

## GEORGIAN HIGHER EDUCATION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF ACCREDITATION PROCESS

**Inga Gelashvili**

Associate Professor  
Georgian International University GIU  
Tbilisi, Samghereti #5  
+995 599 409 665  
inga.gelashvili@giu.edu.ge

**Maryna Ostrianska**

Visiting lecturer  
Georgian International University GIU  
Tbilisi, Samghereti #5  
+995 577 674 323  
mariana.ostrianska@giu.edu.ge

### Abstract

Over the past few years, within the framework of the reform of quality assurance of higher education, important changes have been made. The goal of the reform is higher education improving the quality of education in institutions and making it student-oriented providing an educational environment. As a result of carrying out 8 reforms, the quality assessment system of higher education was changed. Authorization standards and procedures have come in line with the highest with the quality assurance standards of the European space of education and with the guiding principles. The system will become attractive to both locals and foreign students, the process of international recognition of education will be simplified, exchange and joint educational and research programs implementation. From this point of view, the authorization board is important, analysis of the decisions, as well as the assessment of the USD itself, the new authorization standards, their point of view regarding the revised standards. It is important to determine whether there are still problematic issues, different views and recommendations from universities.

**Keywords:** Accreditation, higher education, quality, process, standards

საქართველოს უმაღლესი განათლება აკრედიტაციის პროცესის ფარგლებში

ინგა გელაშვილი

ასოცირებული პროფესორი  
საქართველოს საერთაშორისო უნივერსიტეტი  
თბილისი, სამღერეთის #5,  
+995 599 409 665  
inga.gelashvili@giu.edu.ge

მარინა ოსტრიანსკა  
მოწვეული ლექტორი  
საქართველოს საერთაშორისო უნივერსიტეტი  
თბილისი, სამღერეთის #5  
+995 577 674 323  
mariana.ostrianska@giu.edu.ge

### აბსტრაქტი

ბოლო რამდენიმე წლის განმავლობაში უმაღლესი განათლების ხარისხის უზრუნველყოფის რეფორმის ფარგლებში მნიშვნელოვანი ცვლილებები განხორციელდა. რეფორმის მიზანს შეადგენს უმაღლეს საგანმანათლებლო დაწესებულებებში განათლების ხარისხის გაუმჯობესება და სტუდენტზე ორიენტირებული საგანმანათლებლო გარემოს უზრუნველყოფა. 8 რეფორმის შედეგად შეიცვალა უმაღლესი განათლების ხარისხის შეფასების სისტემა. ავტორიზაციის სტანდარტები და პროცედურები შესაბამისობაში მოვიდა უმაღლესი განათლების ევროპული სივრცის ხარისხის უზრუნველყოფის სტანდარტებთან და სახელმძღვანელო პრინციპებთან. სისტემა გახდება მიმზიდველი, როგორც ადგილობრივი, ასევე უცხოელი სტუდენტებისთვის, გამარტივდება განათლების საერთაშორისო აღიარების პროცესი, გაცვლითი და ერთობლივი საგანმანათლებლო და კვლევითი პროგრამების განხორციელება. ამ თვალსაზრისით მნიშვნელოვანია ავტორიზაციის საბჭოს გადაწყვეტილებების ანალიზი, ამასთან თავად უსდ-ის შეფასება ავტორიზაციის ახალი სტანდარტების, მათი თვალსაზრისი განახლებულ სტანდარტებთან დაკავშირებით, მნიშვნელოვანია დადგინდეს არსებობს თუ არა კიდევ პრობლემური საკითხები, განსხვავებული ხედვები და უნივერსიტეტების მხრიდან რეკომენდაციები.

**საკვანძო სიტყვები:** აკრედიტაცია, უმაღლესი განათლება, ხარისხი, პროცესი, სტანდარტები

### Introduction

For the functioning of higher educational institutions the authentication process is crucial. Higher education authorization of the institution to promote the development of the quality of education outside the mechanism and process is carried out by the National Development of Education Quality Center. Authorization is an institutional assessment that defines compliance of the institution with authorization standards. The goal of USD is to fully meet the standards. Our interest subject is to authorize the higher educational institution analysis of standards, proposed within the framework of the reform of higher education in Georgia with updated authorization standards, which existed until 2017. Up to this point, 28 higher education institutions have been authorized in Georgia. Therefore, it is an indicator of the change in standards caused by difficulties and higher educational institutions insufficient preparation. It was the factor that sparked our interest in updated authorization standards.

### Main part

Quality Assurance is one of the main key issues in the agenda of higher education reform process. It is a result of many factors such as social, political and economic.

The first 'quality agencies', called accreditors, were founded in the USA at the behest of institutions and professional associations, and independent of government. In contrast, the next identifiable external quality

agencies UK, Ireland in the 1960s, were created by governments. Also, they were not created to address perceived problems but to actively guide and direct growing and diverse higher education sectors.

The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education was formed in Hong Kong in 1991 by a dozen QA agencies. (State Audit Office of Georgia, 2016, 60).

The result of this was a remote control through public or private intermediate institutions. It was the idea of quality evaluation policies at university. It has mined a mechanism of redistribution the central power of the State in relation with the HEIs.

In Europe, the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) can be mentioned for its direct influence in the evaluation and accreditation processes. The Bologna Declaration which was declared in 1999 had the aim to reform higher education in Europe by creation European Higher Education Area. And the subsequent meeting at Prague (2001) set measures in order to start the European Higher Education Area in 2010.

The implementation of higher education quality evaluation systems is one of the most important measures adopted. The EHEA, with its 47 participating countries, is characterized by the diversity of political systems, higher education systems, socio-cultural and educative traditions, languages and expectations. As a consequence, a single approach to higher education quality, criteria and quality assurance is completely inappropriate. (Corengia 2014, 16).

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area were developed by European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. It was approved by the Ministerial Conference in Yerevan in May, 2015. This document was written by European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education; European Students' Union; European University Association; European Association of Institutions in Higher Education; Education International Business-Europe; European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education. It has been brought to ensure the accountability of the public HEIs and that the standards in private HE are equal in value.

The European Quality Assurance Agencies are:

1) European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). It was established in 2000 as a European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education for promoting co-operation in the field of quality assurance and since 2004 it is an independent association from the Ministry of Education.

2) European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA) was founded as a project organization in 2003 for mutual recognition of accreditation decisions. And since 2014 its exist as an association.

ECA is an association of recognized accreditation and quality assurance agencies in Europe. The vision of ECA is to act as an internationally acknowledged driver of innovation in accreditation and quality assurance in higher education. (<http://ecahe.eu/>).

3) The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) – the Register- was created in 2007. Unlike the ENQA and the ECA, it is composed by the organizations of the so called “E4” group: 1.) European representatives of the quality assurance agencies; 2.) European students ‘association; 3.) European universities association; 4.) European Association of Institutions in Higher Education. The EQAR’s task is to publish and administer a register of quality assurance agencies that comply substantially with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG). It aims to provide clear and reliable information to the public regarding the quality assurance agencies that operate in Europe. The Register has a free access web site. (Corengia, 2014, 16).

According to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA, 2007), three factors influence the quality assurance trends in international higher education. First, quality assurance is more competitive and rigorous than ever before. Second, quality assurance is becoming recognized regionally. Third, there is a need for an international quality assurance framework with acknowledgement and reciprocity across countries. Program offerings across international boundaries require students to enroll in multiple jurisdictions as part of their degree programs.

These innovative approaches to higher education demand greater awareness of the attributes and requirements of quality assurance organizations worldwide. (<https://files.eric.ed.gov/>).

The most obvious finding to emerge from this paragraph is that the evolution of quality assurance process was started with Bologna Process, and nowadays it covers United States, European and Latin-American countries. During this time (20-30 years) great progress was done in the higher education area.

Georgia was joined to Bologna Process in 2005 and shaped education system according to guidelines of this process. The last years, the main focus in Georgian Higher Education system was made on quality assurance reform and its internationalization aspects.

In 2004, was launched the process of institutional accreditation. In 2006 was founded the LELP – the State Service for the Accreditation of Education Institutions of Georgia. In 2007, it was changed to LELP National Educational Accreditation Center (NEAC).

Accreditation of the study programs of Higher Education Institutions in Georgia was launched in 2010. This process was carried out within the scope of shared program of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia and the Ministry of Federal Education and Research of Germany – Twinning, which also involved the representatives of the International Center for Teaching Studies, France. For the purpose of ensuring compliance of study program accreditation standards and its formation with the European standards and practice, the working group was created in the scope of the abovementioned Twinning project. (State Audit Office of Georgia 2016, 60).

NCEQE employers, and interested parties were included in the working group. The Accreditation Standards were discussed in a working regime with the HEIs. The manual for education quality assurance was developed. It included accreditation standards, their description and possible sources of evidence.

National Qualification Framework was approved in 2010, by a decree №120/N of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. The NCEQE is responsible for improving the quality in education, it aims at closer cooperation with international institutions working in HEA and involvement in the international academic framework.

On May 2011 the Statute of Program Accreditation of Education Institutions was adopted which determines the accreditation standard by the Order №65/N of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia.

NCEQE gained an affiliate status of the European Association for Quality Assurance in (ENQA) in 2014.

In 2018 NCEQE has launched the process for ENQA full membership that has been declared as a strategic goal of the center and the implementation process is envisaged in the approved action plan for 2018-2019.

In 2018 NCEQE is applying to the WORLD Federation of Medical Education (WFME) for recognition as a recognized accrediting agency for Medical Schools in Georgia.

The NCEQE is the main body responsible for ensuring the quality of education in the country as well as monitoring the effectiveness of the NQF. The Quality Assurance mechanisms used for the monitoring of the effectiveness of the NQF is the accreditation of educational programmers and the international academic network and authorization of educational institutions. The main problem for the development and the implementation of the NQF is the barrier for the free access to higher education from the vocational education sector. This causes a problem of proper implementation of the LLL approach. In order to eliminate the existing problems, the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement has launched in 2014 a new project, namely the revision of existing NQF with a special focus on vocational education and NQF's alignment with the European qualification framework for LLL. The project was mainly inspired by the Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union and some strategic changes in the vocational education system. (Glonti 2017, 32).

On April 2019, ENQA made a decision on membership of the NCEQE of Georgia. In autumn that year, Georgia officially became the member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

Nowadays, the accreditation of higher education study programs and its follow up mechanisms appear to be the most important external mechanism of quality assurance. For this reason, each step of the accreditation process is of crucial matter, as well as the existence of proper standards and follow-up. (State Audit Office of Georgia 2016, 60).

“The goal of accreditation is to ensure that education provided by institutions of higher education meets acceptable levels of quality” - U.S. Department of Education. (<https://www2.ed.gov/>).

For realizing of successful career it is important to choose a reputable HEI. The HEIs that have been thought accreditation process, can offer the degrees which are recognized among employers and recruiters. Companies are interested in high qualified personnel. Program accreditation carries a number of values to public, to students, to employers and HEIs.

The Program Accreditation provides a list of values. It defines the following values to the public:

- An assurance of external evaluation of the institution or program, and a finding that there is conformity to general expectations in higher education or the professional field;
- An identification of institutions and programs which have voluntarily undertaken explicit activities directed at improving the quality of the institution and its programs and are carrying them out successfully.
- An improvement in the professional services available to the public, as accredited programs modify their requirements to reflect changes in knowledge and practice generally accepted in the field;
- A decreased need for intervention by public agencies in the operations of educational institutions. ([www.eqe.ge](http://www.eqe.ge)).

For students, Educational Program Accreditation is necessary because it's an assurance that a program meets the needs of students. It helps students in choosing of acceptable universities for enrollment. One more value, is a transfer of credits between HEIs, and an admission of students through the general acceptance of credits among accredited HEIs. Accreditation enables graduates to sit for certification examinations.

Program Accreditation provides access to federal and sometimes state financial aid, available to qualified students who attend institutions accredited by recognized accrediting organizations.

Accreditation of Educational Programs, helps employers to decide a validity of the program and whether a graduate is qualified. In modern society, employers often require evidence that job seeker has received a degree from an accredited program. A benefit to HEI is an increase of the reputation of institution or educational program.

According to NECHE, the following values to universities are:

- 1) The stimulus provided for self-evaluation and self-directed institutional and program improvement;
- 2) The strengthening of institutional and program self-evaluation by the review and counsel provided through the accrediting body;
- 3) The application of criteria of accrediting bodies, generally accepted throughout higher education, which help guard against external encroachments harmful to institutional or program quality by providing benchmarks independent of forces that might impinge on individual institutions;
- 4) The enhancing of the reputation of an accredited institution or program because of public regard for accreditation. (<https://files.eric.ed.gov/>).

The benefit of Program Accreditation is that it can establish a legal status and basic legitimacy. It can function as a licensing mechanism or be directly linked to access to public funding.

Accreditation process typically relates to the accountability and information purposes quality assurance. It checks and assures whether programs or institutions are meeting the set standards or thresholds. Accreditation can be a one-time procedure (e.g. certifying new programs) or a cyclical process (e.g. every 5 or more years). (Liviu 2016, 80).

The educational programs obtain the stimulus which needed for self-directed improvement; the counsel and peer review; an increase of their reputation; an eligibility for program funding and private foundation grants. Program Accreditation is very important for all stakeholders who are involved in this process.

## Research Result

The acquisition of accreditation has arisen as an important alternative today. To **portray the issue of accreditation process in Georgian educational space, some important gaps should be determined. First of all, analyzing Bachelor Programmes' Accreditation Process in Georgia, we found that there are some weaknesses, such as** programme objectives, learning outcomes, programme admission preconditions, programme structure and content and a course, the development of practical, scientific, research, creative performance and transferable skills, teaching and learning methods, student evaluation, and student support



services. Second, we should define that the weaknesses of MA programmes' accreditation is a teaching methodology and organization, adequate evaluation and programme mastering, student achievements and individual work with them. Finally, it is important to note that conducting Doctoral Programmes' Accreditation Procedures, Georgian HEIs have feeble aspects. These include a teaching methodology and organization, adequate evaluation of programme mastering, and teaching quality enhancement opportunities. To put it in a nutshell, some changes should be done for fully compliance educational programmes with accreditations standards.

### Conclusion

As a result of the research, it was revealed that the quality assurance service of USD, according to the representatives, the authorization-accreditation process is different from each other illustrated load. The program fails during the authorization process detailed study, that is why accreditation is needed, at the same time educational the program will be studied in depth. Higher education institutions believe that if we want to get quality education, we need to go through the accreditation procedure. Thus authorization-accreditation for higher education institutions there are well thought out processes. Modern methodology is needed to simplify the process development of literature, manuals and guides. It should be noted that the new standards helped to raise the quality of education, it will be student services, involvement in scientific-research activities, in terms of personnel management policy or quality assurance. But in this regard, there is still a lot to be done.

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