

External review of the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

April 2018

1. Background and Context

In 2005, Georgia joined the Bologna Process and took the responsibility to harmonize its educational system with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and to implement higher education quality assurance system. In 2006, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia established a quality assurance agency - the National Center for Educational Accreditation (Order N222, the Ministry of Education and Science), which was authorized to conduct institutional accreditation of higher education institutions of Georgia. The system has been reformed in 2010 aiming at strengthening the role of the external quality assurance and extending the mandate of the quality assurance body. In this regard, the Law on Educational Quality Enhancement has been introduced. By this law an independent quality assurance body - the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) has been established as a legal successor of the National Center for Educational Accreditation. The core functions of the NCEQE are: implementing external quality assurance mechanisms of all educational institutions (higher education institutions (HEI), vocational education institutions and general education institutions) operating in the country, on both institutional and programme level; development of the national qualifications framework; recognition of foreign education. The NCEQE represents Georgia in the ENIC-NARIC Networks.

To fulfill its function of implementation and development of external quality assurance mechanisms for higher education institutions, the NCEQE continuously works on the development of the education quality concept, creates and maintains up-to-dated quality assurance (QA) standards and procedures and ensures relevant mechanisms for their proper implementation. In this regard, several external reviews of the agency's activities and the external quality assurance mechanisms have been conducted by international peers. The recommendations of the reviews have been considered for the development of the QA system.

Currently, two main external quality assurance mechanisms – authorization of educational institutions and accreditation of educational programmes are in place.

The authorization of higher education institutions is an obligatory for all HEIs in order to be allowed to carry out educational activities and to issue a diploma that is recognized by the state. The procedure identifies the compatibility of educational institutions with authorization standards. The term of the authorization is 6 years after which the HEIs are obliged to go through the re-authorization procedure in order to continue its activities.

The accreditation of educational programmes determines the compatibility of educational programmes with accreditation standards. Programme accreditation is mandatory only for doctoral programmes and programmes of regulated professions (Medicine, Law, Teacher Education, Veterinary, and Maritime). However, due to the fact that state funding goes only to accredited programmes, 98% (1950 accredited programmes) of all academic programs are accredited.

To ensure the continuous development of education quality and the consideration of the external evaluation results by the HEIs, the NCEQE carries out **follow-up monitoring procedures for both educational institutions and educational programmes**.

Furthermore, the NCEQE supports the development of internal quality assurance mechanisms of HEIs through providing various capacity building activities, including provision of guidelines, consultations and workshops for HEIs.

In 2015-2017, NCEQE revised the system of higher education quality assurance to strengthen the development-oriented and outcome-based function of quality assurance and to ensure its compliance with the requirements of Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015). Specifically, the quality assurance standards and procedures have been revised; formal procedure of complaints and appeals has been introduced; students, employer representatives and international experts have been involved in the review panels; evaluation reports became publicly available.

In order to foster the proper implementation of the revised QA system special programme the NCEQE carried out pilot evaluations of HEIs, provided capacity building activities to HEIs and experts, and developed review process guidelines. Special programme under the project "Study in Georgia" has been designed to support the above mentioned activities.

From 2018, the NCEQE has started the system-wide implementation of the revised quality assurance standards and procedures at Georgian HEIs.

The NCEQE has been an ENQA affiliate since October 2013 and now is applying for ENQA membership.

The NCEQE is also applying for registration on EQAR.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

This review, will evaluate the way in which and to what extent NCEQE fulfils the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Consequently, the review will provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether membership of NCEQE should be reconfirmed and to EQAR to support NCEQE application to the register.

The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards granting membership.

2.1 Activities of NCEQE within the scope of the ESG

In order for NCEQE to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all NCEQE activities that are within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). This is regardless of whether these activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA, and whether they are obligatory or voluntary.

The following activities of NCEQE have to be addressed in the external review:

- **The authorization (and re-authorisation) of higher education institutions.** It is an obligatory procedure in order to allow higher education institution to carry out educational activities and to issue a diploma that is recognized by the state. The procedure identifies the compatibility of educational institutions with authorization standards. The HEIs shall apply for re-authorization in every 6 years.
- **Accreditation of educational programmes.** The procedure to determine the compliance of educational programs with accreditation standards, which facilitate the development of quality assurance mechanisms for education quality improvement. The term of initial accreditation is 4 years, while the term of the reaccreditation of educational programmes is 7 years.

Furthermore, the self-assessment report (and external review report) should also address the arrangements for the recognition of the external quality assurance activities carried out by other quality assurance agencies and how NCEQE ensures ESG compliance in cases the agency is not EQAR-registered.

3. The Review Process

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in line with the requirements of the *EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the Terms of Reference and protocol for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by NCEQE including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to NCEQE;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the ENQA Review Committee;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary follow-up visit.

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, student member, and eventually a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. For ENQA Agency Reviews at least one of the reviewers is an ENQA nominee (most often the QA professional[s]). At least one of the reviewers is appointed from the nominees of either the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the student member is always selected from among the ESU-nominated reviewers. If requested, the labour market representative may come from the Business Europe nominees or from ENQA. An additional panel member may be included in the panel at the request of the agency under review. In this case an additional fee to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses is applied.

In addition to the four members, the panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member will not be the Secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide NCEQE with the list of suggested experts with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards NCEQE review.

3.2 Self-assessment by NCEQE, including the preparation of a self-assessment report

NCEQE is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background

description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. All agency's QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.

- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which NCEQE fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, is present. For the second and subsequent reviews, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within 4 weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 € will be charged to the agency.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel

NCEQE will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to NCEQE at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by NCEQE in arriving in Tbilisi, Georgia.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on compliance or granting of ENQA membership.

3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ESG. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language and it will be then submitted to NCEQE within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If NCEQE chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the review panel will take into account the statement by NCEQE, finalise the document and submit it to ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will not exceed 40 pages in length.

When preparing the report, the review panel should also bear in mind the *EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG*, so as to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR.

NCEQE is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which NCEQE expects to contribute to the work and

objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be discussed along with the final evaluation report.

4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report

NCEQE will consider the expert panel's report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. NCEQE commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board's decision.

The follow-up report will be complemented by a small-scale visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered as of particular importance or challenge by NCEQE. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or compliance of the agency with the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

5. Use of the report

ENQA shall retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the expert panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, shall be vested in ENQA.

The review report is used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether NCEQE has met the ESG and can be thus admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. The report will also be used for registration on EQAR, and is designed so as to serve these two purposes. However, the review report is to be considered final only after being approved by the ENQA Board. Once submitted to NCEQE and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by NCEQE, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. NCEQE may use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved of the report. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on membership.

The Chair of the panel shall remain available to respond to questions of clarification or further information from the EQAR Register Committee provided that the ENQA Secretariat is copied in all such requests.

6. Budget

NCEQE shall pay the following review related fees:

Fee of the Chair	4,500 EUR
Fee of the Secretary	4,500 EUR
Fee of the 2 other panel members	4,000 EUR (2,000 EUR each)
Fee of 2 panel members for follow-up visit	1,000 EUR (500 EUR each)
Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat	7,000 EUR
Experts Training fund	1,400 EUR
Approximate travel and subsistence expenses	6,000 EUR
Travel and subsistence expenses follow-up visit	1,600 EUR

This gives a total indicative cost of 30,000.00 EUR VAT excl. for a review team of 4 members. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses is exceeded, NCEQE will cover any

additional costs after the completion of the review. However, the ENQA Secretariat will endeavour to keep the travel and subsistence expenses in the limits of the planned budget, and will refund the difference to NCEQE if the travel and subsistence expenses go under budget.

The fee of the follow-up visit is included in the overall cost of the review and will not be reimbursed in case the agency does not wish to benefit from it.

In the event of a second site visit required by the Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance, and should the agency accept a second visit, an additional fee of 500 EUR per expert, as well as travel and subsistence costs are recoverable from the agency.

7. Indicative Schedule of the Review

Agreement on terms of reference	April 2018
Appointment of review panel members	July 2018
Self-assessment completed	Early August 2018
Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA coordinator	August 2018
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	September/October 2018
Briefing of review panel members	October 2018
Review panel site visit	November 2018
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	By Mid-January 2019
Draft of evaluation report to NCEQE	February 2019
Statement of NCEQE to review panel if necessary	February 2019
Submission of final report to ENQA	Early March 2019
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of NCEQE	April 2019 (depending on the date of the ENQA Board meeting)
Publication of the report	April/May 2019