

## **Protocol N1 on the Meeting with the Coordinating Council of LEPL -National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement**

**March 25, 2022**

On March 25, this year, a meeting of the Coordinating Council of LEPL -National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement was held using the platform Zoom.

The meeting was attended by members of the Coordinating Council, Deputy Directors of the Center, heads and staff of the Center's structural units.

Rusudan Sanadze chaired the meeting in accordance with the Article 51, Paragraph 10 of the Provision of the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement. The Council meeting was provided with simultaneous translation.

Mr. Kakhaber Eradze, Deputy Director of the Coordinating Council, greeted the members of the Coordinating Council and thanked them for participating in the meeting. Mr. Lasha Zivzivadze, Head of the Planning, Research and International Relations Department, presented the agenda of the meeting and informed the Council members that during the meeting their activities would be evaluated according to the evaluation methodology approved last year. He also reminded that the members had to vote on the presented issues after the end of each presentation.

According to the agenda, Mr. Lasha Zivzivadze presented the 2021 Activity Report of the Center. He spoke about the results that the Center has achieved in 2021 in the areas of institutional development, General, Vocational and Higher education, internationalization, the financial sustainability of the Center and its independence. He noted that all the structural units of the Center participated in the development of the Report. After the presentation, Irma Kurdadze, a member of the Coordinating Council, commented in the format of questions and answers that the activities of the Center in 2021 were particularly impressive and served to improve the quality of education. Deputy Director of the Center, Mr. Kakhaber Eradze, responded that the Center had significant support in the framework of the EU Twinning project, through which the Center started proper strategic and operational planning. He once again thanked all the parties for the implementation of the mentioned project.

The Coordinating Council, by an absolute majority of votes, supported the adoption of the 2021 Annual Report of the National Center for Education Quality Development as a notification.

Pro: 10.

Against: 0.

According to the agenda, Mr. Nikoloz Parjanadze, Head of the Higher Education Assurance Department of the Center, presented a draft amendment to the Rule on Selection of Authorization and Accreditation Experts, their Activities and Termination of Membership of the Experts Pool, as well as in the procedure of remuneration of the members of the experts pool of the authorization of General, Vocational and Higher

education Institutions and accreditation of educational programmes and updated fees for accreditation of educational programmes grouped in the Educational Programmes Cluster.

Mr. Nikoloz Parjanadze noted that for the development of procedures for selection of experts under the Rule on Selection of Authorization and Accreditation Experts, their Activities and Suspension/Termination of Membership of the Experts Pool, an emphasis was placed on the involvement of international experts; work is underway on a plan, policies and approaches to finding international experts. The changes serve to increase the flexibility, efficiency and purposefulness of the process. He also noted that it is important to evaluate the whole process in order to have a clear idea of all the procedures involved in the authorization and accreditation process. Consequently, an important aspect is the evaluation of experts within the whole process and other procedural issues.

Nikoloz Parjanadze also noted that the Provision on Selection of Authorization and Accreditation is confirmed by an individual administrative legal act of the Center. Determining qualification requirements is a priority, especially with regard to the sector benchmarks, taking into account the Classifier. He also noted that it is especially important to select a relevant qualified expert for a particular educational programme, and with the involvement of these types of professionals, the process will become even more efficient and development-oriented. One of the important factors is experience. In this case, not only formal qualifications are meant, specific practical experience in the field is implied, and a higher education expert should not have less than three years of experience based on this. Special emphasis was placed on the international expert. Nikoloz Parjanadze also noted that, in the cluster accreditation, it is mandatory to involve an international expert, who must have experience in the field in which he/she works, as well as the practice of evaluation and the ability to adapt to the Georgian reality. He further mentioned that the Center worked with various foreign agencies to find an international expert for the humanitarian cluster. In case of student experts, the Center was focused on experts who are active. In case of a new expert, the Center would inform them as much as possible, familiarize them with the regulations and processes, so that they could be effectively prepared for the evaluation. One of the important factors was the presence of an employer in the panels of authorization and accreditation experts. This was important because the Center evaluated educational programmes that were compatible with the labor market, where it was important for a student to have not only qualifications but also employment skills.

As for the evaluation process, the Center wrote the directions, procedures and framework document of evaluation. The Center also wrote an evaluation scheme for the assessment of experts. In the long run, this would highlight key trends and tendencies.

The Coordinating Council supported the adoption of the draft amendment to the Rule on Selection of Authorization and Accreditation Experts, their Activities and Termination of Membership of the Expert Pool.

Pro: 10.

Against: 0.

At the next presentation, an amendment to the rule on remuneration of experts was presented. Nikoloz Parjanadze presented the main parameters on which the changes were based. As an example, he described one of the scenarios of how the remuneration scheme was carried out. It was important to define the principle of grouping in the cluster and to remunerate the experts. In this regard, regulated and non-regulated programmes should be distinguished. It should be decided how the remuneration is paid in case of non-regulated Bachelor's Degree Programmes and what is the vision of the Center in case of regulated and PhD programmes. It should be noted that the Center took into account the volume of the work done, in the case of more than four programmes, a field expert, a higher education expert, a student expert and an employer expert were separated. In this direction, it is expected that the volume of work done by the field expert and the employer expert will be much larger. It does not imply that the involvement of any of the experts will be less valuable, however, the expected work that they will have to perform will be different. The field expert and the employer expert must go into all the specific details in the case of a separate programme. In case of remuneration of the Chairperson, the amount will be added to the standard remuneration. For example, 150 GEL for two programmes, 200 GEL for four programs, etc. The position of the Center is that the expert will feel appreciated by these changes. It should be noted that participation in this process has more than just a financial value. Experts create great value and these values imply their participation in the direction of the quality of education in terms of their role and their contribution. This model was presented to higher education institutions and it received their approval.

The Council supported the draft amendments to the Rule on Remuneration of Members of the Expert Pool for Authorization of General, Vocational and Higher Education Institutions and Accreditation of Educational Programmes.

Pro: 10

Against: 0

Accreditation fees were presented at the next presentation. The Annex to the Accreditation Provision sets out the rules and conditions for grouping. The Center expanded the communication conditions, communication was carried out with the universities, an analysis was made based on the feedback and all the relevant recommendations were taken into account. The presenter once again reminded the Council members of the principle of grouping programmes into a cluster. Briefly, the parameters considered in the programme evaluation process, administrative costs, expert remuneration, the Council remuneration, translator remuneration, and vacation of an international expert were presented. It should be noted that cluster evaluation is most beneficial for educational institutions because the cost of evaluating programmes grouped in a cluster as a whole is much less than in terms of individual evaluation of programmes. Also, the involvement of an international expert is performed at a lower cost. It should be noted that the involvement of an international expert is not an end in itself for the Center. His/her involvement means more internationalization, more objectivity, and more access to modern leading practices.

At the session of questions and answers, Irma Kurdadze, a member of the Council, demanded clarification with regards of the grounds for the suspension of the expert status, as the low grading of the expert assessment could be the reason for the suspension of the status. Also, clarification was requested on how the higher education expert would be remunerated. In response, the Deputy Director, Kakhaber Eradze,

clarified that the low assessment of an expert could not be a reason for immediate suspension of his status and relevant development measures, training, consultations would be considered. After that, if the appropriate qualification upgrade could not take place, there would be grounds for incompatibility with the qualification requirements. In response to the second question, Nikoloz Parjanadze clarified that the Center did not consider any expert to be less significant than the others. All are equally important and this approach is provided in the case of programmes.

Shalva Mekravishvili asked the next question regarding the salary. He was interested in how much more an expert would be paid for the same amount of work compared to the previous scheme. In response, it was noted that for a particular programme, the salary is increased by at least 100 GEL, but then increases by steps, the salary increase is noticeable in terms of programmes grouped in the cluster, and the expert work is maximally appreciated. The second perspective is also noteworthy: Individually evaluated two programmes and two programmes grouped in a cluster have almost the same cost, but from three programmes, an institution's cost is already reduced. In case of 8 programmes, it is almost 50% less than costs separately estimated. This also includes involvement of an international expert.

The next question about the number of international experts was asked by Cay Etzolt, who was interested in the number of international experts involved in the process. In response, Nikoloz Parjanadze explained that the Center was preparing for these processes and in 2022, the Center wanted to involve at least 10 international experts in this process for the humanitarian cluster. For this purpose, 25 international experts had already been identified, and the additional department had communicated with partner agencies to attract relevant qualified experts.

The Council supported the receipt of updated fees for accreditation of higher education programmes and educational programmes grouped in the Cluster of Education Programmes.

Pro: 10

Against: 0

The next presentation was on the legislative changes on cyber and information security, enacted in 2022, and the Action Plan of the Center for the implementation of these changes. The presentation was made by Mr. Giorgi Gvasalia, the Information Security Manager of the Center, who noted that the deadlines for the implementation of the Action Plan have been changed and divided into two phases - the first phase included 18 months and the second phase - 6 months. The rights and responsibilities of the Coordinating Council were supplemented by the review and approval of the Information Security Policy and the Action Plan of its implementation. The change also affected responsibilities for violating administrative law. Financial fines were added at almost every stage. The role of the Coordinating Council in the implementation of the Information Security Policy Document of the Center and the document structure were also discussed during the presentation.

Mr. Kakha Eradze clarified that not all institutions have the obligation to have an information security policy and an action plan for its implementation. This obligation was imposed on the Center due to the specifics of its field of activity. There was an Information Security Council at the Center that reviewed the

information security operational documents, while the Coordinating Council reviewed and approved the information security management system policy document.

Giorgi Gvasalia presented the first phase of the Information Security Action Plan 2022-2023 of the Center, which included the first 18 months. The Action Plan reflected the organizational context, as well as internal and external audit activities and deadlines, responsible persons, and performance evidence.

It was also noted that previously there was no obligation for conducting an external audit, although this was required by law. The second phase of the Action Plan envisaged an internal audit, and at the end of the second phase, the operational-technical agency undertook to conduct an audit. Afterwards, an independent organization was selected to conduct an external inspection of information security at the Center.

The Council agreed to approve the Information Security Action Plan.

Pro: 10

Against: 0

The Chairperson of the Council cast votes to amend the Provision of the Center, according to which the information security policy document will be reviewed and approved by the Coordinating Council, and the Action Plan for the Policy Implementation and other operational documents - by the Information Security Council.

The Council agreed to amend the Provision of the Center, according to which the Coordinating Council would review the information security policy.

Pro: 10

Against: 0

The last item on the agenda was the reorganization of the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement and the relevant changes to be made to the provision of the Center. The presentation was made by the Deputy Director of the Center, Lasha Margishvili.

A new function was added to the Center -implementation of the authorization of Early Education and/or Education and Pre-school institutions. Accordingly, to fulfill this function, a new department was created - Early and Preschool Education Quality Assurance Department; the addition of new features has led to an increase in the workload of the Financial Division. Accordingly, a decision was made to transform it into a department. The next change concerned the amendment to the procedures for approving the information security policy and action plan for its implementation, which was discussed in the previous presentation, and in relation to the above changes in the staff list of the Center.

On February 15, 2022, a legislative amendment was approved, according to which the Center was assigned to authorize up to 2000 preschools and education institutions by 2030. As a result of the analysis of the current processes and activities in the Center, it was decided to establish the Early and Preschool Education Quality Assurance Department with the following functions: Carry out the authorization process in accordance with the current legal acts and ensure the publicity of the results; involvement in the development of authorization standards and procedures and development of recommendations; implementation of the monitoring process; management and development of the Expert Pool; hold workshops for institutions and other interested parties on authorization issues; plan and implement development activities (training, workshops, conferences, etc.) for institutions, members of the Expert Pool, members of the relevant agencies responsible for conducting these activities, as well as other interested parties for the implementation of supportive measures aimed at developing the quality of early education and preschool education; support the process of preparing recommendations and guidelines for institutions and other interested parties; manage and implement the process of evaluating the activities of experts, develop relevant proposals and submit them to the Director.

The analysis of the ongoing processes and activities of the Center revealed that in addition to ensuring the quality of preschool institutions, the Center begins the process of authorizing public schools, which significantly increases the workload of the Financial Division and makes it more diverse. Accordingly, it was decided to transform the mentioned division into a department under the condition that the change will be enacted from January 2023 in order not to cause changes in the staff list and budget. Also, in order to provide the new department with human resources, it was decided to effectively redistribute the vacant places in the General Education Quality Assurance Department, Internal Audit and Qualifications Development Department and transfer them to the newly created department. Due to the effective redistribution of funds and vacant places, the total number of staff units and the funds requested from the budget will not be increased.

At the question-answer session, Shalva Mekravishvili, the Council member asked whether the authorization of preschools and education institutions would apply to legal entities of public and private law in the similar manner.

Kakha Eradze, Deputy Director of the Center, explained that both public and private legal entities will provide the same services and the Center has the same approach to them. As there was no unified register of institutions providing these services and there was no accurate information about them, a special platform for registration was planned to open in April, which would be open until the end of the year and all private and public institutions would be required to register. The institution would then be allowed to continue operating until the authorization was granted. 2023 will be the year of self-assessment for institutions. Based on their self-assessment reports, the Center would develop and approve an authorization plan that would include both private and public institutions and authorize them according to the plan by 2030.

The Council member Irina Kurdadze asked whether resources of the Center (given the Center's existing functions) would be sufficient to ensure the quality of a large number of preschools.

Deputy Director of the Center, Kakha Eradze, explained that the Center has mobilized resources within its various departments, also, other ministries are involved in this process, e.g. Ministries of Health,

Finance, etc.; as well as municipalities and councils. The situation is complicated by the fact that not all standards are ready yet. However, donors have appeared to help us strengthen our capacity in various areas. From the next year, the budget will also envisage financial support for the planned activities. Many parties were involved within their competence; with the united efforts, all together would create a quality assurance system for preschool studies and education.

The Chairperson of the Council, Rusudan Sanadze, cast votes for the implementation of the amendments introduced in the Provision of the Center. With the full consent of the attendees, the Council agreed to make changes to the Provision of the Center.

Pro: 10

Against: 0

**Chairman of the Council:**

**Rusudan Sanadze** - Head of the Department of Education Sciences of the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences at LEPL Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University; Accreditation Expert of Higher Education Programs;



**Secretary of the Meeting:**

**Maka Abuladze** - Representative of the Student Organization of Georgia NNLE, PhD student at the Georgian Technical University – LEPL



## Annex 1

The Coordination Council meeting was attended by the following members of the Council:
<b>Rusudan Sanadze</b> - Head of the Department of Education Sciences of the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences at LEPL Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University; Accreditation Expert of Higher Education Programs;
<b>Cay Etzold</b> - International Expert in Higher Education;
<b>Heli Mattisen</b> - Director of the Estonian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA)
<b>Shalva Mekravishvili</b> - Civic education expert within the framework of National Curriculum Development Sub-Program under the program "National Curriculum Implementation and Monitoring" of the Department of the Preschool and General Education Development of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia;
<b>Maka Abuladze</b> - Representative of the Student Organization of Georgia NNLE, PhD student at the Georgian Technical University - LEPL;
<b>Irma Kurdadze</b> - Professor of Samtskhe-Javakheti State University LEPL;
<b>Natia Jojua</b> - Professor of "European University" Ltd, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine;
<b>Maya Shukhoshvili</b> - Head of the Higher Education Division of the Department of Higher Education and Science Development of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia;
<b>Anastasia Kitiashvili</b> - Expert of vocational education;
<b>Tea Gulua</b> -UNDP Knowledge Management and Innovation Specialist, Vocational Education Expert;

The following did not attend the meeting of the Coordination Council:
<b>Zaza Purtseladze</b> - Director of the British Council for the South Caucasus and Georgia - did not attend the Coordination Council meeting
<b>Kakhaber Tchelidze</b> - Professor of LEPL Tbilisi State Medical University, Head of the Department of Internal Medicine at the University Medical Center of Higher Medical Technologies



## Annex 2

### Coordinating Council Meeting Agenda:

Time	Discussion topic	Presenter	Position, Organization
19:00 – 19:10	Introduction	Tamar Makharashvili	Director, National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement
19:10 - 19:35	NCEQE Annual Report 2021	Lasha Zivzivadze	Head of Planning, Research and International Relations Department, National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement
19:35 – 19:55	Question & Answer		
19:55 – 20:10	Amendments in “Rule on Selection of Experts for Authorization of Higher Education Institutions and Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes, their Activities and Suspension and Termination of Membership of Expert Pool”	Nikoloz Parjanadze	Head of the Higher Education Quality Assurance Department, National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement
20:10-20:25	Amendments in “Rules for Remuneration of Members of the Expert Pool for Authorization of General, Vocational and Higher Education Institutions and Accreditation of Educational Programmes”	Nikoloz Parjanadze	Head of the Higher Education Quality Assurance Department, National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement

20:25-20:40	Amendments in accreditation fees for educational programmes and programmes included in the cluster	Nikoloz Parjanadze	Head of the Higher Education Quality Assurance Department, National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement
20:40-21:05	Question & Answer		
21:05-21:25	ISMS (Information Management Security System) Implementation Action Plan 2022	Giorgi Gvasalia	Information Security Manager, National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement
21:25-21:35	Amendments in the charter of the NCEQE – Review of the information security policy document of the organization	Giorgi Gvasalia	Information Security Manager, National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement
21:35-21:45	Question & Answer		
21:45 – 22:05	Reorganization changes in NCEQE	Lasha Margishvili	Deputy Director, National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement
22:05-22:25	Question & Answer		
22:25-22:35	Summing up the meeting		