

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

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

According to the self-assessment document, Academy has 65 academic staff, including 28 affiliated: 24 professors, 21 associate professors, 12 assistant professors and 8 assistants. All of them are selected by competition. As for the number of students, it is 223. The number of staff is sufficient for this number of students, and moreover, the institution can serve more students.

Due to the fact that the methodology for determining the number of students and staff in relation to them has been generally explained by the Academy, as well as the methodology for determining the number of student contingents and academic/guest staff is limited to general records, it is impossible for the expert panel to determine how many students are expected and whether the existing staff is sufficient or not. In the documents presented by the Academy, the target indicators have been defined, which were clarified during the interviews. In some cases, it left a vague impression, because in the SER, the actual rate of target marks differed from the target mark, although it was noted as achieved. During the interview, it was explained that it was achieved by a specific date. Nevertheless, the expert panel believes that more clarity is needed in the presentation of such information.

Programme leaders and academic staff involved in the programme have field expertise and hold various administrative positions within the institution, as well as being employed outside of it. The same applies to the guest staff. This is confirmed by interviews and from the QMS database. The workload of some personnel exceeds the relevant norms of the Law in force in Georgia and is more than 40 hours a week, for example, 80 hours a week, 161 hours a week and similar figures are read from the QMS database. As noted by the institution, the schedule of academic and visiting staff is updated every semester, although this is not reflected in the QMS database. Note that the personnel confirm their employment in various institutions; they do not specify the specific weekly workload, although they note that they have time to implement the work to be performed regularly. According to the survey results, the students also do not experience staff overload problems. During the experts' visit, due to the absence of the person responsible for the mentioned issue in the academy, the local database could not be checked, and the data in the database was not additionally transferred to the experts. Accordingly, the expert group believes the institution should timely update the staff workload base, both at the local level and the QMS base, to clarify the staff workload for all the positions held by it.

Evidences/indicators

- Self-evaluation document
- Methodology for determining the number of students and academic/guest staff
- Personal affairs of staff
- Survey results
- QMS base
- Results of the interviews

Recommendations:

- It is recommended that the Academy timely update the staffing chart, both internally and in the QMS base, so that staffing in other institutions is clear.
- It is recommended to develop a specific methodology for determining the number of staff in relation to students, depending on the programmes.

Suggestions:

- Regarding the personnel, it is advised that the established target marks should be presented more clearly.

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

Free Academy of Tbilisi has developed a regulatory document for educational procedures that describes the rules of obtaining, suspending, terminating, and restoring student status; determining the relevancy of educational programs and education recognition received abroad (Evidence No. 22). The publicity of the information is ensured by the university's official website, such as mobility process and admission of local students. During the interviews the panel learned that there are procedures for recognition of the learning periods and they are consistently implemented. This was confirmed both by the students and the academic staff.

It has to be mentioned that the Academy has newly accredited Business administration English language program where international students are also expected to be enrolled in September 2024. However, the website does not contain information for international students regarding the enrolment procedure.

During the interview, the International Relations office representative could not describe the procedure of international students' enrolment, which brings the panel to the conclusion that the personnel is not trained appropriately for the admission process of foreign students. The interviewees explained that they still do not have a ready document that would regulate the admission procedure of foreign candidates and currently the staff was thinking that such document should be prepared.

FTA has developed a mechanism for the protections student's right and legal interest (Evidence No. 28). The findings of the student survey verify that students feel their rights are

<p>upheld (87% of respondents) (Evidence No. 13). It should be mentioned that all students are required to complete the surveys in order to be allowed access to their personal profiles.</p> <p>Students know their rights and responsibilities from the contract and code of ethics (Evidence No. 15), which were confirmed during interviews. They are aware of the appeal procedure and have used it as well. Academic and administrative staff have close communication with students to ensure that information is delivered to students properly and in a timely manner.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The regulation of the educational process • Mechanisms for protection of students' rights and legal interests • Students' framework - contract samples • Report of quality management service - analysis of survey results. • Code of ethics • Self-evaluation report • Interviews
<p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is recommended to create a special page on the web-site for foreign degree seekers to have information publicly regarding the admission process and admission criteria. • It is recommended to train relevant personnel regarding international students' enrolment procedure.
<p>Suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is suggested to remove the mandatory requirement for students to participate in surveys. Participation should be voluntary.
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>-</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>5.2 Student Support Services</p> <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
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>Students of Free Academy of Tbilisi are offered consultation services for the learning process and improvement of academic performance. Students, during interviews, confirmed that they have open communication with lecturers to receive additional support.</p> <p>Academy has LMS "student Base" which is accessible for all student. Some of the students were requested to access the database and try to request the student certificate or open any book from the course, but unfortunately, the student could not manage. Later administration explained that LMS was under reconstruction and due to it student cannot use it in the summer.</p>

<p>Interviews revealed that social media chats and emails are frequently used for receiving study materials from academic staff.</p> <p>In its SER the Academy states that if necessary, an individual program is being drawn up according to the student's interests and level of academic preparation. During the interviews the students confirmed that they can use individual plans in case they are employed and cannot attend all of the lectures. This kind of flexibility attracted some of the students to choose the Free Academy of Tbilisi for studies.</p> <p>Academy has the Student/Alumni Assistance and Career Development Center (Evidence No. 30). Students are permanently informed about current events and prospects in the labor market (Evidence No. 12). The Academy track the employment rate of their alumni: 82% of their graduates are employed, 69% by field (Evidence No. 31).</p> <p>Currently Academy students do not have opportunities to participate in an exchange mobility programs, however, Academy has plan to collaborate with international partners in November 2024 within the framework of student exchange mobility.</p> <p>Academic staff encourages student to participate in international projects. The Law school has such program and the student with the high GPA and English language proficiency level was selected to participate in the international project.</p> <p>The Academy places a high priority on the diverse student life in addition to the academic program and activities. The Academy supports a range of athletics, artistic and cultural activities.</p> <p>Academy students can apply for financial aid through the Academy's structural section, the financial and material resources department.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career support services • Results of graduate students' research • Photo and video material of the training • Memorandums • Tools and Outcomes for Supporting Socially Vulnerable Students • Self-evaluation report • Interviews
<p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is recommended to offer exchange mobility programs to student. • It is recommended to replace social media for academic purposes - increase the usage of Student's Base.
<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>-</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>-</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>

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

Free Academy of Tbilisi, as a college, implements only first cycle educational programs at the bachelor's level and has no doctoral or taught postgraduate programs. This circumstance should be considered as an argument that the level of research activity is appropriate for a "first cycle" institution. In presented Self-evaluation report and annexed documentation it is written that Academy has been actively promoting the strengthening of the research component since its establishment (1996). Due to the existing status of Academy, recent scientific research activities had focused specifically on the hosting of international scientific conferences and the publication of its own scientific journal. However, at this stage Academy is planning to change status of a "college" into the status of "University" and implementation of the second cycle educational programme at the Master's level as well, which will undoubtedly expand and increase the scientific and research area.

The SER included a commentary on student participation in research projects. Focusing on this point and interviewing students and graduates, the panel noted the examples of student contributions to Academy annual scientific conferences. Regarding the small scale of student participation in research projects was somehow confirmed by the documentation provided by the institution, as well as at the panel's meeting with students, as they have heard about the case, but never took part themselves.

In addition, based on the provided information, it was not quite clear whether and how research activities support the mission of the institution, and the criteria by which projects are selected for funding do not refer explicitly to Academy's mission. As interviews emphasized apart from references to the conduct/support of the internationalization policy and the organization of international scientific conferences, seminars and symposia, the institution's strategic goals do not have a direct bearing on the research activities of individual staff members that should be focused on the field prioritized for the development of the Academy's research and educational capacities.

To ensure the implementation of the Mission and Strategic Goals of the Academy, and development of educational programmes, the new Research Development Strategy and Action Plan for the upcoming period should be focused on research priorities of the institution. Separate teachers who have research outputs integrate research results into the teaching, but there is no common methodology and good practices for the systematic integration of research output into the teaching process.

The budget allocated for research purposes in 14000 KGEL in 2023-2024 budget (cost of participation in seminars and conferences and cost of scientific studies) but funding will be increased in 2024-2025 budget up to 75000 KGEL. However, the Action Plan 2022-2024 presented as the Annex of the SER indicates that only 8000 KGEL are allocated for research purposes every year (organization of joint international scientific conference and academic and visiting staff scientific publications, papers, articles).

The research output includes individual research papers produced by academic staff and published in conference proceedings in Georgian and abroad, including the Academy scientific conference, publications in Georgian journals, and some publications in

international journals. Around half of research outputs are published in local journals. Overall, 75 persons (out of 120) of the academic staff (including affiliated and invited academic staff) had at least one scientific output (around 9 per academic staff member in 7 years period). There is a deviation between faculties and a quick analysis by the panel showed that the average number of publications is 7 per person for the Law School and 12 per person in the School of Business Administration and Social Sciences. Conference presentations makes up a bigger part of publications. From the SER and the interviews, it was clear that Academy collects all research outputs produced by their academic staff irrespective of whether these research outputs have been affiliated with the Free Academy of Tbilisi or not. Currently, there is no reliable data and information on Academy-supported research activities of the academic staff.

Evidences/indicators

Component evidences/indicators including the relevant documents, interview results, etc.

- Strategic Development Plan – 2018-2024
- Rules for reviewing, approving and participating in targeted scientific-research projects
- Regulations of the Scientific Research Center
- Report on Publications and Projects of Academic Staff
- Agreement on the implementation of a joint research project
- Agreement on plagiarism (Turnitin) program
- Self-Evaluation Report
- Interviews

Recommendations:

- In order to change Academy's status as a "college" into the status of "University", institutional support for scientific research activities should be paid special attention and the emphasis on research should be strengthened in the strategy, as well as in everyday activities.
- In elaborating the new Research Development Strategy and Action Plan for the upcoming period there should be a higher focus on research priorities of the institution to ensure the implementation of the Mission and Strategic Goals of the Academy, and development of educational programmes.
- In order to involve students into research projects, Academy should achieve high level of research of its affiliated academic staff that would felicitated further integration of research results into the educational process.
- Academy should clarify further the meaning of research activities in HEI, making emphasis on high level publications, to focus on research projects that are important for the Academy and are in line with strategic priorities.
- To ensure the scientific research activities of the Academy, increase opportunities of commercialization Research products and support for the development of educational programmes, institution should define and set research priorities in accordance with the fields, in which educational programmes are implemented.

Suggestions:

-

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

It is mentioned in SER that since re-branding, the institution has carried out scientific and research activities and has taken care of its development. Academy has developed activities that contribute to increasing the quality of research, attracting young researchers to science and involving them in research, creating/developing unified research funding system, supporting academic staff to attract grants from local and international funds, and others. For instance, to increase the scientific and research potential of Academy, popularize science, establish connections with local or foreign universities, scientific centers and develop existing connections, a structural unit - Scientific research center - was created in the Academy on January 9, 2024. The Center's goals, tasks and function - duties are spelled out in the regulations of the relevant structural unit and are available on the Academy's official website (Evidence No. 5). However, the director and the staff of this center are newly hired employees, at the same time they are employees of other organizations and are not yet sufficiently familiar with the priorities of Scientific-Research Development Strategy and adapted to the organizational environment of Academy.

According to the SER and results of interviews with the administrative and academic staff of Academy, institution has elaborated some mechanisms for the development of scientific-research work, raising the quality of research activities, integration and internationalization of scientific research and educational processes, and encouraging motivation for scientific research. However, these mechanisms need improvement as they are very general in appearance and do not operate enough effectively. As the panel noted the document setting out Academy's approach to evaluating staff scientific productivity starts by referring to the mission statement and to the institution's commitment to securing improvements to the quality of staff research (Evidence No. 22). Relevant, valid and objective evaluation of scientific productivity of academic staff was not done due to the determined capability of the applied assessment methods/tools.

In addition, the SER and another presented document provided information on the institution's arrangements for assessing academic/invited staff. This states that assessment is focused on the research as well as the teaching competence of staff. The panel noted, however, that the criteria for assessing research competence as well as scientific productivity make no explicit reference to the impact on teaching of a member of staff's research activities.

The SER emphasized that the Academy constantly holds information meetings, trainings, workshops for the implementation of research components in practice, and ensures the proper activity of the academic staff in the scientific field, such as conducting research, participating in local and international conferences. International scientific conferences are organized every year in the Academy, the active participants of which are academic, scientific personnel, students, graduates and other interested parties, both inside and outside the country. The Academy also operates an international refereed journal "Academiab", where

all interested persons can publish and print an article (an annual international scientific conference has been held in the Academy since 1996 (a total of 23 conferences)).

According to the SER, for the promoting research development and internationalization, new ways and approaches of research management have been developed, which in turn require the implementation of complex measures and an increase in science funding. In accordance with the research policy implementation mechanisms, the Academy has developed development tasks corresponding to these mechanisms. The Academy has developed an internationalization plan, which includes a systematic search for international partners to create international research consortia with similar research goals for the development of grant applications and/or for the implementation of international research activities co-financed by the Academy. In addition, Institution promotes such scientific research activities, which aim to form new knowledge, visions, approaches and perspectives related to the research issue. For this purpose, the following criteria for the evaluation of grant projects have been developed:

- relevance of the research topic/issue;
- novelty of the research and formulation of the problem;
- research goals and objectives; research methodology; t
- he scientific value of the expected research results and the research results dissemination plan;
- degree of international and local cooperation;
- compliance of the project implementation plan-schedule (stages, deadlines and implementation methods) with the goals and objectives of the research;
- compliance of the project budget with the goals and objectives of the research;
- compliance of the human and material resources required for the effective implementation of the project with the goals and objectives of the project;
- compliance of materials required for research with the research project.

In addition, in 2023/2024, institution established new collaborations with international partners, and within the framework of the new partnership with Ruse University in Bulgaria, the Academy is implementing a research project. According to the interviews with administrative leaders and academic staff of Academy, this project will contribute to the involvement of students of the undergraduate educational programme in Law in international scientific activity, their mobility within the framework of this research project at Ruse University in Bulgaria. Another targeted scientific research project competition was announced in the School of Business Administration and Social Sciences and Law, that also will motivate and contribute to the involvement of students in the research activities.

Whilst there is some evidence of the institution's success in convening international conferences in collaboration with its university partners, the panel was unable to establish whether staff had undertaken any joint research with their colleagues in foreign Universities (except the case of Ruse University). There is also little evidence of other research-related activity arising from these partnerships. The panel noted that this issue should be considered if Academy intends to expand successful international partnerships.

Despite the records in the SER and other presented documents, the current position with respect to the internationalization of research was identified as the weaknesses of this institution. Thus, the Academy's internationalization policy in terms of its integration in the international scientific area can be discussed as a weak point of the institution, which intends to change the status of college into the status of University. While interviewing administrative and academic staff (including invited lecturers), the panel noted with approval the frank analysis of the factors that are 'hindering' the institution's progress in this area.

In the SER, Strategic Plan and Research Development Strategy of the Academy it is written that institution promotes the development of fundamental research, the main goal of which is to facilitate the study of new ideas, events and facts, theories and models. Research should be the basis of socio-political, public and/or cultural progress in the long term. Research

contributes to the creation of a competitive research environment, the development of outstanding quality research, the approach of research to international standards, the integration of research results into the educational process, and the growth of the scientific potential of young researchers by involving them in research.

Despite the target goal and elaboration of mechanisms for supporting research activities development, as well as information meetings for the university community and other activities that Academy holds to enhance the target scientific activities, the quality of research activity needs improvement.

On the basis of the information provided, as well as in its discussions with staff, the panel has found that the work undertaken by affiliated academic, non-affiliated and invited staff is categorized as 'works published in local journals', 'works published in international journals', presentations at local and international conferences, lifelong learning activities, etc. Since only 28 of the 65 academic staff are affiliated to the institution, there is a high level of reliance on invited staff, and it was clear from the lists provided by Academy that many of the latter staff engage in research and scholarly activity in other institutions. However, the conduct of basic research activities and active involvement in decision-making in relation to research are a contractual requirement for the small number of affiliated members of Academy staff.

In one of the supporting documents, it is stated that the Academy ensures freedom of research. Academic staff are free to determine the subject of research, but research freedom is linked to academic integrity and integrity, which implies that the research process and results will not harm the public and that the research will be conducted in accordance with the universal ethical values of the staff. Staff actively participate in "various activities which serve their professional and pedagogic development". The examples provided are of attendance at lectures delivered by visitors from other organizations, conferences hosted by the Academy, and training offered by partner institutions.

It should be mentioned that attracting and involving young staff in science is one of the priorities of Academy. Several events are planned in the academy, the main goal of which is to encourage young researchers and scientists, to involve students in research, to interest them in academic careers, and more. The Financial and Material Resources Service of the Academy allocates financial resources for academic and invited staff to ensure the publication of manuals, works, articles, monographs and others, both locally and internationally. The Academy's budget includes an annual increase in funding for scientific research, projects, and staff participation in scientific events. Academy's legal acts/regulations on research activity support and financing mechanisms are transparent.

Despite the abovementioned fact the budget for enhancing quality of scientific-research activities is not adequate and should be increased. Scarcity of funding can be discussed as one of the stated impediments to the realization of Academy's internationalization objectives, as well as promote development of fundamental research and motivate younger generation to be involved in scientific-research activities or/and projects.

The panel observed that whilst there is some financial support for raising staff research activities, the budgetary allocation for the enhancement of international cooperation, development fundamental research and commercialization of research products is low. There is some additional support for staff research. The panel was told, and it was confirmed by the Academy's documentation, that invited staff can benefit from financial assistance and it was apparent to the panel that Academy succeeds in attracting staff who maintain a level of research activity that is appropriate for supporting for the delivery of the first cycle programmes.

For the promotion of development of fundamental research, internationalization of research activities and commercialization of research products, as well as motivating younger generation to be involved in scientific-research activities or/and research projects elaboration / implementation, it is necessary to increase budget on internationalization of research and

development, design and develop grant programs that focus directly on them. In addition, it is important to elaborate valid instruments and criteria for the selection and evaluation of projects.

Evidences/indicators

- Strategic Development Plan – 2018-2024 and Action Plan –2022-2024
- Research Development Strategy
- Academy budget
- Rules for Reviewing, approving and participating in targeted scientific-research projects
- Report on Publications and Projects of Academic Staff
- Agreement on the implementation of a joint research project
- Self-Evaluation Report
- Interviews

Recommendations:

- Ensure the effective implementation of the institution's new arrangements for evaluating the quality of research activity and the scientific productivity of staff.
- Increase budgeted for improving the research support system to ensure the adequate financial support for staff research activity and the institution's internationalization policy particularly in the field of R&D, and for promoting the development of fundamental research.
- For enhancing the research and scholarly activity and scientific-research productivity of affiliated staff Academy should develop a strategy, with clear and assessable targets, relevant action plan with achievable objectives and tasks for Scientific Research Center, as well as a clear procedure, with valid and measurable criteria for research projects selection and evaluation.
- Foster further internationalization of research by taking part in international networks and projects as only international partnership could boost research results and would encourage the academic staff to be more active in this respect.

Suggestions:

-

Best Practices (if applicable):

-

Evaluation

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

6.3. Evaluation of Research Activities

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

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

The Self-Evaluation Report provides some evidence, related to Academy's evaluation of research activities, including a set of procedures for the approval and monitoring of institution-funded projects (Evidence No. 22). A document setting out the institution's approach to the evaluation of staff scientific productivity was also made available to the

panel. This document is setting out Academy's intended arrangements for the evaluation of research activities, with a key role being played by the Quality management service.

According to the SER, Free Academy of Tbilisi has introduced procedures for evaluating the quality of research activities, quantitative criteria for evaluating scientific productivity of academic/ invited personnel. The institution is committed to develop scientific activities of academic/ invited staff, taking into account the Academy's mission and Strategic Development plan, along with educational activities, which will contribute to raising the quality of academic/invited staff research. The procedure for evaluating the scientific productivity of the personnel developed by the Academy explains the types of scientific activity and productivity of academic/ invited personnel, the procedure for evaluating the effectiveness of research activities, indicators and evaluation results. The evaluation will contribute to the improvement of the quality of the academic/ invited staff's research activities, to determine the needs for encouragement and professional development. Using the evaluation, suggestions and recommendations will be developed regarding the improvement of the scientific-research work, as well as raising the qualifications of the academic/ invited staff.

The panel was provided with documents setting out Academy's arrangements for evaluating staff scientific productivity and assessing academic/invited personnel. These documents include a comprehensive (and appropriate) list of types of scientific activity, and they provide a very brief indication of the ways in which the institution will evaluate research activity. In addition to the evaluation of funded projects and surveys of staff and students, there is a combined self-evaluation and assessment questionnaire. A further document contains details of Academy's arrangements for assessing academic/invited staff, focusing on both their teaching and research competence. The latter is assessed by means of a questionnaire that has two components - a self-evaluation and an assessment by the Quality Assurance and Strategic Development Service.

While interviewing administrative and academic staff of the Academy, the panel noted that the following requirements were set for academic staff: an affiliated professor is obliged to accumulate at least 50 points annually through scientific and research activities, an affiliated associate professor - at least 40 points, an affiliated assistant professor - at least 25 points, an affiliated assistant - at least 10 points, a professor - at least 30 points, associate professor - at least - 25 points, assistant professor - at least 20 points, assistant - at least 10 points.

The panel also noted that the academic staff is obliged to carry out the scientific activities determined by this rule and to accumulate the minimum number of points determined for him/her every year. The review of the self-evaluation reports submitted by the academic staff at the end of the year is carried out by the head of the Quality management service. The head of the Quality management service provides the results of the final evaluation to the Financial and material resources service for further response. Based on the ranking of the results of the annual evaluation of the academic staff's scientific research activity, the academic staff with the three best results will be given a monetary award as an incentive.

During the site visit, staff confirmed Academy's commitment to supporting staff research. The SER and presented documents set out the wide-ranging responsibilities assigned to the member of staff who has lead responsibility for research. The panel was told that before the Scientific research center's establishment this role had been assigned to the Dean, some responsibilities (for instance, support for the internationalization of research activities/products) were shared to the head of IR unit, HR and Quality management service.

Regarding the Scientific research center, which was established in the January 2024, and its involvement in the process of supporting for and assessing research activity, carried out at the Academy, the panel was unable to establish clearly whether and how should be achieved the stated target objectives by this center.

The panel was assured that to enhance the scientific research productivity of academic staff, the Scientific research center should develop a strategy, with clear and assessable targets,

relevant action plan with achievable objectives and tasks, a clear and detail-described procedure, with relevant and valid criteria of scientific productivity assessment.

Evidences/indicators

- Rules for evaluating scientific productivity of personnel
- Form of Staff Scientific Productivity Evaluation, self-evaluation
- Information about Personal Research Activities
- Self-Evaluation Report
- Results of the interviews with institution's leadership, representatives of scientific-research centre, academic staff, students

Recommendations:

- The procedure for the internal assessment of scientific research activities of an independent scientific research projects/units of the Academy should be in accordance with the international standards of the scientific research activities' assessment (such is participation of foreign assessors in the process of assessment, use of various forms of scientific bibliometrics, etc.).
- Consider whether the Strategic Development Plan and the four-year Action Plan give sufficient attention to the target scientific/research activity, that should be relevant to the implemented cycles of educational program's (Master's level), and ensure that both documents provide an appropriate range of indicators for assessing the institution's and individual staff performance in this area.

Suggestions:

-

Best Practices (if applicable):

-

Evaluation

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

7. Material, Information and Financial Resources

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

7.1 Material Resources

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

Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements

Free Academy of Tbilisi has presented the documents confirming real and movable property. It should be noted that two floors (1st and 2nd floor) of the Academy building is used by FTA,

while the rest of the floors are rented out. The space is enough for 223 students with active status. During the site visit, the building was inspected fully. As a result of the interview with the administration, it was noted from their side that in case of an increase in the number of students, the Academy will fully use the space it owns for Academy educational goals. According to the inspection, the part rented by the Academy is also renovated and its use for academy purposes is possible.

Based on student surveys, which were mentioned during interviews with students and graduates, FTA built an access road to the Academy building, and a cafeteria is also functioning. However, it should be noted that the cafeteria needs to be expanded. The Academy has a sufficient number of educational resources, including computer equipment, an exam space is equipped with computers with special software necessary for the exam center, Internet, and video cameras.

Free Academy owns building where administrative and academic processes are held. It is located in the center of Tbilisi. The infrastructure of the academy is renewed and corresponds to modern standards.

Free Academy's infrastructure includes:

- Lobby
- Recreation spaces
- Theoretical teaching auditoriums
- Professorship
- A library:
- Administrative offices
- Spaces for group work
- Reading room
- Conference hall
- Courtroom
- Student lounge
- Archive.
- An electronic catalogue
- Storage rooms
- Sanitary units
- Computer labs/ examination center, 1st floor
- Sanitary units adapted for disabled people.
- Central heating
- Cooling system- in every room
- Rehabilitated the fire water supply network
- Evacuation plans
- A medical center
- Video surveillance cameras- 15 days is saved, then auto-delete
- A special ramp and a vertical lift/platform
- Electronic systems for students and staff: openbiblio
- Wireless internet

Auditoriums have natural and artificial lights. Sanitary units are arranged, there is a possibility of using them for disabled people. The building is heated by a central heating system, and the cooling system is working too.

Video surveillance cameras do not have an indication on the walls that recording is in progress.

Academy has adapted environment for people with special needs: special platform in entrance and modern elevator to move from first floor to the second. There is a free parking space in front of the building. At the time of the experts' visit, the mentioned place was not marked, because, as mentioned, its paving was newly completed and it is planned to mark the parking

<p>area with appropriate markings. From the same place, it is possible for disabled people to reach the building and enter inside.</p> <p>The fire safety inventory and their validity dates, evacuation exits, evacuation plans have been placed in the appropriate places, checked by the experts. During the experts' visit, the doctor was in the Medical office; there was a possibility to use cold and hot water in the room. The dates of medication were randomly checked, and the registration log was also checked. Special persons (security officers) are responsible for maintaining order in the FTA building.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation confirming ownership of real estate, extract from the public register; • Inventory materials of ownership of movable property • The contract concluded with the object implementing the practice • Mechanisms of fire safety, medical detection and order protection • Self-evaluation report • Facility observation • Interviews
<p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is recommended to install notifications/warnings on the walls that Video surveillance camera recording is in progress.
<p>Suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is preferable to increase and organize the cafeteria space accordingly. • It is preferable to draw a parking place with appropriate signs.
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>-</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>7.2. Library Resources</p>
<p>Library environment, resources and service support effective implementation of educational and research activities, and HEI constantly works for its improvement.</p>
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p> <p>Free Academy of Tbilisi has developed mechanisms for development and renewal of library resources and services. According to the mentioned document, the institution updates the book fund, determines the need for purchase of new resources, monitors and updates technical resources. The institution has presented the documentation confirming the book fund in the academy, and the panel of experts randomly checked 6 textbooks for different programmes, which were presented in material form in the library. The books in the library are processed in a library manner.</p> <p>The space of the library is enough for existing students. If the number of the students will be increased, they have a plan to expand it and they have enough spaces for that. The reading</p>

hall is equipped with computers connected to the Internet, there is a printer, copier, scanner. During the interview, the librarian noted that, in case of need and request, materials are prepared and sent in electronic form for students. This fact was confirmed by the students during the interviews. There is an electronic catalog of books on the website of FTA.

Access to the electronic library databases was verified by experts, including access to scientific databases, with which the librarian was free to work. Statistics of the use of scientific electronic databases have been low for several years. The library uses OpenBiblio, training is periodically held on issues related to the library, this was also confirmed by the staff and students.

As of today, users do not have external access to the library, however, the library is being built on the ini.ge platform, which was confirmed by the electronic resources management service and noted that this platform will be available soon.

The rules for using the library are posted in the library, according to which it is available 6 days a week, not less than 60 hours. During the experts' visit, the proper functioning of the electronic literature search system was checked.

Evidences/indicators

- Mechanisms for development and renewal of library resources and services
- Documentation confirming the ownership of the book fund
- Statistics of use of electronic library databases
- Rules for using the library
- Results of interviews

Recommendations:

-

Suggestions:

- Preferably to raise awareness of the usage of research-databases.

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

According to the information technology management policy document of FTA (Evidence No. 23), the information security policy, planning of the new information technology management system, communication management and virus protection are defined. Also, the functions of the Academy's educational process management electronic system are described. As

<p>mentioned in the interviews, awareness raising on personal data protection issues is underway. To increase the effectiveness of the information system, surveys are periodically conducted, on the basis of which computer hardware is changed, and the Internet network is improved. The rules of IT administration, responsibilities and accountability are defined in the statute of the Academy.</p> <p>The Academy has a corporate e-mail for both staff and students. Management of the learning process is done based on the ini.ge platform. It combines the spaces of students and professors, it is possible to view the student's academic performance, as well as information about training courses, here the students evaluate the professors and participate in various types of surveys.</p> <p>Free Academy of Tbilisi has developed a Business Continuity Management mechanisms and action plan (Evidence No. 8), which foresees strategic tasks of business continuity management. Lists key components of the business continuity plan and presents analysis of business control mechanisms. The business continuity plan was reviewed and approved by the decision of the Senate of the Academy. A business continuity group has been created, it analyses business incidents, develops recommendations for improving procedures and presents them to the Senate of the Academy every year.</p> <p>FTA's website is bilingual, it functions in Georgian and English languages. It contains information about the Academy's activities, educational programs, the library's electronic catalogue, employment opportunities, and more.</p> <p>Electronic management systems have been implemented in the Academy. The mechanisms for the development of electronic services and electronic management systems are described in the provision of register production and information technology.</p>
<p>Evidences/indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information technology management policy • Statute of the Academy • Provision of register production and information technologies • Interview results
<p>Evaluation</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fully complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Substantially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially complies with requirements</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not comply with requirements</p>
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>-</p>
<p>Suggestions:</p> <p>-</p>
<p>Best Practices (if applicable):</p> <p>-</p>
<p>7.4 Financial Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allocation of financial resources described in the budget of HEI is economically achievable ○ Financial standing of HEI ensures performance of activities described in strategic and mid-term action plans ○ HEI financial resources are focused on effective implementation of core activities of the institution ○ HEI budget provides funding for scientific research and library functioning and development ○ HEI has an effective system of accountability, financial management and control
<p>Descriptive summary and analysis of compliance with the standard component requirements</p>

According to the regulation of financial and material resources management of FTA, the functions of the head of the service and the main specialist are defined. Financial policy, accounting reporting, implementation of purchases, accounting of material values, preparation of utility bills documentation, preparation of financial reports, monitoring of accounting and reporting, control of budgetary indicators, development of the budget project, monitoring of the budget, identification of priorities considering the strategic and action plan are the functions of this service.

The functions of the Financial and material resources service are described in the statute of the Academy. According to the statute of the Academy, the main sources of the Academy's income are tuition fees paid by students, state grants, other funds received from the Academy's educational activities, funds received from publishing activities, founder's investments, other incomes determined by the law. Since the institution needed to mobilize material resources to strengthen various resources, the founder incurred personal expenses to ensure the issues. During the interview with him and other administrative structural units, it was noted that, if necessary, the founder accepts the issue of solving the financial problem. The Academy presented an agreement from the founder, according to which, in the event of a financial crisis for the Academy, he will provide an investment of \$ 100,000 within 10 working days.

In accordance with the standard of financial management and control, financial risks and effective budget management are defined in the Academy. The heads of structural units of the Academy are responsible for the realism, measurability and attainability of the Academy's budget. The stages of budget development are described in the same document, which was also confirmed during the interviews.

The presented budget for 2023-2024 shows the total income of the Academy, as well as, in detail, funds received from programmes and other income, expenses and company profits. The budget is calculated for 300 students. In the strategic and action plans, the institution focuses on scientific activities and internationalization, however, according to the budget file, insufficient funds are allocated for these activities. The Academy also presented the forecast budget for 2024-2025, where the revenues and profit share are significantly increased.

The financial support of the Academy for the development of the library is clear. This is confirmed by visiting the library and interviewing the staff. The dynamics of the necessary funds allocated for the library are reflected in the budget of the academy and are increasing.

At the initial stage, the Academy did not present the conclusions of the financial audit, based on the request of the experts, they presented the independent auditor's conclusions and financial statements for the years 2022 and 2023.

Evidences/indicators

- Regulation of financial and material resources management
- financial management and control standard
- Statute of the Academy
- Academy budget
- founder's agreement
- Results of interviews

Recommendations:

- It is recommended to increase the budget for scientific activities, internationalization policy and research support.

Suggestions:

-

Best Practices (if applicable):

-

Evaluation

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