# Higher Education Institution Authorisation Experts'

# Final Report

# LEPL - Shota Meshkia State Teaching University of Zugdidi

**Expert Panel Members**
Chair: Milan Pol, Masaryk University, Czech Republic
Members:
Eka Lekashvili, LEPL - Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia
Gaga Gvenetadze, Tbilisi State University, Georgia
Giorgi Melashvili, N(N)LE - Agricultural University of Georgia, Georgia
Khatuna Saganelidze, LLC New Vision University, Georgia (employer)
Nino Lipartia, LLC Grigol Robakidze University, Georgia
Vazha Kelikashvili, LLC Georgian Aviation University, Georgia (student)

Tbilisi, 2024

# Authorisation Report Resume

## General information on educational institution

Shota Meskhia State University of Zugdidi is the key higher education institution in the Samegrelo region and under different names it has operated since 2007. Currently it conducts nine bachelor programs, two master programs, teacher training program Georgian language training program and also 28 vocational education programs and 18 short-term training/retraining courses. According to the self-evaluation report (SER), there are 77 academic staff, including five affiliated professors, six non-affiliated professors, 28 affiliated associate professors, 22 non-affiliated associate professors, nine affiliated assistant professors, seven affiliated assistants, and more. There are 954 students in higher education programs. The university is using the campus that has been gradually rebuilt, and this way the university has very solid material conditions for its functioning.

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

The evaluation process started well before the site visit by organizing online meetings of the expert team and providing the team with the information about the evaluation procedure and also with the documents submitted by the university. The self-evaluation report contained basic information; in some cases, the expert team requested some additional documents to be provided by the university. The site visit was held on August 9-12, 2024, and it was very well organized both by NCEQE case coordinators, and by the university leaders. This way, the expert team had a good opportunity to study all the materials provided, to meet and interview different actors within the university and beyond, and also to visit the facilities in which the university is functioning. This all helped the expert team to get a relatively complete picture about the university´s functioning.

## Overview of the HEI's compliance with standards

The expert team recognized the efforts of the Shota Meshkia State University of Zugdidi to meet the recommendations formulated in the previous authorization report. The expert team also appreciated the material development of the university in recent years. The expert team has also agreed upon the need for some areas of university functioning to improve further, as formulated in the recommendations and suggestions. In sum, the expert team evaluated "complying with requirements" standards 1, 3 and 5. In case of standards 2, 4, 6 and 7 the expert team evaluated the university as "substantially complying with requirements". The expert team formulated 23 recommendations and 8 suggestions. The expert team also identified one case of the best practice.

### Summary of Recommendations
- It is recommended to ensure active participation of representatives of all main stakeholders´groups in the development of the university's strategic plan.
- It is recommended to ensure monitoring and accountability mechanisms are effectively developed and used.

- It is recommended to review university´s organizational structure to reduce fragmentation, improve departmental communication, and ensure that the organizational chart accurately reflects the mission, roles and responsibilities.
- It is recommended to strengthen internationalization efforts by developing targeted strategies to increase participation in international programs, providing more flexible opportunities, and providing additional support for student and staff involvement.
- It is recommended to fully integrate and expand the use of modern technologies, particularly in student services and library resources, ensuring that both students and staff are aware of and can utilize the institution´s electronic systems and tools.
- It is recommended to continue in efforts of enhancing communication and training programs on academic referencing and plagiarism policies in order to ensure all students and staff are fully informed about the standards and procedures in place.
- It is recommended to include sexual misconduct in the "Code of Ethics" to address this critical issue and provide clear protocols for handling such cases, thereby strengthening the institution's commitment to ethics and integrity.
- It is recommended to continue in efforts of ensuring that in the clinical subject teaching, the university has more local personnel and does not rely only on invited personnel.
- It is recommended to invest in highly qualified academic and invited staff in order to ensure full and continuous management of the educational process.
- It is recommended to strengthen staff performance reporting mechanisms in accordance with the workload.
- It is recommended to establish incentive mechanisms for the performance of the research component and professional development activity by the staff.
- It is recommended to ensure effective involvement of the students in the representative and faculty councils.
- It is recommended to ensure that bachelor's and master's theses are prepared in accordance with the rules and follow the citation rules.
- It is recommended to update the strategy for the development of scientific research activities 2025-2028, and include in it more detailed, understandable, and measurable information.
- It is recommended to strengthen efforts to improve foreign language proficiency of the staff and this way to support sustainability of research internationalization as well as teaching.
- It is recommended to ensure that all professors and associate professors provide the required data and become familiar with the relevant criteria and performance metrics to make it possible to objectively evaluate and measure the research activity of the academic staff at the University.
- It is recommended to offer training or resources to improve the academic staff's understanding and ability to discuss established research activity evaluation criteria effectively.
- It is recommended to enhance the academic team's awareness of the required standards to ensure the quality of research theses at the university.
- It is recommended to continue working on the search for practice facilities and reflect in the agreements the maximum/minimum number of students that the partner institution will be able to accept.
- It is recommended to make the work on international library electronic databases more intensive and effective.
- It is recommended to place a guide for international electronic databases and a guide for electronic catalogs on the website so that the applicant can independently use the mentioned service.
- It is recommended to improve and update the website with accordance with the accessibility of full information.
- It is recommended to update financial and audit reports on the university website.

## Summary of Suggestions

- It is suggested to consider possibilities of expressing a newly emerging stronger emphasis on the research activities of the university in the mission statement.
- It is suggested to enhance the university´s business continuity plan by thoroughly testing it to ensure readiness for emergency situations, as well as conducting regular training for staff and students to familiarize them with the processes in place for risk mitigation and continuity of operations.
- It is suggested to continue monitoring and adjusting student planning mechanisms to maintain alignment with its capacity and strategic goals, ensuring all students receive high-quality education.
- It is suggested to involve more students in the research projects.
- It is suggested to ensure that the document "Rule of Student Projects" is completed with relevant information.
- It is suggested, for regional development and advancement of the research, to collaborate more with other universities in nearby regions of Georgia.
- It is suggested to continue active work in the direction of library catalog and fund processing.
- It is suggested that in the budget of the university, in the spending part, an article on financing the operation and development of the library is allocated separately.

## Summary of the Best Practices
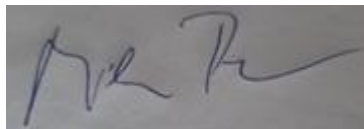- Faculty based ethical board includes key specialists in the field.

## Summary Table of Compliance of HEI with Standards and Standard Components

| | Standard | Complies with Requirements | Substantially complies with requirements | Partially Complies with Requirements | Does not Comply with Requirements |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Mission and strategic development of HEI** | × | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 1.1 | Mission of HEI | × | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 1.2 | Strategic development | ☐ | × | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2. | **Organizational structure and management of HEI** | ☐ | × | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2.1 | Organizational structure and management | ☐ | ☐ | × | ☐ |
| 2.2 | Internal quality assurance mechanisms | ☐ | × | ☐ | ☐ |

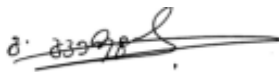| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2.3 | Observing principles of ethics and integrity | □ | x | □ | □ |
| 3. | **Educational Programmes** | x | □ | □ | □ |
| 3.1 | Design and development of educational programmes | x | □ | □ | □ |
| 3.2 | Structure and content of educational programmes | □ | x | □ | □ |
| 3.3 | Assessment of learning outcomes | x | □ | □ | □ |
| 4 | **Staff of the HEI** | □ | x | □ | □ |
| 4.1 | Staff management | □ | x | □ | □ |
| 4.2 | Academic/Scientific and invited Staff workload | □ | x | □ | □ |
| 5 | **Students and their support services** | x | □ | □ | □ |
| 5.1 | The Rule for obtaining and changing student status, the recognition of education, and student rights | x | □ | □ | □ |
| 5.2 | Student support services | □ | x | □ | □ |
| 6 | **Research, development and/or other creative work** | □ | x | □ | □ |
| 6.1 | Research activities | □ | x | □ | □ |
| 6.2 | Research support and internationalization | □ | x | □ | □ |
| 6.3 | Evaluation of research activities | □ | □ | x | □ |
| 7 | **Material, information and financial resources** | □ | x | □ | □ |
| 7.1 | Material resources | □ | x | □ | □ |
| 7.2 | Library resources | □ | x | □ | □ |
| 7.3 | Information resources | □ | x | □ | □ |
| 7.4 | Financial resources | x | □ | □ | □ |

## Signature of expert panel members

1. Milan Pol (Chair)

2. Eka Lekashvili

3. Gaga Gvenetadze

4. Giorgi Melashvili

5. Khatuna Saganelidze

6. Nino Lipartia

7. Vazha Kelikhashvili

# 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 the higher education area and broader society. Strategic development plan of HEI corresponds with the mission of an institution, is based on the goals of the institution and describes means for achieving these goals.

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

The mission statement of the Shota Meskhia State University involves to some extent all three main pillars of a standard higher education institution´s operation, teaching, research and so-called public reach (third mission). In concrete, the mission statement is formulated as follows:

"*To cultivate a new knowledge and employment environment that prioritizes meeting the needs of students, staff, and stakeholders, considering the changing requirements of the labor market. To contribute to the steady, successful, and sustainable development of the region through educational programs that emphasize the integration of learning and research projects aimed at leveraging research outcomes and fostering internationalization, facilitating the exchange of innovations to positively impact the well-being of the population, society, business, and the state.*

*To cultivate democratic and tolerant mindsets, emphasizing personal growth, and providing higher and professional education that prepares individuals for success in both domestic and international labor market, to produce competitive, highly skilled professionals who actively contribute to society and effectively address future challenges, guided by the principle of lifelong learning.*

*As a regional education center, is to inspire optimism and confidence in the future, while upholding quality, inclusion, and equal access to education for all target groups, fostering sustainable, equitable, and inclusive development.*" (SER, p. 18)

This can be said that the mission statement defines the role of the university locally/regionally as well as (to some extent) internationally, and it takes into consideration the role of the university in developing active members of the society, knowledge creating

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and dissemination, facilitating students´personal development and ensuring their competitiveness on the labor market.

The mission statement defines the characteristics of the university based on its type and main directions of its work. At the same time, it can be assumed that a more explicit emphasis on research activities of the university would fit into the mission statement considering the fact of the recent transformation from "teaching state university" into "state university". The panel is aware that this change is caused by the change in Georgian legislation and does not necessarily come out of the university desire.

In sum, this can be concluded that the mission statement of the university corresponds to Georgia´s and European higher education goals, it defines the role and place of the university within the higher education area and society as a whole.

The vision statement as well as the values of the university are in line with the mission statement.

The mission statement is accessible at the university website.  During the interviews, it was proven that the mission statement is shared by the community of the institution.

**Evidences/indicators**
- The mission statement of ZSU
- Self-evaluation report
- Site visit
- interviews

**Recommendations:**
None

**Suggestions:**
- It is suggested to consider possibilities of expressing a newly emerging stronger emphasis on the research activities of the university in the mission statement.

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
None

**Evaluation**

x Complies with requirements

☐ Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

**1.2 Strategic Development**
- o HEI has a strategic development (7-year) and an action plan (3-year) in place.
- o HEI contributes to the development of society, shares with society the knowledge gathered in the institution, and facilitates lifelong learning
- o HEI evaluates implementation of strategic and action plans, and duly acts on evaluation results.

Shota Meskhia State University of Zugdidi has a Strategic Development Plan (2024-2030) as well as a 3-year Action Plan (2024-2026) and its annual actualization. Strategic Development Plan stresses out seven strategic directions and priorities, and these in fact go

along the lines of the focus of authorization standards. This way, the strategic directions and priorities emphasize the third role, quality assurance, educational programs development and integration of teaching and research, development of personnel, students and their support, research and internationalization, and resources.

This can be said the strategic plan as well as action plan cover all main aspects that are vital for the operation of the university. In each case, strategic directions and priorities are further elaborated into objectives and activities which can be seen as achievable and mostly also measurable.

The university declared that the development of a strategic plan was a participatory process in which people from the university and also beyond were involved. The methodology of the development of this document is clearly described. The participatory nature of the whole process was proven by some respondents during the interviews; in some other cases respondents from stakeholders´groups (employers, graduates) seemed to be aware of the existence of the plan but not of the process of its development.

The action plan then brings more concretization and also links the plans and activities with financial allocations. The university has the document "Strategic planning, monitoring and evaluating methodology" which deals with monitoring and evaluation. When looking at the action plan, it does not appear to be projected fully there. For instance, the performance indicators are not a part of this document which can make it difficult when monitoring and evaluating the progress. Also, mechanisms such as systematic reviews of annual reports could be helpful in this respect.

As for the third mission, this can be agreed that the university contributes to the social development of the country/region, it shares with society the knowledge gathered in the institution and facilitates lifelong learning. There is evidence about it, including a rich portfolio of lifelong learning opportunities provided by the university.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Self-evaluation report
- Strategic development plan
- Action plan
- Strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation methodology
- Site visit
- Interviews

**Recommendations:**
- It is recommended to ensure active participation of representatives of all main stakeholders´groups in the development of the university's strategic plan.
- It is recommended to ensure monitoring and accountability mechanisms are effectively developed and used.

**Suggestions:**
None

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
None

**Evaluation**

☐ Complies with requirements

x Substantially complies with requirements

□ Partially complies with requirements

□ Does not comply with requirements

## 2. Organizational Structure and Management of HEI

Organizational structure and management of the HEI is based on best practices of the educational sector, meaning effective use of management and quality assurance mechanisms in the management process. This approach ensures implementation of strategic plan, integration of quality assurance function into management process, and promotes principles of integrity and ethics

### 2.1 Organizational Structure and Management

- o Organizational structure of HEI ensures implementation of goals and activities described in its strategic plan
- o Procedures for election/appointment of the management bodies of HEI are transparent, equitable, and in line with legislation
- o HEI's Leadership/Management body ensures effective management of the activities of the institution
- o Considering the mission and goals of HEI, leadership of the HEI supports international cooperation of the institution and the process of internationalization.

Shota Meskhia State University of Zugdidi describes its organizational structure as a strong framework for effectively implementing the institution's strategic goals. The structure consists of key management bodies, such as the Academic and Representative Councils, as well as various main and support units, all of which operate in accordance with the "Law of Georgia on Higher Education" and university statute. Recent changes to this structure, guided by external evaluations and priority tasks, were implemented to strengthen critical areas such as research, internationalization, and lifelong learning. The self-evaluation report (SER) highlights the creation of new administrative roles aimed at better managing the university's expanding operations and refining departmental unit functions, particularly internal audit and quality assurance. The SER emphasizes that the university's management bodies, which include the Rector, Deputy Rector, and Head of Administration, are clearly defined and operate in accordance with the university's statute.

Additionally, the institution maintains a registry of educational institutions, as described in current legislation, and the regulations for documents processing within the institution are aligned with the established legislation. Institution management also partially uses modern technologies, including an electronic document processing system. However, the electronic system is not fully operational in the library or for students, who remain largely unaware of the available electronic system and electronic library resources.

During the site visit, the expert team discovered several issues that raise concerns about the effectiveness of this organizational structure. Although the procedures for electing and appointing management bodies are transparent and in accordance with legal requirements, there is a noticeable gap in effective monitoring of their performance. Reports submitted by management bodies receive little critical feedback, and council discussions appear to lack the depth required for meaningful accountability and continuous improvement.

The university's organizational structure also appears fragmented, with inconsistent organizational charts. Communication links between certain departments, such as the research departments, are weak, resulting in isolated operations that may impede the university's ability to meet its strategic objectives efficiently. The expert team noted that some departments, such as the English Language Centre and the Life-Long Learning Centre, could potentially be consolidated to reduce bureaucracy and improve operational efficiency.

In terms of internationalization, the university has attempted to disseminate information about international programs and encourage participation in mobility opportunities. Nonetheless, participation rates among students and faculty members remain low. According

to a recent Quality Assurance survey, only 13% of academic staff participate in international mobility programs. This suggests that more targeted strategies are required to increase participation in international activities, which is still an area for significant improvement.

To ensure the continuity of all major processes taking place at the institution, the HEI has developed a business strategy continuity plan those accounts for possible risks, prevention mechanisms, and strategies for risk mitigation. During the site visit it was not fully proven that the institution is prepared to handle emergency situation, despite ongoing work in this area.

**Evidences/indicators**

- Self-evaluation report
- Structure of the Teaching University https://zssu.ge/zssu2/en/node/427
- Functions of the structural units of the Teaching University
- Procedures for the election/ appointment of the management bodies of the Teaching University
- Business continuity plan of the Teaching University
- Internationalization policy and mechanisms
- Memorandums signed with international projects, contracts
- Site-visit and interviews

**Recommendations:**

- It is recommended to review university´s organizational structure to reduce fragmentation, improve departmental communication, and ensure that the organizational chart accurately reflects the mission, roles and responsibilities.
- It is recommended to strengthen internationalization efforts by developing targeted strategies to increase participation in international programs, providing more flexible opportunities, and providing additional support for student and staff involvement.
- It is recommended to fully integrate and expand the use of modern technologies, particularly in student services and library resources, ensuring that both students and staff are aware of and can utilize the institution´s electronic systems and tools.

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**Suggestions:**

- It is suggested to enhance the university´s business continuity plan by thoroughly testing it to ensure readiness for emergency situations, as well as conducting regular training for staff and students to familiarize them with the processes in place for risk mitigation and continuity of operations.

**Best Practices (if applicable):**

None

**Evaluation**

☐ Complies with requirements

☐ Substantially complies with requirements

x Partially complies with requirements

o ☐ Does not comply with requirements

**2.2 Internal Quality Assurance Mechanisms**

o Institution effectively implements internal quality assurance mechanisms. Leadership of the institution constantly works to strengthen quality assurance function and promotes establishment of quality culture in the institution.

o HEI has a mechanism for planning the student body, which will give each student an opportunity to get a high quality education.

The internal quality assurance (QA) mechanisms at Shota Meskhia State University of Zugdidi are designed to maintain and improve the quality of educational activities while remaining consistent with the university's mission and strategic objectives. The Quality Assurance Service primarily coordinates the QA system, which is governed by internal and external regulatory frameworks such as national legislation and European standards for quality assurance in higher education. This service is in charge of overseeing QA activities across the university and promoting continuous improvement using the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle.

The university's QA mechanisms include all key operational areas, such as educational programs, teaching, research, and resource management. These mechanisms are supported by both internal and external evaluations, such as surveys and audits, which ensure a thorough assessment of their effectiveness. Since its last authorization, the university has made significant progress towards improving educational quality by effectively implementing recommendations from both internal and external assessments.

However, during the site visit, certain issues were identified that could have an impact on the QA system's optimal operation. While the recent separation of the central QA department and faculty-level QA unit is a step in the right direction, more clarity and integration of their responsibilities are still required. This issue emphasizes the importance of adjusting the roles and functions of these units over time to ensure consistent operation.

The QA Service's practice of conducting various surveys, including ad hoc ones, is good practice. However, during the site visit, the expert panel learned that stakeholders are not fully aware of the results of these surveys conducted by the QA Service, nor are they confident that changes made within the university are based on these survey findings rather than other discussions. This suggests that the dissemination of survey results to stakeholders and their subsequent application to improvement actions may not always be effective. Ensuring that feedback mechanisms are consistently implemented and that survey insights are actively used to drive institutional improvements remains a critical area for development.

The university's methodology for planning its student body is a well-structured approach that takes into account a variety of factors, including labor market demands, available resources, and strategic priorities, to ensure that each student receives a quality education. While this planning mechanism has many advantages, it should be evaluated on an ongoing basis to ensure that it continues to align with and support the university's overall goals.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Self-evaluation report
- Document of quality assurance mechanisms Annex
- A report on the results of the use of quality assurance mechanisms
- results of the survey conducted at the university - analysis and reports
- "Methodology for determining the threshold number of students/vocational students and the contingent of admitted students/vocational students"
- Site-visit and interviews

**Recommendations:**
- It is recommended to clarify and integrate the roles of the central QA department and faculty-level QA unit to ensure a cohesive and effective quality assurance process.
- It is recommended to enhance the dissemination and utilization of QA survey results among all stakeholders to ensure they are used effectively for continuous improvement.

**Suggestions:**

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|---|
| ● It is suggested to continue monitoring and adjusting student planning mechanisms to maintain alignment with its capacity and strategic goals, ensuring all students receive high-quality education. |

**Best Practices (if applicable):**

None

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**Evaluation**

☐ Complies with requirements

x Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

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2.3. Observing Principles of Ethics and Integrity

o HEI has developed regulations and mechanisms that follow principles of ethics and integrity. Such regulations are publicly accessible.

o Institution has implemented mechanisms for detecting plagiarism and its prevention.

o HEI follows the principles of academic freedom.

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Shota Meskhia State University of Zugdidi (ZSU) has implemented comprehensive regulations and mechanisms to uphold the principles of ethics and integrity, as outlined in the "Code of Ethics" and "Student Code of Ethics." These documents, along with additional regulations such as the "Internal Rules and Norms of Disciplinary Responsibility," serve as a framework for students, academic staff, and administrative personnel to maintain ethical conduct. Disciplinary measures for violations of these codes are regulated and made public ( https://zssu.ge/sites/default/files/page/ETIKIS%20KODEQSI.pdf), ensuring transparency and accountability.

The university has also made significant progress towards promoting academic integrity. This includes implementing plagiarism detection mechanisms using Turnitin software, developing specific plagiarism prevention rules, and providing regular academic writing and plagiarism training sessions to staff and students. ZSU's participation in the TEMPUS international project INTEGRITY demonstrates its commitment to developing institutional capacity in this area. The university's approach to academic integrity is consistent with internationally recognized values and legal standards, creating a culture of honesty, trust, and respect.

However, the site visit and subsequent findings emphasize several critical areas that require improvement. Many students and academic staff (including BA and MA thesis supervisors) demonstrated a lack of understanding of citation methods and how their work is checked for plagiarism. This understanding gap highlights the need for improved communication and academic referencing standards training. Additionally, there was inconsistency in how plagiarism policies and procedures were communicated, which could lead to misunderstandings and jeopardizing academic integrity.

Another area for improvement is the incorporation of sexual misconduct into the ethical code. Adding this to the existing regulations would address a critical aspect of ethical behavior and provide clearer guidance on how to handle such situations.

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**Evidences/indicators**

● Self-Evaluation Report

● Ethics and behavior Rules and procedures for responding to their violations

● Procedures and mechanisms for plagiarism detection, prevention, response to plagiarism cases

- Internal regulation of the Teaching University
- Rule of proceedings of the Teaching University
- Site-visit and interviews

**Recommendations:**
- It is recommended to continue in efforts of enhancing communication and training programs on academic referencing and plagiarism policies in order to ensure all students and staff are fully informed about the standards and procedures in place.
- It is recommended to include sexual misconduct in the "Code of Ethics" to address this critical issue and provide clear protocols for handling such cases, thereby strengthening the institution's commitment to ethics and integrity.

**Suggestions:**

None

**Best Practices (if applicable):**

None

**Evaluation**

☐ Complies with requirements

x Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

## 3.    Educational Programmes

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

### 3.1 Design and Development of Educational Programmes

HEI has a policy for planning, designing, implementing and developing educational programmes.

The university has elaborated satisfactory educational programs, based on educational standards, and they have successfully implemented all internal and external quality standards. Based on the self-evaluation report, this is confirmed by internal quality assessments - surveys of students, graduates, employers, as well as successful accreditation of educational programs. In 2018-2024, the university was provided with re-accreditation of 2 master's, 6 bachelor's educational programs, 2 new (teacher training and veterinary) integrated master's and 2 new bachelor's (information technology, preschool education) educational programs.

The development of an educational program in a state university is a collaborative process and involves, along with academic staff, internal and external stakeholders of the university: employers, students, and alumni. The most interesting and unique aspect for the Shota Meskhia University of Zugdidi is that in this process there are actively involved local government bodies. These bodies also provide places for practice of students during their study as well as after graduation; for graduates of some programs, they are also employers. Also, a major role has the requirements of the labor market, the university's priorities mostly are based on market research and needs of the region, including occupied part of Georgia.

Mostly, in development of programs the decisions are taken together with the conclusion of the quality assurance office of the university and are submitted to the Faculty Council for

consideration. In case of a positive decision of the Faculty Council, the program is submitted with changes to the Academic Council for approval. In the case of the Veterinary integrated master´s program, the faculty has an ethical board, and all the experiments and practical training, involving live, slaughtered animals and cadavers are undergoing through this council.

Zugdidi State University has procedures for program planning, development, approval, development and cancellation. The learning outcomes of the program are clearly defined and aligned with the National Qualifications Framework. The program ensures the achievement of the set goals and expected learning outcomes. There are no mentions in self-evaluation reports how the students are notified in case of program annulment or cancellation, but in the interviews the students and lecturers noticed that there is a good, organized mailing system for events and processes that are ongoing in the university. The electronic learning process management system (Ini.ge) is also very sophisticated tool for creating student portfolio. Moreover, a proper credit system provides a good basis for smooth transfer of the students on similar or related educational programs.

There is a lack of student activity in research projects, but since this is a new requirement for the university, it will probably improve soon.

One of the most valuable learning outcomes on a master's program is the ability to plan, design and accomplish research experiments, acquiring these skills will be difficult without involvement in scientific projects. University has a good potential for conducting such projects using connections and collaboration with the facilities and institutions, that are working with university personnel based on various contracts.

**Evidences/indicators**

- Self-evaluation report
- Document of quality assurance mechanisms
- Results of the survey conducted at the university - analysis and reports
- Site visit
- Interviews

**Recommendations:**
None

**Suggestions:**

**Best Practices (if applicable):**

- Faculty based ethical board includes key specialists in the field.

**Evaluation**

X Complies with requirements

☐ Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

| 3.2 **Structure and Content of Educational Programmes** |
|---|
| o Programme learning outcomes are clearly stated and are in line with higher education level and qualification to be granted |
| o With the help of individualized education programmes, HEI takes into consideration various requirements, needs and academic readiness of students, and ensures their unhindered involvement into the educational process. |

The learning outcomes of the programs are clearly defined, in accordance with the level of higher education and the qualifications awarded. According to self-evaluation report, in order to ensure the proper formation of the study results of the program, the quality assurance office of the university constantly holds informational and consulting meetings with the academic staff, and the developed programs, as already mentioned, in accordance with the rules for developing educational programs, are compared with accreditation and authorization standards, national qualification requirements and internal university requirements. Guidelines of ECTS - the European system of transfer and accumulation of credits are implemented.

All required information for students and personnel regarding the programs is provided on webpage www.zssu.ge

The webpage contains information about both implemented and planned events, conferences, scholarships from different countries, exchange programs and others. According to self-evaluation report, the webpage updates frequently, and during the visit to the university, all information on webpage was updated and matched to provided documents.

The programs are created based on Georgian legislation and experience of the personnel, must be mentioned, that during the creation of the programs, good practice in other universities is considered. In improvement of the program and educational process are participating lecturers, administration staff, also students, including alumni. Local businesses and government bodies are also participating, that makes the structure and content of the programs unique for the university and region.

This must be mentioned that mostly in the subjects where practical learning is mandatory, accomplishment of student learning outcomes is mostly dependent on personal contact with the tutor. For example, in veterinary medicine, students must develop surgical and clinical skills by direct observation and involvement, but in the current course it can be hard, meaning that most lecturers in clinical subjects are invited personnel from Tbilisi, and long distance can be obstructive for providing good quality practical training.

Also, during the visit we did not find any written lawsuits created by students, that makes the correct evaluation of law students.

**Evidences/indicators**

- Self-evaluation report
- Document of quality assurance mechanisms
- Results of the survey conducted at the university - analysis and reports
- Site visit
- Interviews

**Recommendations:**

- It is recommended to continue in efforts of enhancing that in the clinical subjects, the university has more local personnel and does not rely only on invited personnel.

| Suggestions: |
|---|
| None |

| Best Practices (if applicable): |
|---|
| None |

**Evaluation**

    ☐ Complies with requirements

    X Substantially complies with requirements

    ☐ Partially complies with requirements

   ○   ☐ Does not comply with requirements

## 3.3 Assessment of Learning Outcomes

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

According to the self-evaluation report and other documents, including syllabi, during the execution of the educational curriculum, the attainment level of students' learning outcomes is appraised in compliance with the assessment framework sanctioned by Order N3, issued by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia on January 5, 2007, titled "Rule of Calculation credits for higher education programs." This assessment procedure considers students' active engagement in the instructional process and adheres to the principle of continuous assessment of knowledge acquisition.

The evaluation of students' achievement levels within the educational program's learning component encompasses various assessment modalities, including interim (singular or multiple) and final assessments, the aggregate of which yields the final score (measured on a scale of 100 points). Detailed information regarding the regulation of the educational process is delineated in Annex 3.2.1, while Annex 3.2.3 elucidates specifics pertaining to educational programs.

Zugdidi state university has clear and well explained criteria for student evaluations, and this can be accessed through the syllabus of the subjects, also it is described in programs.

The university uses an educational process electronic management program - The following services are available to students through the electronic systems of educational process management:

   1. Information about the student, where the student has the opportunity to correct his/her application data.

   2. Study card, which allows the student to see the subjects he/she has chosen, the grades received and accumulated credits.

   3. Forming an individual table: From the list of presented subjects, the student can choose the subjects to be studied in the current semester. The sum of the credits of the chosen subjects should not exceed the set limit, which is known to the student in advance. If necessary, the tutor of the department will advise the student on the above-mentioned issue.

   4. Study program: The student can familiarize himself with the list of specialties available

at the faculty with brief information about each specialty and a list of relevant disciplines.

   5. Syllabus: the student can familiarize himself with the study syllabus of the educational programs he has chosen.

   6. Selection of specialties: The electronic learning process management system allows the student to choose or change free credits.

7. Study material, electronic resources and others are provided to the student through this system.

This electronic system gives students complete information about goals achieved, gaps, and ways of improvement.

**Evidences/indicators**

- Self-evaluation report
- Document of quality assurance mechanisms
- Results of the survey conducted at the university - analysis and reports
- Site visit
- Interviews

**Recommendations:**
None

**Suggestions:**
None

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
None

**Evaluation**

   X Complies with requirements

   ☐ Substantially complies with requirements

   ☐ Partially complies with requirements

o   ☐ Does not comply with requirements

## 4. Staff of the HEI

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

**4.1. Staff Management**

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

Shota Meskhia State University of Zugdidi (ZSU) has a personnel management policy and a management plan. The main document of the personnel management policy was approved by the Academic Council on 25 of September of 2023.

ZSU is the only higher education institution in the region, which has the highest responsibility and is determined to establish the function of a regional educational hub by 2030. The main strategic document of the university defines that by 2030, ZSU envisions itself as a regional education hub that meets the demands of a rapidly evolving labor market through the principle of lifelong learning, aims to promote the implementation and internationalization of research while maintaining a good reputation and high regard among stakeholders. Therefore, the implementation of this goal is impossible without the involvement of highly qualified academics and other personnel. According to the same document, it is envisaged by the university to improve the management policies and procedures focused on the development of personnel during 2024-2030.

The university has approved the human resource management policy document, which was adopted by the representative council by the resolution of September 25, 2023. According to this document, the "Management Policy" establishes rules for effective personnel management, mechanisms for monitoring the activities of the university, and procedures for improvement through the analysis, reporting, and recommendations derived from evaluation results at the LEPL (Legal Entity Under Public Law) Shota Meskhia State University of Zugdidi. The staff of the university (including academic, administrative, and auxiliary personnel) adhere to the guidelines outlined in the "Management Policy", which includes Mechanisms for Improving Educational Programs of the University, Assessment/Self-Assessment/Study of Employee Satisfaction at the University, Mechanisms for Personal and Professional Development/Improvement of Personnel, Personal Management Policy etc.

The ZSU recognizes and confirms the need for highly qualified personnel. For this purpose, the university has rules for hiring staff, academic staff support mechanisms and staff professional development policy documents approved by the representative council. In addition, the university has approved staff performance evaluation rules. According to the documentation mentioned, personnel are hired on the basis of open competition or direct interviews.

According to the presented documentation, academic personnel are hired on the basis of Georgian legislation, and the working conditions and remuneration are determined by the annually renewed labor contract. Based on the competition, the academic staff will be selected for the following term: professor for 6 years, associate professor for 4 years, assistant professor for 3 or 4 years. It should be noted that the conclusion/renewal of contracts for personnel elected for a specified period of time is not fully in line with the current legislation of Georgia. Accordingly, it is necessary that the mentioned record and labor contracts comply with the Labor Code of Georgia.

Various mechanisms are provided by the university for the professional and academic support of the staff. Among them, financial support for participation in international and local conferences, announcement of scientific projects and small grant incentive projects, financial support for publishing publications, staff incentives for publishing in international bases and journals, and others. The university also provides support to administrative staff. This includes preferential training rates for employees, leave for educational purposes, organization of various training and development activities, and support for involvement in external activities and others.

During the interview with the staff, a question was repeatedly asked about the projects supported by the university, which would be aimed at the development and support of the academic and professional activities of both academic and administrative and support staff. University staff named some activities that were supported by the university and aimed at developing staff's professional skills.

Despite the existence of the mentioned documentation, there are indications about some issues here. During the interviews with the staff, a question was repeatedly asked about the projects supported by the university, which would be aimed at the development and support of the academic and professional activities of both academic and administrative and support staff. University staff named only a few activities that were supported by the university and aimed at developing staff's professional skills. It seems to be necessary to provide additional information about the support measures mentioned in the university's personnel management policy documents and to ensure the maximum involvement of personnel in professional development activities.

To ensure the educational activities of the university, it is necessary to have highly qualified academic and invited staff. The professional qualifications of the mentioned staff should exactly correspond to the purpose of the program implementation. Attracting and retaining highly qualified academic staff is one of the university's challenges. ZSU is a regional university, the majority of whose personnel are recruited from Tbilisi and Kutaisi. In addition, the vast majority of them are employed in other educational institutions and/or public or private institutions. Consequently, their involvement in the learning process, continuity and sustainability cannot be ensured on a weekly basis. Many of these staff members confirmed they usually come to the university once or twice a month to give lectures and consultations. At other times, lectures are conducted remotely, with on-site assistance provided by a local assistant. We believe that conducting a lecture program in such a way does not always fully support a continuous learning process and the achievement of the goals defined by the university.

Invited and academic staff are involved in the educational process by the university, selected on the basis of an open competition or personal interviews. It is the duty of the university to constantly ensure promotion and monitoring of personnel and development of the staff. For this purpose, the university has an annual staff evaluation/self-evaluation procedure. The Human Resources Department of the university conducts the assessment process. With this objective, the relevant rule is established, and the relevant criteria/sub-criteria are defined. The content of the sub-criteria includes the constituent components of the criteria. The combination of the evaluation points of the criteria determines the total evaluation score. According to this rule, the person to be assessed makes a self-assessment, and then the assessment form is filled. The completed evaluation report is sent to the head of

administration, and later feedback is provided. Thai way, the internal evaluation is rightly followed by external one.

During the site visit, the presented self-assessment/evaluation documentation was examined in detail. The materials presented mention only the results of their activities, results of scientific research activities, participation in projects and other professional development activities. It should be noted that according to the 2022-2023 performance evaluation documentation, the staff's involvement in professional and scientific activities has decreased. In some cases, the participation of personnel in various conferences (within Georgia) is noted, which is not enough and needs to be strengthened. Therefore, it is necessary for the university staff to constantly participate in planned activities for the purpose of educational and professional development. Appropriate ongoing supervision of staff participation and involvement in developmental activities should be carried out by the university.

The principle recognized by the university is involvement in scientific research and maximum integration of personnel into the local and international scientific community. The main condition for ensuring the above-mentioned goal is the existence of a medium or high level of language competence of the staff. Unfortunately, the vast majority of university staff do not have appropriate qualifications in any foreign language usually used for academic communication in Europe/internationally. Although the university has offered a free English language training course for the staff in the last few years, the language competence of the staff is not satisfactory. Consequently, staff involvement in academic, professional or other types of international activities, exchange programs, scientific activities cannot be carried out effectively.

In order to overcome the deficits in English language proficiency and strengthen scientific activities, the university has created a group of young people who are equipped with foreign language skills and help the staff to find and translate relevant materials in scientific databases. The staff often focuses only on local publications. In particular, the university itself has a publication "Krebsi" where the works of the staff are published.

It should be noted that no foreign language subject is implemented in any educational program. In addition, admission and inclusion of foreign language students in the study program is not ensured. University staff mostly do not participate in mobilities or other international projects. Inclusion of students in exchange programs is almost impossible. Therefore, the issue of internationalization of the institution and programs is not ensured.

Accordingly, it is necessary to improve foreign language skills of the academic staff in order to facilitate the implementation of the university's scientific research activities, the internationalization of the results of scientific research activities and educational programs.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Self-evaluation report
- Site visit
- Interviews

**Recommendations:**
- It is recommended to invest in highly qualified academic and invited staff, in order to ensure full and continuous management of the educational process.

- It is recommended to establish incentive mechanisms for the performance of the research component and professional development activity by the staff.

**Suggestions:**
None

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
None

**Evaluation**

☐ Complies with requirements

x 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

ZSU introduced the contract of academic staff, teachers annual teaching and scientific methodological workload scheme of visiting professors and lecturers, which determines the criteria of their workload, more specifically, the volume of annual academic work and hourly standards related to the educational process.

There are 954 students in the university, and 318 students have their status suspended. (33,4%). According to the number of students, the number of staff is determined, which is academic - 77, and invited - 59.

The workload of personnel is stipulated in the appendix of the labor contract. The minimum annual workload for academic staff is 800 hours, which can be devoted to educational, scientific and other activities. They include training course creation, modification, supervision of papers, module modification etc. Additional coursework for a professor is 3 hours, for an associate professor 6 hours.

The management bodies of the university are aware that for effective work it is necessary to have highly qualified academic staff and to use the resources and potential of this staff to a maximum extent. For this purpose, the university plans to contribute to the improvement of the mechanisms of academic staff selection, employment, career advancement and regulation of workload schemes.

It seems, the academic staff workload is determined transparently and fairly at ZSU, through consultation with the people whom it concerns. The distribution of workload is consistent with the mission, goals, operating principles, policies and practices of the university. The workload distribution for each staff member reflects the full range of demands placed on academic staff activities such as research, participation in grant projects, activities carried out for the purpose of raising professional qualifications, university service or participation in wider public activities, teaching, development of teaching methods and curriculum etc. Academic staff are not required to perform all of the above-mentioned duties on an annual basis, so that the

workload scheme does not hinder and limit them in their professional and career advancement.

The workload of academics includes research, teaching and administrative activities with a percentage and hourly distribution determined by the rule. In order to attract researchers and promote their active involvement in research projects, a clause was added to the annex of the contract of affiliated academic staff and at the expense of increasing the percentage share of the research component, other obligations were reduced, which is the motivation for an academic person to conduct research activities effectively. Also, the right of academics is protected by legislation and statutes to support their activity in the scientific direction.

Ratio of the academic, scientific, invited staff number to the number of students is 1:7, ratio of the affiliated staff number to the number of students is 1:20. Ratio of academic, scientific, and invited staff to the number of higher education programs is currently 9:1) (in previous authorization period the ratio was 7.5:1. Ratio of the affiliated staff members to the total number of academic and invited staff is 1:2,8.

**Evidences/indicator**
- Academic staff affiliation rules and conditions
- The rule of the limit of the workload of academic staff
- Interview results
- Labor contracts and Appendixes of labor contracts

**Recommendations:**
- It is recommended to strengthen staff performance reporting mechanisms in accordance with the workload.

**Suggestions:**
None

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
None

**Evaluation**

☐ Complies with requirements

X Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

## 5. Students and Their Support Services

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

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

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

Students have available such general information as how to obtain student status, make mobility, terminate status etc. The information mentioned is public to them, and if necessary, they receive information through consultations by the university administration. It should be noted that the contract signed between the student and the university clearly reflects the rights and duties of both parties, and most importantly, the legal interests of the students are protected by this document. Regarding the aforementioned, the rights and duties that are incumbent upon the student from the moment of signing the contract are explained to the student each time, and the provision of this information is confirmed by both the submitted documents and the results of interviews with students.

Student's rights and duties are determined by various university regulations: Student Code of Ethics, regulating rules of educational process, the contract signed with the student, Etiquette - Online Behavior Guide, E-Learning Administration Rule, Examination procedure, Rule of use of Turnitin plagiarism detection program of Shota Meskhia State University of Zugdidi and activity of plagiarism detection commission, Internal regulation, and more. The mentioned regulations are published on the website of the university - in the legal reference, in the educational process administration system, in addition, first-year students receive the Code of Ethics, Exam Conduct Rules, and the Student Guide by email. The student agreement form is posted on the university website.

The university has an appeal system for academic and administrative matters. The procedures for appealing the exam paper are regulated by the Rule of Conducting Examinations. The student has the right to familiarize with the intermediate/final/supplementary examination paper and, if necessary, to appeal the received grade. To be precise, if the student does not agree with the outcome of the appeal, a relevant appeal commission is established by the order of the rector. Through the electronic system of learning process management (Ini.ge), students have the opportunity to send an application to appeal the received assessment.

Based on the documents provided by Shota Meskhia University of Zugdidi and the results of the site visit, it is clear that the institution fully meets the requirements of the standard.

**Evidences/indicators**

- Site visit
- Interviews
- Annex 3.2.1. The regulation of the educational process
- Annex 5.1.1. Samples of the agreement signed between the university and the student
- Annex 5.1.2. Student Code of Ethics
- Annex 5.1.3. Student contract sample
- Annex 5.1.4. Student survey results
- Annex 5.1.5 The procedure for conducting exams
- Annex 5.1.6 Electronic system of learning process management - Ini.ge
- Annex 5.1.7. Rules for the use of the plagiarism detection program Turnitin and the activity of the plagiarism detection commission"
- Annex 3.2.3. Methodology of individual curriculum development
- Annex 5.1.8. Rights and duties of students

**Recommendations:**
None

**Suggestions:**
None

**Best Practices (if applicable):**

None

**Evaluation**

    x Complies with requirements

    ☐ Substantially complies with requirements

    ☐ Partially complies with requirements

    ☐ Does not comply with requirements

## 5.2 Student Support Services

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

Zugdidi Shota Meskhia State University has an important place not only in the development of the region, but also in the fulfillment of the strategic task of Georgia, since a large part of the university's student contingent are students who moved from occupied Abkhazia, who maintain their connection with Georgia. Consequently, it is very important what and how the university offers to students. Various student support services operate in the university, one of the important parts is the provision of dormitory space for students and teaching staff, which is very important for the university. Along with this, the educational institution offers a partial tuition fee discount for socially vulnerable students, various scholarships for successful students, the possibility of individual study schedules and more. Based on the documents provided by the university, it is clear that the president of the student government can submit or mediate social assistance to the student.

At the beginning of each academic year, meetings are constantly held with new students, where the administrative staff of the university provides necessary information related to the studies. The university serves the students by means of coordinators of the relevant educational programs, from whom the students receive information and advice on the planning of the educational process and academic achievements. At the same time, it is important to note that the university has a career development service that constantly provides information to students about what opportunities they have for employment. It is also important to note that students are aware of the opportunities available to appeal their grades, as evidenced by both the documentation provided and meetings with students.

The university has a document Rule of Student Projects, which establishes the rules for how a student can submit a project prepared by them to the administration for implementation, although it is important to note that the internal university document does not include information on funding limits, deadlines etc. That is why it is important that the university provides full information about what time limits and additional rules need to be followed in order to prepare and implement the project.

The university has a student research fund, and it announces various grant competitions for students. A research center has been established at the university, which ensures the involvement of master students in research projects, although it is desirable that the involvement of students in scientific-research projects increases. Students constantly receive information through the electronic platform, this way, they can see their grades, evaluate lectures and learning processes.

Student self-government has been formed at the university, its members well understand the role and the mission in the university. They have information about the self-government election period, election procedures and mechanisms. They actively participate in various projects and also constantly share information with university students. Various creative events are held at the university with the initiative of the student self-government.

During the visit to the university, it was determined that students do not have information about their role in the representative and faculty councils, though. It appears the students were not actually involved in the process of discussion of academic issues, which were discussed by the above-mentioned councils. It is imperative that the university ensures effective student involvement in academic, representative and faculty councils.

The university has an internal regulatory rule that regulates the realization of bachelor's and master's theses. As a part of the on-site visit, the expert team requested samples of bachelor's/master's theses - based on their study, it was determined that the rules of formatting are not observed in the theses, in particular, the title pages, font sizes, chapter references etc. The student final works mostly included only Georgian-language sources. This is important that the bachelor/master's theses are done in accordance with the rules and also the sources are indicated in accordance with the citation rules.

**Evidences/indicators**

- Interviews
- BA and MA thesis
- Site visit
- Workload, functions and duties of people involved in consulting services, their job descriptions
- Annex 3.2.1. The regulation of the educational process
- Annex 5.2.2 Student support mechanisms
- Internal regulations and norms of disciplinary responsibility of Shota Meskhia State Teaching University
- ZSU´s website - http://www.zssu.ge/zssu2/
- Annex 5.2.3. Rules for granting scholarships to students
- Annex 5.2.4 Research results of graduates in their careers (including the employment rate in accordance with the
- Obtained qualifications) and regarding academic development
- Annex 5.2.5 Youth politics

**Recommendations:**

- It is recommended to ensure effective involvement of the students in the representative and faculty councils.
- It is recommended to ensure that bachelor's and master's theses are prepared in accordance with the rules and follow the citation rules.

**Suggestions:**
- It is suggested that the document "Rule of Student Projects" is completed with relevant information.

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
None

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

## 6. Research, development and/or other creative work

Higher Education Institution, considering its type and specifics of field(s), works on the strengthening of its research function, ensures proper conditions to support research activities and improve the quality of research activities

| **6.1 Research Activities** |
| --- |
| <ul><li>HEI, based on its type and specifics of its fields, carries out research/creative activities.</li><li>Ensuring the effectiveness of doctoral research supervision</li><li>HEI has public, transparent and fair procedures for the assessment and defense of dissertations which are relevant to the specifics of the field</li></ul> |

The current strategy for the development of scientific and research activities (2025-2028) focuses on the factors identified and considered in the process of research development:

· Determination of priority and prospective direction/directions for the institution.

· Determination of financial and human resources.

· Establishing and strengthening partnerships and collaboration with representatives of the academic field (universities, research institutes), as well as cooperation with the business sector, private companies and enterprises interested in research results.

· Cooperation with international organizations and institutions; strengthening researchers in the management of research projects.

· Evaluation of the results of research activities and making recommendations as needed.

· Support for innovation and commercialization (applied research) to create new products and services.

· Dissemination of research results to the general public.

In 2023, the university prioritized advancing scientific research and enhancing academic productivity. A strategic research plan was approved, outlining key goals, tasks, and measurable performance indicators. To support these efforts, financial provisions were increased, and motivation was bolstered through supplements for academic staff. The strategy for the development of scientific and research activities of ZSU includes the following 4 strategic goals:

1. Promotion of interdisciplinary studies.
2. Integrating research into learning.
3. Strengthening of research infrastructure and activities of researchers.
4. Increasing the visibility of research results and supporting open science.

During the interview with the administrative and academic staff, it was determined that the university's research priority is the implementation of an applied research project.

The 2025-2028 Strategy for the Development of Scientific Research Activities is currently too general and lacks specific strategies. It needs to include more detailed, understandable, and measurable information. Additionally, it is important to have a time-bound plan with clear results and indicators, as well as identifying potential funding sources.

A working group, established by the Rector, focuses on boosting research activities, training academic staff in research skills, and providing support. To improve research quality, the university's Center for Lifelong Education, alongside the Foreign Language Center, offers services such as translating scientific papers into English and facilitating participation in national and international library networks.

The university introduced academic staff to the working group, which is assisting with English translations of professors' articles. A key challenge is publishing articles by affiliated professors in impact-factor journals. To enhance research quality and internationalization, a review process for scientific articles and regulations for including international editorial board members were developed.

The university increased its budget to support academic staff through shared accommodation, meals, travel, interpreters, and business trips. As part of its mission, the university aims to establish itself as a research-oriented institution, fostering studies aligned with scientific priorities. Collaboration with partner organizations and internal support mechanisms ensures the integration of research results into the educational process.

To further enhance research quality, the university:

· Encourages academic staff, including young researchers, to produce new knowledge and high-quality publications, and supports their research potential, including participation in international conferences.

· Promotes research ethics and interdisciplinary research, exemplified by the creation of the Zugdidi Gastronomy Academy and a planned Gastronomy Museum.

· Integrates research into education, as seen in the "One Day in Kolkheti" project, which involved students and professors in joint research, resulting in a mini film.

· Engages students in research activities and supports initiatives like the "Golden Fleece" youth club and a creative incubator.
· Collaborates with international and local research institutions, exemplified by the academic journal "Topical Issues of Law," a collaboration among nine Georgian regional universities.

Finally, the university optimizes its resources to ensure that research outcomes benefit society. As part of its broader research goals, the university participated in the "Georgia I2Q - Innovation, Inclusivity, and Quality" grant application as a member of the Competitive Innovation Fund (CIF) consortium.

University is involved in several interdisciplinary and international research projects. One project, "Human Culture Society" (Nov 2023 - Dec 2024), aims to integrate research with teaching using an interdisciplinary approach, focusing on the unity and conflict between nature and culture, as well as freedom, religiosity, and justice in Georgian thought. Activities include seminars, lectures, and a Spring School of Political Philosophy in Poland.
Another project, in collaboration with several European universities, explores the impact of crises on the transformation of the EU and European states, emphasizing international and interdisciplinary education. This project will include an international conference, workshops, and public lectures.

A third project, "Man, Outer World, Co-World," focuses on unifying research and teaching at university, aiming to meet modern European academic standards. The project includes public lectures, colloquiums, and the creation of new training programs in collaboration with Georgian and international scholars.

Two research projects were approved on the basis of the internal scientific grant competition:
· Of popularizing the history and culture of the region - historical and cultural guide of Zugdidi municipality".
· "Circular economic development opportunities in the Samegrelo region"
Additionally, a project proposal was submitted to the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation titled "Where All Routes Crossed: Seaside Kolkheti Connecting Cultures (1st BC-4th AD)".

A grant competition titled "Promotion of Science and Stimulation of Scientific Research in Schools of the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Region" has been announced and will be funded by the university. The competition aims to popularize science in regional schools, enhance research skills among senior students, motivate teachers to involve students in research, encourage scientists, especially young ones, to participate in the school process, and introduce innovations that will improve school effectiveness and boost student interest in science.

The University will host the 35th International Hegel Congress - "The Idea of Goodness and Morality in Hegel's Philosophy" - and will include a conference, publishing and cultural events.

The University, taking into account its type and field-specific focus, is committed to enhancing its research function by creating favorable conditions to support and improve the quality of research activities, but to accomplish this effectively, the processes must be clearly outlined in the strategy and regulatory documents to facilitate the assessment and monitoring of the results achieved.

For effective regional development, it is crucial to foster strong partnerships with other universities in the region. These collaborations not only enhance the sharing of resources, knowledge, and expertise but also create a robust network that drives innovative research. By working together, universities can address regional challenges more efficiently and develop research projects that have a broader impact. Additionally, such cooperation can lead to joint funding opportunities, interdisciplinary initiatives, and the ability to tackle larger, more complex problems that might be beyond the capacity of a single institution. In essence, regional collaboration among universities is not just desirable; it is essential for achieving sustainable growth and research excellence.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Strategy for the development of scientific research activities 2025-2028
- Memorandums of Cooperation
- University website
- Interview results

**Recommendations:**
- It is recommended to update the strategy for the development of scientific research activities 2025-2028, and include in it more detailed, understandable, and measurable information.

**Suggestions**:
- It is suggested, for regional development and advancement of the research, to collaborate more with other universities in the nearby regions of Georgia.
- It is suggested to involve more students in the research projects.

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
None

**Evaluation**

☐ Complies with requirements

x 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/art-creative activities.
- ○ University works on internationalization of research, development and creative activities.

The university has established and implemented various mechanisms to enhance research productivity, focusing on several key objectives. These include stimulating and encouraging the scientific activities of young researchers and academic staff, supporting their participation in both international and local research activities, and promoting the publication of research results in high-impact scientific journals and international publications. The university also aims to improve research skills for effective project implementation and support applied research projects submitted to national and international scientific foundations, including competitive projects for master's students.

To achieve these goals, the university has developed and successfully implemented a range of support mechanisms. Research funding is diversified, drawing from the university's own budget, grants from various scientific funds, and contributions from non-governmental and international organizations. The research budget has steadily increased from 2019 to 2024, resulting in more funded projects and activities. This budget supports academic staff through internal scientific grants, co-financing of external grants, financial aid for participation in international conferences, travel expenses, publishing, and improvements to the scientific library and electronic resources.

The university promotes to some extent staff development through both individualized faculty-level initiatives and organized training sessions. These training courses cover various aspects such as legal issues related to research, finding funding sources, preparing and evaluating grant applications, and publishing in international databases. The university also supports grant administration and assists researchers with the reporting process.

As part of the "Strengthening the Monitoring and Supporting Mechanisms of the Research Development Process in Regional Universities" project, university representatives participated in two cycles of professional development activities tailored to their needs. These activities focused on research policy planning, internationalization, commercialization of research, doctoral education, project evaluation, and academic publication. The project facilitated the creation of a regional university network, with meetings held both online and in person to share experiences and deepen cooperation.

The university signed an agreement with the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia and the European Union's "Horizon Europe" Framework Programme. This led to the establishment of a grant office dedicated to Horizon Europe. The office organized a meeting where the rector highlighted the significance and opportunities of Horizon Europe for Georgian scientists and innovators. Notably, a three-day workshop was held with National Office Heads and National Contact Persons (NCPs), focusing on application submission with researcher involvement and covering topics such as Maria Sklodowska Curie actions and Horizon Europe widening.

In 2022, two affiliated professors participated in the EU Climate Mission project titled "Co-creating Innovation Packages for Local and Regional Climate Resilience" (Green-labs.eu). This project, involving partners from various European countries and local entities, is planned to be re-submitted with expanded criteria. Additionally, the university is involved in a 2024 project application titled "Harmony in Education: Fostering Peace through Excellence," under Horizon Europe. This project aims to integrate peace education into curricula, establish community initiatives for peacebuilding, and provide professional development for teachers.

The university celebrates the International Day of Women and Girls in Science and the International Day of Science by organizing events such as public lectures, webinars, and workshops to promote science and research. Academic staff have participated in webinars covering European Research Council (ERC) funding, "Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area" (WIDERA) work programs, and Gender Equality Plan (GEP) development. The grant office has also organized information meetings with the national office and European Commission.

Significant events include sharing experiences from Jure Zovko, Professor at the University of Zadar, and Zdislav Krasnodebski, Vice-Chairman of the European Parliament's "Industry, Research and Energy" Committee, regarding opportunities within Horizon Europe for Georgian scientists. The university has actively collaborated with Zugdidi Municipality City Hall, particularly regarding the EU project NETZEROCITIES competition, which aims to achieve climate neutrality.

The grant office has provided information on the "Researchers' Mobility Program (GRMP)," which funds 3-month research visits to EU member states. The office hosted a consultation meeting and shared details about the competition and application conditions. Academic staff were involved in training and workshops related to Horizon Europe programs and research project management. Virtual brokerage events and international hybrid conferences, such as the one on "Promoting Science-Industry Cooperation with Joint Priorities of Research and Innovation," were also supported.

Involvement in open science initiatives has been a priority, with activities including the Open Science Forum and the presentation of Openjournals.ge, an open access platform for Georgian scientific journals. The grant office has disseminated relevant information through the university's web page, social networks, and email.

To improve the quality and productivity of research, the Center for Lifelong Education, in collaboration with the Foreign Language Center, supports academic staff with translating scientific works into English, integrating into international library networks, and publishing in scientific journals. Also due to the academic staff's limited proficiency in English, a group of students are actively involved in searching necessary scientific materials in international libraries, selecting high-impact journals, and translating publications. Enhancing the language

skills of the academic staff is crucial for their effective integration into the global scientific community.

Academic staff attended the webinar organized by the library of Ilia State University - "How to get Published in an Academic Journal".

Insufficient foreign language proficiency poses a risk to the sustainability of research internationalization. The university needs to intensify its efforts to address this issue.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Interview result
- Self-evaluation report
- Website
- Agreements
- Reports

**Recommendations:**

- It is recommended to strengthen efforts to improve the foreign language proficiency of the staff and this way to support sustainability of research internationalization as well as teaching.

**Suggestions:**
None

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
None

**Evaluation**

☐ Complies with requirements

x 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.

According to SER and interview results, the university (until 2021) assessed the productivity of its academic staff using an average indicator—requiring the publication of at least one article in an international journal—and a high indicator—publishing in high-impact factor journals. The evaluation results confirmed that the achievements during the reporting period met the target, although the target itself was set at an average level by the institution. Currently, citation indexing has seen some improvement. Past experience demonstrates that as the level of institutional support increases and evolves, the research productivity of university staff improves accordingly.

The university has since updated its regulations for assessing the research activity and productivity of academic staff. According to official documentation (SER, Reports) the evaluation mechanisms in place analyze and assess the outcomes of scientific research activities, enabling informed decisions for ongoing improvements. The quality of the academic staff's research is assessed in accordance with the university's rules for evaluating academic activity, utilizing the annual self-assessment report of scientific-research activity. The following

indicators are used to evaluate the research activities of the staff: a) the number of scientific research activities; b) the productivity of scientific research works (considering both quantitative and qualitative aspects).

1. Quantitative Indicators:
a) The scientific productivity of academic staff is evaluated using the h-index, which assesses both
productivity and citation impact.
b) Specifically, a h-index 2 is established for professors, and a h-index 1 for associate professors
2. Qualitative indicators
a) Evaluation of staff with qualitative indicators is carried out in accordance with the evaluation of the activities of academic and invited implementing educational courses.
b) To affirm productivity and provide a positive evaluation of scientific activities conducted by academic staff over a full academic year, it is mandatory to validate quantitative and/or qualitative indicators, including the implementation of scientific activities across various categories.

According to SER the "Number of Scientific-Research Works" indicator refers to the total count of scholarly activities and publications completed during the reporting period. This includes preparing and contributing to monographs, manuals, and collections of scientific works; publishing articles in refereed, high-impact factor, or foreign journals; delivering reports and participating in scientific conferences, symposiums, and seminars; organizing scientific events and student activities; engaging in editorial and review work; supervising master's theses; being involved in scientific societies; participating in funded research projects; and engaging in international scientific cooperation. At the end of each academic year, academic staff submit a self-evaluation report of their scientific-research activities to the faculty. However, during the interview with the academic team, they emphasized their participation in conferences but struggled to discuss the scientific aspects in detail.

The faculty then forwards the verified results to the quality assurance service for assessment. This assessment contributes to the annual evaluation of research activities and is factored in the final evaluation of academic staff. According to SER, based on the ranking from the annual evaluation of research and academic activities, the university incentivizes staff with the best results through various mechanisms.

The university presented the Report on Scientific Projects Implemented by the University. Also, HEI has issued a document that quantifies the productivity of its academic staff, providing data on affiliated professors registered on Researchgate.net, including the number of their publications and their citation index.

However, the review of provided reports and personal files revealed that not all professors and associate professors have provided the required data at this stage. During the interview, the academic staff were unable to provide details or demonstrate familiarity with this criterion and its associated performance metrics related to scientific activity.
It should also be noted that the review of master's theses has shown that their format and quality do not meet the standards set by the university's regulations. It is crucial to offer improved guidance to both academic staff and students on thesis preparation according to HEI regulations. Additionally, raising the academic team's awareness of the required standards is essential to maintain the quality of research at the university.

**Evidences/indicators**
- Strategy for the development of scientific research activities 2025-2028
- Quantifies the productivity of its academic staff
- Quality Assurance Mechanisms
- Rector's order
- Interview results
- Master Theses

**Recommendations:**

- It is recommended to ensure that all professors and associate professors provide the required data and become familiar with the relevant criteria and performance metrics to make it possible to objectively evaluate and measure the research activity of the academic staff at the University.
- It is recommended to offer training or resources to improve the academic staff's understanding and ability to discuss established research activity evaluation criteria effectively.
- It is recommended to enhance the academic team's awareness of the required standards to ensure the quality of research theses at the university.

**Suggestions:**

None

**Best Practices (if applicable):**

None

**Evaluation**

□ Complies with requirements

□ Substantially complies with requirements

x Partially complies with requirements

□ Does not comply with requirements

## 7. Material, Information and Financial Resources

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

| **7.1 Material Resources** |
| --- |
| o The institution possesses or owns material resources (fixed and current assets) that are used for achieving goals stated in the mission statement, adequately responds to the requirements of educational programmes and research activities and corresponds to the existing number of students and planned enrolment. <br> o HEI offers the environment necessary for implementing educational activities: sanitary units, natural light possibilities, and central heating system. <br> o Health and safety of students and staff is protected within the institution. <br> o HEI has adapted environment for people with special needs |

The panel concluded that the university possesses material resources that are used for achieving goals stated in the mission statement, and adequately responds to the requirements of educational programs and research activities and corresponds to the existing number of students and planned enrolment. The mission of the Zugdidi Shota Meskhia State University is: "to cultivate a new knowledge and employment environment that prioritizes meeting the needs of students, staff, and stakeholders, considering the changing requirements of the labor market. To contribute to the steady, successful, and sustainable development of the region through educational programs that emphasize the integration of learning and research projects aimed at leveraging research outcomes and fostering internationalization, facilitating the exchange of innovations to positively impact the well-being of the population, society, businesses, and the state. To cultivate democratic and tolerant mindsets, emphasizing personal growth, and providing higher and professional education that prepares individuals for success in both domestic and international labor markets, to produce competitive, highly skilled professionals who actively contribute to society and effectively address future challenges, guided by the principle of lifelong learning. As a regional education center, is to inspire optimism and confidence in the future, while upholding quality, inclusion, and equal access to education for all target groups, fostering sustainable, equitable, and inclusive development".

By 2030, the university envisions itself as a regional education hub that meets the demands of a rapidly evolving labor market through the principle of lifelong learning, aims to promote the implementation and internationalization of scientific research while maintaining a good reputation and high regard among stakeholders.

In order to achieve the goals defined by the mission of the university, Shota Meskhia Zugdidi State University takes care of infrastructure development. The following tasks are planned for the goal #7 of the 2024-2030 Strategic Plan (development of material, informational and financial resources for sustainable, stable, effective and efficient functioning of the educational university):

- · Development of material, informational and financial resources for sustainable, stable, effective and efficient functioning of the university.

- · Improving library resources and improving services.

- · Improving access of effectiveness, efficiency and management of services and processes to university management systems.

- · Through the use of information technology. providing access to information technologies.

- · Ensuring an effective system of accountability, financial management, planning and control in the university.

- · Financial resources.

Based on the self-assessment report of the authorization of Shota Meskhia Zugdidi State University, the attached documents, the interviews conducted within the framework of the authorization site-visit, the study of additional requested documents and the material and technical resources, it was determined that the immovable and movable property owned/fairly owned by the university are used for the purposes defined by the university's mission; it is

consistent with the university's mission, teaching and research goals, and the existing and planned number of students.

2 master's, 2 integrated, 9 bachelor's, teacher training, Georgian language training, 28 vocational educational programs and 18 short-term training/retraining courses are implemented in the Zugdidi State University. 77 academic staff are involved in the implementation of educational programs, including 5 affiliated professors, 6 non-affiliated professors, 28 affiliated associate professors, 22 non-affiliated associate professors, 9 affiliated assistant professors, 7 affiliated assistants, 85 administrative and support staff, 59 on an hourly basis visiting professor/specialist in the field. In total, 49 academic staff are affiliated, 1 foreign academic staff is teaching, and 954 students are receiving education at higher educational programs. From this, the status is suspended - 318. The maximum number of students requested by USD is 1500, and the maximum number of places for students determined by the authorization board (in case of repeated authorization) is 1000. The university determines the number of acceptable contingents by the formula for determining the number of students given in the Rule for Determining the Number of Students. As a matter of fact, the university can accept 1200 students.

The total area of the institution is 288,388.95 sq. m., of which the total teaching area is 4138 sq. m., and the total auxiliary area is 284,250.95 sq. m. (out of which 87,818.95 sq. m. - buildings and pasture adjacent to the farm (7392.95 sq. m. buildings and structures, 80.426 sq. m. pasture adjacent to the farm) and 196,432 sq. m. - unused auxiliary space). The self-assessment report is accompanied by extracts from the public register, as well as documents confirming the sustainability of real estate/buildings in 2024. ZSU has 3 (three) educational buildings, 1 training campus, dormitory for students and professors, 1 hotel apartment, livestock farm, greenhouses, and agricultural land. Documentation confirming the real estate is presented. The 2023 inventory document is provided as a document confirming the movable property. In the current period, 4.1 square meters are defined per 1 student. m., and under the conditions of the requested contingent, while maintaining the same size of the training space, it will be 2.75 sq. m. According to the opinion of the rector of the university, the project of a new dormitory for students is in the initial stage of planning, because students are asking for it.

The university has developed strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation methodology, according to which it determines the general principles, rules and procedures of strategic planning. According to the mentioned methodology, the institution determines the vision, mission, values, long-term goals and ways of their achievement of the educational university. Also, it analyzes the priorities and main directions of the educational university, the internal and external indicators of the evaluation of the educational university, taking into account the current real situation and perspectives. Taking into account the analysis of the current situation and threats, it sets specific tasks to achieve the specified goals. For quality enhancement of activities, the institution has defined target marks for the period 2026-2031 at the university level. Generally, the institution applies for an increased rate of target marks. In some cases, maintenance of the target marks has been observed.

During the interview process with the representatives of the quality assurance service, it was clarified that the institution has taken the actual situation as an indicator in case of target marks, however, the institution noted that they plan to improve both the main and additional space/environment, which is reflected in the 2024-2030 strategic plan. The action plan for 2024-2026 presents planned projects: development of a training campus project for the organization of facilities supporting the educational process (professor-teacher hotel, student dormitories, greenhouses, livestock farm, beekeeping training laboratory, student dormitory,

university kindergarten) at the educational university, Gastronomy Museum) and infrastructure construction. During the interview and inspection of the infrastructure, it was noted that the mentioned projects are at the stage of planning and agreement with the governing bodies of the municipality, and the preparatory stage of designing is underway.

According to the self-evaluation report, the total budget of the educational university for 2024 is 7,522,932 GEL. 239,850 GEL has been allocated for scientific research activities, and 27,000 GEL for library operation. It should be noted that the approved budget document contains different data, including relative indicators. It is desirable to specify specific data in all documents in accordance with the approved budget data. The ratio of administrative costs to the total budget is 75%, and the ratio of the amount of money allocated for research/artistic, development and creative activities to the USD-total budget is 3.6%.

In order to assess the achievement of the goals defined by the mission of the institution, the requirements of educational programs and research activities, the appropriate provision of material and technical resources with the existing and/or planned number of students, the group of experts additionally requested the internal space corresponding to the measurement drawing of the building.

Analyzing the results of the self-assessment report, the study of the attached and additionally received documents, and the results of the interviews with the groups involved in the operation of the university, a clear picture of the ongoing processes in the university was revealed. In addition, the institution presented the measurement drawings of all the spaces at its disposal, indicating the teaching and auxiliary space, as well as the internal space

Appropriate spaces are allocated for conducting educational, research and administrative processes: auditoriums, administrative rooms, computers, chemistry, pharmacy, veterinary laboratories, small and large archives, conference halls, professorship, server room, laboratory of the Academy of Gastronomy, educational and scientific libraries, research center, laboratories, cafeteria, recreation areas, bathrooms, boiler houses and other auxiliary spaces. Their arrangement ensures effective management of the educational and administrative process. The building complies with safety standards and is adapted for people with disabilities. All buildings are fully equipped with security, central heating and cooling system, constant water supply, ventilation ducts and fire safety systems. All floors have sanitary units, which are constantly supplied with water, have ventilation and lighting, and are adapted for people with disabilities (sanitary units, elevator, etc.). The University strives to improve the infrastructure according to individual needs based on the recommendations offered in the internal research and external evaluation process.

In the building of the institution there are large (2) and small (2) conference halls equipped with appropriate modern equipment. These spaces are equipped with audio conferencing systems, monitors and microphones. Large halls are designed for 200 and 100 people, and small halls for 50-60 people. Adjacent to the conference space is a simultaneous translation space.

In order to ensure the implementation of educational programs, an imitate courtroom, pharmacy, veterinary, microbiology, anatomy, pathological anatomy and histology, clinical diagnostics, chemistry, laboratories equipped with modern equipment, clinical facilities, pharmacies, animal slaughterhouses, animal husbandry facilities have been created, etc. On the basis of relevant agreements, the university also uses the clinical laboratory-bases of partner organizations. The „Agro House" Association for Agricultural Development (AFAD), which, within the framework of the affiliated agreement, offers the educational university

laboratories equipped with modern equipment, including a mobile laboratory, which allows conducting research and practical components of physiology, clinical diagnostics, microbiology, etc. in this direction Also, the existing base of the veterinary clinic near the institution allows students to develop practical skills. During the interview process, students, academic staff and administration representatives confirmed that the laboratories have a sufficient number of resources (reagents, teaching materials, etc.), thus ensuring the achievement of educational program goals and learning outcomes. If necessary, stock is replenished through purchases.

The university equipped the veterinary laboratory within the framework of the SQIL project, "Investment in safe quality livestock breeding" funded by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) LEND O'LAKES INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GEORGIA (VENTURE 37). Within the framework of the project mentioned, the improvement of the laboratory with the co-funding of the university, the identification of the needs of the personnel involved in the program and further training are provided.

The institution has 15 computer laboratories, where personal computers connected to the Internet are located. They are constantly connected to the Internet through a connection to the server.

The institution has a methodology for determining the admission quota, according to which it is recommended that the existing auditorium fund is sufficient to receive the planned number of students. According to the methodology for determining the threshold number of students/professional students and the contingent of admitted students/professional students of the ZSU, the criteria are based on the material and informational resources of the educational university and its ratio with the existing/planned number of students/professional students. In particular: the volume of common teaching and auxiliary space, the number and volume of training auditoriums, the volume and number of educational inventory, computers and other types of laboratories, availability of libraries, space for independent work of students, the presence and number of computers and other technical facilities, etc. The study area per student is determined by taking into account the number of auditoriums, the area of the auditoriums, the load of the auditoriums, and the amount of educational inventory determined in the auditoriums, not less than 1 m² in the case of a type A learning environment (it is possible, taking into account the standard of any module, the learning environment of type C and B to be 2 m² /4 m² /6 m²). Distribution of no more than 16 students per academic/visiting staff, and 20 professional students for professional educational programs.

Based on the inspection of the spaces of Zugdidi and Senaki, it was determined that, taking into account the specifics of the educational programs, there is an educational space equipped with appropriate inventory, including educational/scientific-research laboratories, inventory necessary for the implementation of the practical component, information-technological equipment, appropriate supplies (reagents, educational materials, etc.), which ensure the achievement of educational program goals and learning outcomes.

The institution has signed memorandums with practice facilities according to the program directions. The goals and activities of mutual cooperation are described in the mentioned memorandums, however, in some cases it is not specified how many students the practice facility provides. Some program practice components are provided by only one facility, making the sustainability of the practice questionable. Therefore, it is desirable to continue working on the search for practice facilities and to reflect in the agreements the maximum/minimum

number of students that the partner institution will be able to accept, which will simplify the planning of the educational process.

The panel found out that the university offers an environment necessary for implementing educational activities: sanitary units, natural light possibilities, and central heating system. During the reporting period, the following infrastructural projects were implemented: a new educational building was built; computer communication networks were organized; The rehabilitation of the Zugdidi educational building, the installation of a limited liability crane (elevator) in the university building, the rehabilitation of the university assembly hall, the facade of the educational building, and the roofing of the educational building of the Senaki professional base were carried out; The fencing of the agricultural land was completed; The improvement of the university and Senaki yard, the rehabilitation of the Senaki farm building, the metal fence of the university, the dormitory and workshop room of the educational building of the university were carried out; fire protection works were carried out in the university building; On-going renovations were carried out in the educational buildings of the university; Creation of a continuous system of alternative electricity supply, a central heating system, an individual cooling system is installed in all auditoriums and work spaces, which is purchased under warranty conditions. The buildings are renovated and equipped with furniture, lighting and equipment necessary for teaching. The institution has the necessary environment for carrying out educational activities: a continuous system of electricity supply, sanitary facilities, the possibility of natural lighting and a central heating system.

This can be concluded that the health and safety of students and staff is protected within the institution. The safety and health of the staff and students are protected in the university. In particular, the institution has developed mechanisms for fire safety, medical assistance detection and order protection; there is a corresponding inventory, which was confirmed during the inspection of the university premises. It was noted that training is held for the purpose of training employees in relation to security issues. In addition, each service has its own regulations, which are posted on the university's website. The functions and duties of the people employed in these services are defined. The buildings have evacuation exits. The acts of fire safety supervision and fire technical inspection and examination are presented.

Security and order are ensured on the entire perimeter of the institution's building. Security is provided by the State Security Service 24 hours a day. in the university. An emergency management plan is in place. Security cameras equipped with video recording functions are installed on the entire internal and external perimeter. Videotapes are stored for 3 weeks. The university has a labor safety department, which has trained all employees of the university administration to acquire skills that will reduce risks in the work process and ensure a high level of labor safety. The corresponding staff of the Labor Inspection Department periodically conducts training of administrative staff in accordance with the news. In educational/scientific-research laboratories, safety norms are observed according to the rules developed.

In a visible place, on all floors of the building, fire-fighting inventory is installed with detailed instructions for its use and evacuation plans, which are approved by the CSI - 112.

The institution has medical offices equipped with the necessary inventory for finding first aid. Medical cabinets are constantly supplied with hot and cold water. In order to provide first aid, the institution has a responsible person with relevant qualifications. In the university, there are medicines necessary for the discovery of first aid. The doctor's regulation was developed in the university, which defined the rights and obligations of the university doctor.

The group of experts studied the student satisfaction survey conducted in 2022-2023, the purpose of which was to study the attitudes of the students of the Shota Meskhia Zugdidi State University towards the educational process, student support services and material-technical base for the further improvement of educational activities. According to the results of the survey, the majority of students are satisfied with the material and technical base of the university, including the level of hygiene, amenities and infrastructure. The technical base related to the educational process was positively evaluated by the students. A survey of 2019-2023 graduates was also conducted: 40% of graduates took part in the survey. The majority of the interviewees confirm that the educational university creates a student-oriented environment towards innovation, has proper services and the opportunity to receive practice, and the material and technical base of the educational university is modern. However, some of the graduates have difficulty answering the questions, which was explained by their less awareness of university services.

For the staff satisfaction survey, affiliated, non-affiliated and visiting academic staff were interviewed - 77 respondents, which is 54% of the total number. They positively evaluate library resources and learning environments (auditoriums, computer labs, equipment), although few have recommendations regarding library clothing. The results of the survey are used by the university administration to improve the university services.

The university has an adapted environment for people with special needs. In order to create an adapted environment for the education of students with special educational needs, both educational buildings of the university have a special ramp for the movement of persons with disabilities. Entrance doors to auditoriums and bathrooms are arranged so that people with disabilities can move without assistance; In the university campus there are bathrooms adapted for people with special educational needs, a special elevator. The security service provides assistance to students with disabilities if necessary. In addition, the university has developed a rule for drawing up an individual study plan for people with disabilities, according to which, if necessary, an individual study plan is drawn up. Promotion of inclusive education teaching (continuous improvement of the relevant environment, introduction of special programs and other needs-based activities) 5000 GEL has been allocated according to the 2024-2026 action plan of the Shota Meskhia State University of Zugdidi. Creating an adapted environment for people with special needs, which includes the installation of an elevator in the Senaki educational building.

**Evidences/indicators**

- Annex 7.1.1. Documentation proving the ownership of real estate, extracted from the public register
- Annex 7.1.2. Movable estate inventory materials
- Annex 7.1.3. Agreement concluded with practice/research-scientific facilities
- Annex 2.2.3. the results of the survey
- Annex 7.1.4. Fire safety, medical assistance detection and order protection mechanisms
- Additionally requested documents
- Interview results
- Inspection of the material and technical base
- Self-evaluation report

**Recommendations:**

- It is recommended to continue working on the search for practice facilities and reflect in the agreements the maximum/minimum number of students that the partner institution will be able to accept.

**Suggestions:**

None

**Best Practices (if applicable):**

None

**Evaluation**

☐ Complies with requirements

x Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

7.2. Library Resources

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

The third priority of the mission of the ZSU is the development of educational programs with the integration of learning and research, and the sixth priority is the promotion of the use of scientific research results and internationalization of research. For the implementation of the mentioned priorities, such activities as strengthening educational programs through the use of the research component in the learning process, strengthening learning outcomes through research competence, developing students' research skills, strengthening the curriculum of educational programs through the introduction of the methodology for evaluating the use of scientific library databases, joint scientific-research activities with relevant organizations and with institutions and others. 125 scientific articles and 4 monographs were printed on the basis of the research carried out and ongoing in the ZSU. According to the self-assessment

report, the budget allocated for research-scientific activities is 239,850 (3.2%). According to the 2024 budget, scientific expenses amount to 200,000 GEL, and 60,000 GEL has been allocated from the Rustaveli Fund. According to the 2024-2026 charity plan, 30,000 GEL has been allocated for the development of mechanisms to stimulate and encourage the scientific activities of young researchers and academic staff, and 15,000 GEL for the development of mechanisms supporting student initiatives from a scientific point of view, and for promoting the sustainability of the student grant fund at the university base. To implement the activities mentioned, it is important to strengthen the library resources.

According to the self-evaluation report, there is an educational and scientific library with a total area of 262, 4 sq. m. The educational library includes a library (58.7 square meters), two reading rooms of 59 square meters. m and 144, 7 sq. m halls, with 50 seats. Workspaces for the staff working in the library, spaces for meetings and group work, spaces for information technology equipment. Reading rooms are equipped with appropriate equipment. In particular, 2 copiers and scanners are provided for readers, one of them is ultra-modern. 20 computers are connected to the Internet. The library is provided with wireless internet. The library is protected by an alarm system. The library is open 6 days a week from Monday to Saturday. To date, the library fund contains 10,000 books in Georgian and foreign languages, in material and electronic form. The book fund is constantly updated.

On the website of the library there are windows for services, library catalog, international library databases, academic scientific databases (Researchgate, Clarivate, Academia, Zenodo, Google Scholar, Scprofiles, Orchid), e-books and e-books V2. It should be noted that the institution has informative instructions, which are also posted on the university's website. The procedure for issuing books from the library, the procedure for receiving and evaluating documents and books donated to the library. The library's regulations describe the functions and duties of the library, cooperation with other institutions, the right to use the library, etc., however, there is no search guide in international electronic databases and no search guide in the electronic catalog on the website of the library. It is advisable to place the mentioned rules on the website so that the applicant can independently receive the mentioned service.

Along with the mentioned documents, the group of experts requested the acceptance-handover acts of the library equipment, the rules for replacing the lost library items by the library reader and the demarcation of current literature, the rules for purchasing the library resources, and the institution ensured the delivery of the mentioned documents electronically. Thus, the group of experts, while observing the infrastructure, randomly selected several titles of educational literature. In some cases, it became difficult to find the literature, and the name of the literature was not in exact agreement with the educational material. It is desirable for the institution to continue active work in the direction of library catalog and fund processing.

Based on a survey of academic staff in 2024, the purpose of which was to obtain a statistical indicator of the use of international scientific databases by academic staff from the Integrated Information Network Consortium of Georgian Libraries, it was recommended that an external use statistician be purchased by the educational university. It should be noted that according to statistical data, access to non-urban bases was made by Zugdidi State University 33 times. In the course of the interview, the argument was made that the above-mentioned statistics only show access to electronic databases recorded from university premises. Accordingly, it was requested to determine the statistician of external use. During the interview process, it was noted that librarians periodically conduct training related to access to electronic databases, however, the expert group believes that this work should become intensive and effective and this way supportive for the quality and intensity of research.

According to the self-evaluation report, the university administration has purchased "Electronic information for libraries - eIFL right of use purchase/access" electronic resources:

1) Cambridge Journals Online (https://www.cambridge.org/core).

2) BioOne Complete (http://www.bioone.org/).

3) E-Duke Journals Scholarly Collection (https://www.dukeupress.edu/).

4) Edward Elgar Publishing Journals and Development Studies e-books (https://www.elgaronline.com/page/70/journals).

5) IMechE Journals (https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/IMeche).

6) New England Journal of Medicine (http://www.nejm.org/).

7) Open edition Journals (http://www.openedition.org/).

8) Royal Society Journals Collection (https://royalsociety.org/journals/).

8) SAGE Premier (https://us.sagepub.com/enus/nam/sage-premier).

The university library cooperates with the program leaders in the direction of acquiring updated literature in the study program syllabi.

The library staff has appropriate competence in library work. Library staff provide information to students and staff regarding library resources and services. Orientation meetings and consultations are held permanently at the beginning of the academic year. The librarian helps students find literature and other resources.

**Evidences/indicators**

- Annex 7.3.1. Information Technology Management and Development Policy
- Annex 7.3.2 Information about electronic services and electronic management systems and their development mechanisms
- The procedure for issuing a book from the library
- The procedure for receiving and evaluating documents, books donated to the library
- A guide to searching international electronic databases
- The rules for replacing lost library items and demarcation of current literature by library readers
- The procedure for purchasing library resources

**Recommendations:**

- It is recommended to make the work on international library electronic databases more intensive and effective.

- It is recommended to place a guide for international electronic databases and a guide for electronic catalogs on the website so that the applicant can independently use the mentioned service.

**Suggestions:**

- It is suggested to continue active work in the direction of library catalog and fund processing.

**Best Practices (if applicable):**

None

**Evaluation**

☐ Complies with requirements

x Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

## 7.3 Information Resources

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

The task of 7.3 of the strategic document of ZSU for 2024-2030 is defined as "improving the efficiency, effectiveness and accessibility of management of services and processes through the use of information technologies in the management systems of the educational university." Ensuring access to information technology. In order to achieve the above-mentioned goal, the result activities were planned: 1. Improvement of the information technology infrastructure created in the educational university for the purpose of business continuity, including electronic management services and electronic management systems. 2. Attracting the best IT specialists and promoting their professional growth. organization of staff training in order to use modern software products and technologies; 3. Use of licensed software.; 4. Increasing the quality of information provision - improving the English-language website, expanding the information and communication resources of the website; 5. Daily updating of the website, ensuring the publicity of the ongoing reforms and news in the educational university; 6. Systematic updating of technical and software-informational means; 7. Implementation of business continuity mechanisms.

ZSU has created an information technology infrastructure that corresponds to the institution's business processes and ensures their effective implementation. ZSU operates a complex hardware infrastructure to support the various IT needs of students, faculty and staff. These include desktop computers, laptops, printers, scanners, projectors, interactive whiteboards, servers, storage devices, and other peripherals that are distributed across departments, administrative offices, laboratories, and academic spaces. The hardware specification is regularly updated.

In 2023, in connection with the opening of a new building and the conduct of educational processes, the university received 150 units of personal computers, which, with their characteristics, fully meet the requirements of IT programs. The computers mentioned were assembled and installed in the laboratories of the main building (lab: 213, 225, 226, 227). The laboratories of the new building were organized and technically prepared. As part of a project funded by the Vocational Skills Agency, the buildings are connected by fiber-optic cable, which provides Internet access to the new university building, dormitory and training-

workshop building. In the main educational building, on the second floor, space - a server room with an air conditioner - was arranged. Communication points for 40 computers were arranged in the new space.

In addition to 150 personal computers, the university purchased 40 personal computers and 20 portable computers through a consolidated tender. Inventory necessary for server, network and IT processes was purchased.

Network infrastructure includes both wired and wireless access points. New projectors were purchased, which will be installed in the university's teaching rooms and laboratories. The university has the opportunity to have digital academies, developed and supported by the world's leading IT companies, such as: Cisco Networking Academy - Cisco Networking Academy, which has been operating at the university for more than 10 years. Since 2020, the following have been added: Redhat Academy - the world's leading Linux distribution training resource, Paloalto Networks Academy, Fortinet Networking Academy, AWS academy. With the help of the listed academies, university students have the opportunity to access educational resources developed by the manufacturer, which increases the quality and effectiveness of the educational process.

According to the data of 2024, optical fiber Internet with a speed of 200 Mb/s global - 800 Mb/s local will be provided. In 2023, technical and hardware equipment worth up to 420,000 (four hundred and twenty thousand) GEL was procured by a tender. The list consists of network devices such as wireless access points, routers, switches, and firewalls. Also, computer components - to strengthen existing resources: SSD, RAM. Data storage (NAS Synology). Server: PowerEdge R650XS. Firewall: FG-100F. Projectors and conference system. Cables and equipment for network infrastructure. The quantities are as follows: Server - 3 units of Firewall - 2 units of Switch - 10 units of Router - 1 unit of Wireless Access Point - 15 units of SSD - 150 units of RAM - 40 unit (4GB DDR4) USB flash memory - 100 units Communication cabinet - 3 units The above-mentioned devices were added to the existing IT infrastructure of the university, the main part of which is reflected in the quantities. At the end of 2023 and the beginning of 2024, the university was installing a video surveillance system, 41 internal 123 and external cameras equipped with night vision were added to the existing 9 cameras (which were installed in the new educational building). The camera storage device is located in the server room, in the communication cabinet.

In addition to technical equipment, the university has access to educational and consumer digital resources. Since 2018, the university has been using Google Workspace (formerly G Suite), an educational version. University students, lecturers and administrative staff have corporate e-mail and unlimited cloud storage. During the coronavirus pandemic, Google Meet was actively used to conduct the learning process remotely. The university also uses Microsoft Office 365 A1 free service. The University holds Zoom licenses for online meetings and activities. A network license for the accounting software has also been purchased. Within the framework of the memorandum, the banking network software was handed over to us free of charge from AltaSoft. The university has purchased an electronic learning management system (Learning Management System) since 2018. Services include hosting services, which are provided by an outsourced company. A management system for e-books has been purchased in the library section, and e-books are stored on a secure server of an outsourced company. In 2018, for the first time and as a pilot, the university launched electronic testing on the basis of the Moodle system, which was placed on an internal (local) server, after that, the services of several subjects were periodically started. Computer labs are used for mid-term and final exams electronically within a reasonable time frame.

The University provides a wide range of software applications and platforms to facilitate teaching, learning, research and administrative functions. These include licensed software suites (e.g. Microsoft Office, Google Workspace), learning management systems (e.g. Moodle, Canvas), administrative software, student information systems and electronic learning process management systems (LMS, SIS). Financial management network software. Software procurement, installation, licensing and updates are managed centrally by the IT department to ensure compliance with license agreements, security patches and version control.

The institution has developed an information technology management policy, which represents the information technology management policy and procedures implemented in the university, regulates the use of information systems and electronic services, regulations, and development mechanisms. The policy determines the general approaches and rules for the use of computer and information resources in the university management, educational and research processes, on the basis of which information technology management procedures are formed. Its purpose is to promote the protection of the main characteristics of information in the university (confidentiality, availability, integrity), which in turn ensures the effectiveness of information risk management and business continuity. Based on the mentioned, physical and informational security is provided; incident management; control over harmful software codes; backup systems, applications and data; computer network management; Planning and development of a new system. Information technology risks are managed adequately and efficiently at the university, data protection is ensured (including personal data protection), and the effectiveness of the information system is evaluated.

The teaching university has developed a network infrastructure to provide high-speed, reliable connectivity to all campus users. The network includes wired and wireless connections located in academic buildings, residential buildings, libraries, and outdoor spaces. Network equipment includes routers (Router), switches (Switch), access points (Access Point), routers (Firewall), which are strategically located to optimize coverage, bandwidth and security.

A data center equipped with the latest servers, storage systems and network equipment were organized in the educational university. The data center is designed for the high availability of critical IT services and software. The center is equipped with continuous power supplies and a cooling system. Fire protection and physical security measures protect against interruptions and unauthorized access. Backup recovery and business continuity plans are designed to minimize the impact of unforeseen events. Maintaining an efficient IT infrastructure aims to provide a reliable, secure and technologically advanced environment conducive to teaching, learning, research and institutional operations.

Server equipment that will serve both the administration and will be used for practice by professional students. Server hardware includes the unit PowerEdge R650XS Rack Server data: 7.2 TB memory 128 GB RAM 2 X CPU 16 cores 32 threads 1 unit PowerEdge R730XD Rack Server data: 2.4 TB memory 128 GB RAM 2 X CPU 8 cores 16 threads on the server infrastructure must maintain a centralized management system (Active Directory). Centralized infrastructure management is essential for productive administration of users and computers. Computer laboratories, including both buildings of the Zugdidi campus and the Senaki base will be centrally managed and will not be connected to the administration's virtual network infrastructure. New and existing but updated services, student testing system, digital storage of intangible products and learning results will be placed on the server. An internal cloud storage will be created for information that is not of critical importance but is used on a daily basis for conducting educational and administrative processes. The purchased NAS server will provide storage and backup of critical information required for administrative

activities. In terms of information security, individual users will be created so that employees can securely place work-critical information on the server. With the purchased wireless access points and switches, wireless Internet will be available on the university campus as much as possible. The coverage area will be both teaching and workshop buildings, as well as student housing. Students will be able to use the wireless Internet using their student email. There will be a separate username for guests and a separate username for administration. It is planned to join the university "EDUROAM". This will make it possible for representatives of local universities or organizations affiliated to "EDUROAM", as well as for international members, to use the Internet at the university without having to have a separate individual user and password for them. In 2023, the firewall purchased through a tender will be actively used in the network security direction of the university. The device allows control of network intrusion prevention and web filtering. Content monitoring is essential for educational institutions to ensure students have access to educational resources and adhere to regulations while blocking sites with inappropriate content. From the point of view of IT management - network management will be much more effective, logging is necessary at the request of the regulator, therefore the university using network equipment with this functionality comes in full compliance with the regulator's standards. At the same time, since several devices are enrolled on the balance of the university, they will have the opportunity within the framework of "SelfDev" activities to gain experience working with the above-mentioned equipment, which is supported by the existence of the Fortinet Network Security Academy in the theoretical part. The network infrastructure in the university will be divided into virtual networks so that the administrative units do not have intra-network (non-relevant) crossings with each other in any way, except as necessary. In 2024, it is planned to increase the online learning resources at the university, the existing international academies, Cisco Networking Academy, RedHat Academy, Fortinet Network Security Academy, PaloAlto Cyber Security Academy and AWS Academy will be joined by the virtualization software giant VMware's IT Academy. As part of this academy, the university will receive teaching resources, instructor training support and student learning materials, as well as software licenses for educational purposes. It is also planned to gain access to Mikrotik training resources and enjoy the relevant benefits. ZSU information technology infrastructure (computer equipment, software, Internet), which is intended for USD services, is permanently and stably available to students and staff.

In order to promote and increase the quality of university activities, the following electronic services and electronic management systems have been implemented in the university: 1. Electronic learning process management system - Ini.ge; 2. Electronic document circulation system – Eflow; 3. Human resources management (later - HR platform) system; 4. Electronic Teaching system MS Teams; 5. Corporate e-mail; 6. University website zssu.ge; 7. Electronic library catalog (OPAC); 8. Short text message sending system SMS MSG Human resources management system Human resources management (hereinafter - HR platform) system is used in the university for human resources for accounting and management of resources. It fully complies with the requirements of the Labor Code of Georgia and the Law of Georgia on Protection of Personal Information. The following types of information are stored and managed through the human resources administration platform: system for recording and managing descriptions of structural units and their respective positions; system of registration and management of resumes of employees at the university; a system for recording and managing personal affairs of both current and dismissed employees; HR procedures and orders accounting and management system; Agreements accounting and management system. The platform is located on the university server and its technical administration is provided by the information technology service. The proper functioning of electronic services and electronic following management systems was checked during the visual inspection of the infrastructure.

In order to ensure the continuous and smooth operation of the key and peripheral components of the server and network infrastructure, the Information Technology Service carries out continuous monitoring of the system. A variety of software solutions are used for monitoring, which detect errors and notify the team of administrators via e-mail and special bots in real time about a problem detected in the system. The personnel working in the information technology service of the university are trained within the scope of their activity.

The information technology infrastructure (computer equipment, software, Internet), which is intended for the services of USD, is permanently and stably available to students and staff.

A corporate email is created for all ZSU employees and students. Authorization to the university management systems and Moodle system, access to various electronic and scientific databases is done through e-mail. Through email, the administration provides students with information about news, sports and/or academic events, and active vacancies.

ZSU has implemented an electronic system of proceedings, which is eDocument. Allows electronic movement of official documents. Through the system, it is easy to implement the process of constant monitoring of tasks, responses to them and other organizational issues.

Mechanisms promoting the development of electronic services

During the authorization visit, in order to assess the current mechanisms of business continuity in the university, the expert group requested the business continuity rule of the institution, which was approved by the representative council by the resolution N28 of September 25, 2023. The mentioned rule ensures the regulation of continuous operation of the ZSU in the event of unexpected or unusual circumstances.

The rule defines the types of risks, the probability of their occurrence, impact, impact effects, etc. And based on the risk assessment, a risk management plan will be developed. All employees of the university participate in the process of risk management. The rule determines the development/approval of the business process continuity plan. The internal audit service of the educational university monitors the development of the business process continuity plan. The institution presented the 2024-2029 Business Continuity Plan developed by the internal audit, which details the year-by-year risk identification, probability of occurrence, impact on university operations, impact on students, response measures and control mechanisms, reporting period, potential ways of improvement, responsible service and evaluation. The 2023 reports of the head of the administration and the audit service are also presented.

The business continuity plan includes information technology, material resources, business operations, security and safety, and human resources.

The principles of continuity of business processes in the direction of material resources include: a system of continuous supply of electricity, water, heating, Internet, case management, appropriate action of the procedure of continuity of work of administrative units.

The university website was created in 2010 with the existing code. Previously, the site consisted of separate Perl scripts. However, in 2010, the so-called Drupal was chosen based on the transition to a content management system and the university's requirements. Initially, the site was developed based on Drupal 5. Designed the site design and created the Drupal theme. In 2012, the first update of Drupal to version 6 took place, which provided additional

features to the site and at the same time developed a new design. In 2016, there was another update to Drupal 7 version and another site design continued. The updates mentioned above refer directly to updating Drupal from one major version to another, not the site content. Directly updating the content of the site or adding new content was and is happening constantly on a daily basis. It should be noted here that in addition to updating the main version of Drupal, other separate components (modules) were also updated. New modules were also being installed, which in turn added new possibilities to the site. In December 2023, a new site design was developed, however, the Drupal code was not updated directly, and version 7 remained in use. With this update, the site acquired the so-called "Responsive" design using Bootsrap 4, which allows the site to look good even on smartphone screens. It should be noted that the Drupal 7 code is already out of date, which in turn is reflected in the complexity of the process of introducing new, modern capabilities, even if the "Responsive" design works with certain limitations. Added to this is the fact that after January 2025, Drupal 7 will no longer be officially supported. However, subsequent versions of Drupal 7 are radically different from their predecessors, making it difficult to update the system. Based on the facts mentioned above, it is planned to develop a completely new site based on Drupal 10, with the latest components and using Bootsrap 5. The new site will fully meet the requirements of the university, taking into account the latest standards and trends for at least the next 5-7 years.

In December 2023, for hosting the university website and other digital resources, additional hosting was purchased, on which the main website of the university and all educational resources offered by the university to students will be launched. The service of the electronic educational process management system is moving and does not come at the intersection with the new hosting. The Internet was provided to the university by optical fiber network, speed: 200/600 Mbps global/local.

In should be mentioned, that the process of the official webpage of the university is updating in Georgian as well as in English languages. Also, as indicated on the 7.2 and 7.4 substandard some regulation documents and reports have to be uploaded on the web. Otherwise, official webpage substantially serves communication and information functions, contains contact and other useful information in Georgian and English languages, including mission of HEI, its activities, structure, catalogue of educational programs, programs and enrolment criteria, expected learning outcomes and qualifications to be granted, procedures for teaching-learning and assessment, administrative/academic/scientific staff, library electronic catalogue, regulation documents, strategic development plans, annual reports, financial reports, ongoing and implemented research (results), basic statistics, accessible services, employment opportunities, etc.

**Evidences/indicators**

- Annex 2.4. Business continuation plan
- Annex 7.3.1. Information Technology Management and Development Policy
- Annex 7.3.2 Information about electronic services and electronic management systems and their development mechanisms
- Website of the University https://zssu.ge/
- Interview results
- Inspection of the infrastructure

**Evaluation**

☐ Fully complies with requirements

x Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements

**Recommendations:**
- It is recommended to improve and update the website with accordance with the accessibility of full information.

**Suggestions:**
None

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
None

## 7.4 Financial Resources

- o   Allocation of financial resources described in the budget of HEI is economically achievable
- o   Financial standing of HEI ensures performance of activities described in strategic and mid-term action plans
- o   HEI financial resources are focused on effective implementation of core activities of the institution
- o   HEI budget provides funding for scientific research and library functioning and development
- o   HEI has an effective system of accountability, financial management and control

In the 2020-2030 strategic goals, sub-goal 7.4 is to ensure an effective system of accountability, financial management, planning and control in the educational university. This chapter covers the following activities:

Increasing the effectiveness of the internal financial management and control system through further improvement of accountability mechanisms; strengthening the system of internal audit quality assurance, control and professional growth through cooperation with structural units; Economically, efficiently, productively and purposefully managing/spending budget funds, etc. And sub-goal 7.5 is - financial resources, which include the following activities: introduction of a new financing model, improvement of the financial and budgetary policy and management of the budgetary process of the educational university. provision of educational, research and other activities of the educational university with adequate financial resources; The possibility of optimal planning and distribution of the educational university's financial resources, including research, student projects, qualification raising training courses, infrastructural projects, financial resources necessary for the realization of the strategic plan; Management of diversified sources of funding (program funding from the state budget, income from economic activities, international program funding, donations), attracting new sources of funding (external funding sources - grants, funding of state projects), finding and implementing internal university resources (commercialization of activities); Attracting new sources of funding (external funding sources - grants, funding of state projects) increasing the university's income, ensuring financial resources and financial sustainability necessary for the implementation of the strategic plan; Facilitation of the management of the educational university in the implementation of the strategic goals of the educational university,

introduction of program funding; Evaluation of the financial management and control system in the educational university.

The 2024 budget revenues are 6,654,275.0 GEL, of which 884,444.0 GEL is the balance at the beginning of the period, and 88,950.0 GEL is the funding received from the state budget. Grants amount to 280,881.0 GEL. Grants received from international organizations amount to 1000881.0 GEL. The approved grant from other level state units is 180,000.0 GEL (including the Rustaveli Foundation, grants for other current purposes from the self-governing unit - Zugdidi Municipality, Central Budget), income from property is 5,400,000.0 GEL, interest is 10,000.0 GEL. Sale of goods and services (tuition rent) 5 350 000.0 GEL (including higher education tuition fees 2 250 000.0 GEL, income received by educational institutions in the form of training grants (voucher financing) 3 100 000.0 GEL. Incomes allowed by law 40 000.0 GEL, Other unclassified income 40,000.0 GEL.

In the part of expenses (5,872,450.0 GEL), the salary is 2,292,000.0 GEL, of which the official salary is 2,140,000 GEL (including the administration and other personnel 1,400,000 GEL, and the academic staff 740,000 GEL; bonus 112,000 GEL, allowance 40,000 GEL). The cost of goods and services is 3,337,500 GEL (of which the salary of freelance workers is 2,150,000 GEL, the bonus of freelance workers is 50,000, travel expenses are 512,500, representative expenses are 25,000, food expenses are 18,000 GEL and medical expenses are 3,000 GEL

The budget allocates the expenses related to the purchase of soft equipment and uniforms and personal hygiene (5,000 GEL), the operation and maintenance of transport, equipment and weapons (60,000 GEL). Other goods and services (474 000 GEL) include professional teacher training expenses (15 000 GEL), student event expenses (82 000 GEL), conferences/professor trainings (42 000 GEL), public lectures (25 000 GEL), scientific expenses (200,000 GEL), and other expenses (110,000 GEL). The budget also provides state scholarships and grants. 781,825 GEL is planned for the main assets. The university has no credit debts.

The budget has been approved following the relevant procedures, the financial resources are economically viable, as evidenced by the analysis of the university's budget dynamics indicators presented by the university. Compared to 2018, by 2023 the budget of the university has increased almost 3 times. Accordingly, based on the study of the self-assessment report, attached and additional documents, and the analysis of the information obtained as a result of the interviews during the authorization visit, it was revealed that as a result of the activities carried out by the relevant services of the university in the direction of income diversification, the amount of funding increases every year. Funds raised from various donors enable the university to finance educational and research activities as well as institutional activities. This makes it possible to ensure financial stability and implement important projects for the development of the university with funds released from the part of its own income. The fulfillment of the tasks set for strategic development is also conditioned by the university's financial sustainability. The implementation of the activities described in the strategic development and action plan is based on the financial analysis of the previous years and the forecast of incomes written by years.

Budget of the activities carried out within the framework of the five-year action plan provided for by the strategic development plan for 2019-2023 and the project for 2024-2026", which was developed according to the "rules for drawing up/approving the budget of Shota Meskhia Zugdidi State Educational University, determining the sources of income and distribution expenses". The mentioned rule regulates the preparation/approval of the budget of the

educational university, the determination of sources of income and the distribution of expenses. All budget revenues and expenses are fulfilled through the state treasury system.

During the accreditation visit, it was confirmed that along with the development of educational and research programs in the university budget, appropriate funds are provided for the library, university development, promotion, student activities, creative and other types of activities, as well as development and renewal of the material and technical base of the university. In order to promote research, the university administration annually prints/implements the publication of collections of works, monographs, international and domestic conference materials, manuals/supporting manuals. arranging international and domestic conferences. According to the annual report of the head of the administration, a new library space was organized, the infrastructure of the space was maintained and equipped with technical means. The university library functioned successfully. Library resources were constantly updated/filled. Timely delivery of the necessary material for the readers both on-site and online in electronic form. This was confirmed during the inspection of the infrastructure and during the interview process. However, in the spending part of the 2024 budget, there is no separate funding for the operation and development of the library. The ratio of the amount of money allocated for research/artistic, development and creative activities to the USD-total budget is 3.6% by 2024, the target rate is planned to increase to 4.0% by 2026. In the one-year and three-year action plans of the university, tasks are intended to increase the efficiency of the library's activities. Among them, the value part of only one - the support of the scientific library - is represented and it amounts to 10,000 and 30,000 GEL, respectively.

It is desirable that in the budget of the university, in the spending part, an article on financing the operation and development of the library should be allocated separately, which will confirm the financial part of the implementation of the planned tasks of the institution in this direction.

In order to ensure financial management, an effective system of accountability, financial management and control has been implemented in the university, it is regulated by the rule of effective management of the financial management and control system of the State Educational University of Shota Meskhiia Zugdidi. The goal of implementing the financial management and control system is to improve the quality of financial management of the educational university, increasing the responsibility of the heads of all structural units of the educational university within their competence, for the implementation of internal control mechanisms, compliance of activities, compliance of goals with the existing budget, timeliness and specificity of goals, measurability, attainability and realism.

The university has a system of accountability, financial management and control based on the relevant policy document. The evaluation of the financial management and control system is carried out by the head of the internal audit service of the internal audit service of the educational university. During the evaluation of the financial management and control system, through the financial service and other structural units, he promotes (does not participate in) the implementation of the financial management and control system of the university. Updated audit and financial reports are not publicly posted on the website.

The head of the administration develops and submits to the representative board for approval the rules and procedures necessary for the implementation/development of the financial management and control system, consults the structural units involved in the financial management and control system, organizes necessary training, seminars and other workshops in the process of introducing the system.

Based on the goals of the financial management and control system, the reporting process at the educational university is carried out at two levels: a) at the lower level – structural units report to the head of the administration. b) at the top level - the head of the administration consolidates the reports presented to him and submits them to the council representative for approval. The purpose of the annual report is to present information about the implementation, development and functioning of the financial management and control system, as well as the effectiveness and productivity of the actions taken by the structural units to the head of the administration, the administration by the head - for management bodies. Making changes and additions to the rule of establishing the financial management and control system is carried out by the resolution of the representative council in accordance with the current legislation. According to the rule of drawing up and approving the budget, the budget of the university is approved by the representative council on the recommendation of the head of the administration. The effectiveness of this mechanism was confirmed during the interview process during the accreditation visit.

For the sake of publicity and transparency, the approved budget of the university is posted on the university's website and is available to all interested people.

**Evidences/indicators**
- ZSU´s budget
- Self-evaluation report
- Financial reports on the current and/or previous reporting periods
- Financial management and control system introduction document
- Interview with administration
- University website: https://zssu.ge/zssu2/node/40

**Recommendations:**

- It is recommended to update financial and audit reports on the university website.

**Suggestions:**
- It is suggested that in the budget of the university, in the spending part, an article on financing the operation and development of the library is allocated separately.

**Best Practices (if applicable):**
None

**Evaluation**

☐ Complies with requirements

x Substantially complies with requirements

☐ Partially complies with requirements

☐ Does not comply with requirements