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**FOUNDATION FOR INTERNATIONAL
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION ACCREDITATION**

FIBAA – BERLINER FREIHEIT 20-24 – D-53111 BONN

Assessment Report

Higher Education Institution:

Ilia State University, Georgia

Bachelor/Master programme:

Higher Education Systems and Institutional Innovation

Qualification awarded on completion:

Master of Education Policy



Decision of the FIBAA Accreditation and Certification Committee

22th Meeting on June 19, 2026

PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION

Project Number:	25/059
Higher Education Institution:	Ilia State University
Location:	Tbilisi, Georgia
Study programme:	Higher Education Systems and Institutional Innovation, Master of Education Policy
Type of accreditation:	concept accreditation

The FIBAA Accreditation and Certification Committee has taken the following decision:

According to § 7 (6) in conjunction with § 9 (1) of the FIBAA General Terms and Conditions within the framework of procedures for the award of the FIBAA Quality Seal for Programmes from 1 March 2025, the study programme is accredited with one condition.

Condition:

Condition 1: The University adopts a comprehensive institutional policy on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in teaching and learning, providing clear guidance for students and academic staff on its appropriate and responsible use.

Proof of meeting these conditions/this condition is to be supplied by 18 March 2027.

Period of Accreditation: 15 September 2027 until 14 September 2032.

The FIBAA Quality Seal is awarded.

This decision will be published in accordance with FIBAA's publication policy. The accreditation applies to the programme as described in the documentation submitted; any substantive changes require prior notification.

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Concept Accreditation

The Higher Education Systems and Institutional Innovation offered by Ilia State University (ISU) fulfils, with one exception, the FIBAA quality requirements for Master programmes and can be conceptually accredited by the Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA) for a period of five years, starting on 15 September 2027 and ending on 14 September 2032, subject to one condition.

The programme complies with the national and European Qualifications Frameworks, the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) in the version applicable at the time the procedure was opened, and the principles of the Bologna Declaration.

Procedure

An agreement for the concept accreditation of the Higher Education Systems and Institutional Innovation, Master in Education Policy was concluded between FIBAA and Ilia State University on 2 December 2025. On 10 March 2026, the HEI submitted a self-evaluation report, which included a detailed description of the programme and additional documents to demonstrate that the criteria for programme accreditation are met.

At the same time, FIBAA appointed a review panel¹, which was approved by the HEI. The panel consisted of:

Prof. Dr. Petra Deger

Heidelberg University of Education
Professor of Education Sociology
(*written procedure*)

Affiliated Prof. Dr. Maia Chkotua

International Black Sea University
Affiliated Professor in Education Sciences, Head of the Teacher
Training Educational Programme

Hilal Karaoglan

Marmara University, Turkey
Student: M.A. Educational Management and Supervision

Prof. Dr. Milan Pol

Masaryk University
Professor of Education

Alexander Schöpke

Bündnis für Bildung e.V.
Director

FIBAA project manager:
Yuliia Bleshmudt

¹ The panel is presented in alphabetical order.

Accreditation Data at a Glance

Mode of the site visit	At the HEI's premises in placef. At the end of the visit, the panel provided brief feedback on its first impressions to representatives of the HEI.
Date of the site visit	on 22-23 of April 2026
Groups interviewed	• HEI Management • Programme management • Lecturers • Students and graduates from the School (<i>MA in Education Administration</i>) • Administration staff
Facilities and equipment inspected (optional, if relevant)	• Library reading halls • Fab Lab & Uni Lab • International Students and Programme Marketing Office • Student Affairs and Alumni Office • International Relations Office • Office of Development • Lecture rooms • Computer labs • Canteen
Use of virtual learning platforms/tools demonstrated (optional, if relevant)	yes
Documents reviewed additionally on-site: (e.g., exam samples, internal QA reports, thesis examples)	yes
Date Report Delivered to HEI for Statement	9 June 2026
Date of HEI Statement	15 June 2026

General Information on the Study Programme

General Information	
Type of study programme: <i>Master programme</i> Name of the study programme (in original language and English translation): <i>Higher Education Systems and Institutional Innovation</i> Degree title awarded (in original language and English translation) <i>Education policy</i> Projected study time (years / months / semester / trimester) <i>2 years</i> Number of ECTS credits & national credits assigned to the study programme <i>120 ECTS credits</i> Type of accreditation: <i>Concept accreditation</i>	Mode of study: <i>Full-time</i> Methodological approach: <i>Study programme with obligatory class attendance</i> Language of instruction (if more than one, please provide percentages of their usage in the courses/modules): <i>English</i> Double/Joint Degree programme: <i>no</i>
Implementation	

Dates and Scope

Initial start of the programme:

September 2027

Programme cycle starts in:

other start date: September 2027

Scope (planned number of parallel classes) and enrolment capacity

20 places per cohort

Summary

Brief description of the study programme:

The planned **Master's Programme in Higher Education Systems and Institutional Innovation** represents a strategic expansion of the School of Education's portfolio. The new programme aligns closely with Ilia State University's mission to create meaningful social impact through innovative and transformative education. In the context of a rapidly changing higher education environment, the programme aims to prepare graduates with the critical thinking, leadership, and problem-solving skills needed to address complex institutional and policy challenges. The programme should fill an important national gap and reinforce ISU's position as a regional centre for educational research, innovation, and leadership.

The programme stands out for its international orientation and committed teaching staff. The site visit was well-structured and provided comprehensive insights into the academic and organisational framework. The site visit took place on-site and included in-depth discussions with programme management, teaching staff (full-time and part-time), students and alumni from the School of other study programmes, and administrative representatives. During the site visit, the experts toured the university facilities, including the library, the Student Affairs Office, and various laboratories and learning spaces.

Key distinguishing features of the programme include its strong international orientation, such as English-medium instruction, innovative teaching formats including co-teaching, and the uniqueness and innovativeness of the study programme concept within the regional context. The teaching staff is highly qualified, well-prepared, and experienced abroad. The programme concept was developed in close cooperation with international partners and leading higher education institutions in the field. In addition, the programme is supported by a comprehensive, well-structured needs and market analysis that clearly demonstrates the relevance and demand for the study programme.

The panel notes that, with further development and expansion of the programme, an increase in the number of core academic staff members may be necessary to ensure adequate, sustainable academic support. Although mobility opportunities are available, given that most Master's students are employed, additional short-term or online mobility opportunities should be considered to increase accessibility and participation.

Considering the strong cooperation with leading higher education institutions in the field, the programme should gain opportunities to strengthen joint and collaborative research activities with international partners. Furthermore, although the programme demonstrates a clear international orientation, the panel observed that some courses remain closely focused on the Georgian context. Broadening these courses with more comparative and international perspectives would further strengthen the programme's international profile and regional relevance.

The expert panel formed a positive overall impression of the programme and the institution's commitment to quality and further development. Panel members noted the high level of engagement among all stakeholders and the strong motivation of team members to contribute to the programme's quality and successful development. The panel considers that some

criteria could potentially be evaluated at a higher level; however, given that this is a concept accreditation and the programme has not yet been implemented, the panel assigned the evaluation level of “meets” and expects that the identified strengths and planned developments will be fully realised during implementation.

The learning environment appeared supportive, and the institution’s openness to feedback and international standards was evident throughout the discussions.

Quality Profile

HEI: Ilia State University

Master's programme: Higher Education Systems and Institutional Innovation

		Exceptional	Exceeds ²	Meets ³	Does not meet ⁴	n.r.	Recommendation ⁵
1	Objectives						
1.1*	Subject-specific qualifications and employability of students (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
1.2	Positioning of the study programme on the educational market		X				
1.3	Positioning of the study programme within the HEI's overall strategic concept			X			
2	Admission						
2.1*	Admission requirements (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
2.2(*)	Ensuring foreign language proficiency (Asterisk Criterion only for study programmes offering courses in a foreign language)			X			
2.3(*)	Professional experience (if relevant; Asterisk Criterion for master programmes that require professional experience)					X	
2.4	Selection procedure (if relevant)			X			
2.5	Counselling for prospective students			X			
3	Implementation of the study programme						
3.1	Structure and Content						
3.1.1*	Structure of the study programme (Asterisk Criterion)			X			X

² quality requirements.

³ quality requirements.

⁴ quality requirements leading to condition or recommendation.

⁵ The measures that the HEI takes in order to implement the recommendations of the panel members will have to be considered during the re-accreditation.

		Exceptional	Exceeds ²	Meets ³	Does not meet ⁴	n.r.	Recommendation ⁵
3.1.2*	Rationale for degree and programme name (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
3.1.3*	Conceptual coherence of the curriculum (Asterisk Criterion)			X			X
3.1.4*	Study and exam regulations (Asterisk Criterion)				X		
3.1.5*	Examination and final thesis (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
3.2	Intended Competences and Skills						
3.2.1*	Methods and scientific practice (Asterisk Criterion)			X			X
3.2.2*	Integration of theory and practice (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
3.2.3*	Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary thinking (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
3.2.4*	International contents (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
3.2.5*	Professional ethics and societal issues (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
3.3	Teaching and Learning Methodology						
3.3.1*	Logic and plausibility of the Teaching and Learning Methodology (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
3.3.2	Acquisition of future and soft skills			X			
3.3.3*	Course materials and recommended literature (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
3.3.4	Extracurricular events			X			X
3.4	International environment and mobility opportunities						
3.4.1	Foreign language contents			X			
3.4.2	International mobility of students and teaching staff			X			X
3.4.3	International composition of students and teaching staff			X			
4	Academic Environment and Framework Conditions						
4.1	Teaching staff						
4.1.1*	Structure and quantity of teaching staff (Asterisk Criterion)			X			

		Exceptional	Exceeds ²	Meets ³	Does not meet ⁴	n.r.	Recommendation ⁵
4.1.2*	Academic and comprehensive qualification of teaching staff (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
4.1.3*	Pedagogical qualification of teaching staff (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
4.1.4	Professional experience of teaching staff			X			
4.1.5*	Internal cooperation (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
4.1.6*	Student support by the teaching staff (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
4.2	Programme Management and Administrative Support						
4.2.1	Programme management			X			
4.2.2	Administrative support			X			
4.2.3	Public information					X	
4.2.4*	Inclusive and equitable education (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
4.2.5	Career counselling and placement service			X			
4.2.6	Alumni activities			X			
4.3	Cooperation and partnerships						
4.3.1(*)	Cooperation with HEIs and other academic institutions or networks (Asterisk Criterion for cooperation programmes)			X			
4.3.2(*)	Cooperation with professional fields (Asterisk Criterion for educational and vocational programmes, franchise programmes)			X			
4.4	Facilities and equipment						
4.4.1*	Quantity, quality, media and IT equipment of HEI's facilities (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
4.4.2*	Access to literature (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
4.5*	Financing of the study programme (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
5	Quality Assurance						
5.1*	Quality assurance and quality development with respect to contents, processes and outcomes (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
5.2	Instruments of Quality Assurance						

		Exceptional	Exceeds ²	Meets ³	Does not meet ⁴	n.r.	Recommendation ⁵
5.2.1	Evaluation by students			X			X
5.2.2	Evaluation by teaching staff			X			
5.2.3	External evaluation by alumni, employers and third parties			X			

The panel members identified a need for improvement in the following aspects⁶ Study and exam regulations. Therefore, they recommend accreditation on condition of meeting the following requirements:

- **Condition 1** (see chapter 3.1.4): The University adopts a comprehensive institutional policy on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in teaching and learning, providing clear guidance for students and academic staff on its appropriate and responsible use.

Proof of fulfilment of the above-mentioned condition must be submitted by 18 March 2027.

The panel members identified several areas where improvements could further strengthen the programme and **recommend**:

- reviewing and balancing the required reading load to ensure that it is realistic, manageable, and aligned with the expected student workload under the ECTS framework (see chapter 3.1.1);
- introducing an elective course related to legal aspects (see chapter 3.1.1);
- broadening some courses beyond country-specific perspectives to strengthen the programme's international orientation (see chapter 3.1.3);
- providing AI-related training more systematically and organising dedicated introductory workshops for students before the beginning of their studies to ensure consistent understanding of the ethical, responsible, and effective use of AI technologies in academic work (see chapter 3.2.1);
- inviting guest lecturers more actively (see chapter 3.3.4);
- offering more short-term mobility opportunities and online exchange formats to increase accessibility and participation in international activities (see chapter 3.4.2);
- providing students with information on the results of course evaluations and on planned follow-up activities or improvements based on the evaluation findings (see chapter 5.2.1).

In addition to the condition and recommendations, the panel members recognised strengths of the programme that exceed the required standards:

- Positioning of the study programme on the educational market (see chapter 1.2).

⁶ These aspects are Asterisk Criteria which means that they are essential for the study programme.

The panel acknowledges the institution's engagement and encourages the HEI to build on the feedback provided in this report. Substantial revision and development in the identified areas could form the foundation for a successful accreditation in the future.

Information

Information on the Institution

Iliia State University (the “**ISU**” or the “**University**”) is the third-largest public research university and one of the leading higher education institutions in Georgia. Since its establishment 17 years ago, the university has achieved significant growth and become the country’s leading research university, with strong international recognition reflected in global rankings of universities and researchers.

The University positions itself within national, regional, and global contexts, emphasising the role of higher education in Georgia’s European integration process. The University’s mission is the creation, transfer, and application of knowledge for scientific progress and societal development at both local and international levels. The mission is based on three principles:

- Teaching–Research Nexus: unity of research and teaching, with students involved in knowledge creation;
- Unity of General and Specialised Education: integration of liberal arts elements with strong disciplinary preparation;
- Unity of Universal and Local Knowledge: production of universally relevant knowledge while addressing national and regional challenges, especially in the context of democratic transition and EU integration.

According to the ISU Strategy 2024–2030, it aims to strengthen its role as a leading research University in Georgia and the wider region.

ISU consists of four faculties, four additional schools, one international doctoral school, 26 institutes, and 50 research centres. The University employs 353 academic staff members, 218 researchers, and a large network of invited lecturers and administrative personnel. It serves over 17,000 students, including around 700 international students.

ISU offers 110 accredited programmes across bachelor’s, master’s, doctoral, teacher training, and joint degree levels. The University also provides 17 English-medium programmes and maintains extensive international partnerships and exchange opportunities, reinforcing its regional and global engagement.

The School of Education

The School of Education within the Faculty of Business, Technology and Education (the “**School**”) offers programmes at all levels of higher education, including undergraduate, integrated teacher education, master’s, doctoral, and teacher training programmes. Its portfolio includes programmes in Early Childhood Education, Primary Teacher Education, Educational Administration, and Educational Sciences, as well as subject-specific teacher preparation programmes.

The School's activities reflect ISU's mission by integrating research, teaching, and professional practice. It promotes evidence-based educational development and collaboration between schools, universities, and policymakers. The School also hosts important research units, including the SALiS Research Centre, which supports innovative science education, and the Education Research Centre, established in 2024 as an interdisciplinary platform for research, dialogue, and policy discussion on educational challenges in Georgia and beyond.

Programme Description and Appraisal in Detail

1. OBJECTIVES

1.1 Subject-specific qualifications and employability of students (Asterisk Criterion)

The programme is designed as an English-language Master's degree aimed at attracting students from Georgia, the South Caucasus, and the broader post-Soviet and Eastern European regions. By focusing on higher education policy, systems, and institutional change from an international and comparative perspective, this programme prepares graduates to work effectively in complex, globally interconnected higher education environments.

The programme was developed in cooperation with Tampere University within the framework of the Competitive Innovation Fund (CIF) under the Innovation, Inclusion and Quality (I2Q) project, supported by the World Bank. Its development process lasted approximately one and a half years. It included extensive research on markets and higher education trends to identify regional needs, existing gaps, and emerging competencies in higher education policy and institutional management.

An international academic working group of 12 scholars and practitioners collaboratively designed the curriculum, course structure, and learning outcomes. The programme also introduces innovative approaches for the Georgian higher education context, including the Higher Education Forum. This seminar-based course actively engages students in discussions with scholars, policymakers, and practitioners. In addition, most courses are delivered through collaborative co-teaching by multiple instructors, offering students interdisciplinary and professional perspectives.

Through its international orientation, collaborative design, and innovative teaching methods, the programme aims to strengthen the professionalisation of expertise in higher education in Georgia and the wider region.

The programme aims to prepare specialists who combine theoretical knowledge with practical skills to shape higher education policy, governance, and institutional development. The programme focuses on three main goals:

- advancing critical understanding of higher education systems,
- developing ethical and transformative leadership, and
- integrating research, policy, and practice to support innovation.

The programme objectives were developed through benchmarking with international higher education programmes, consultations with academic and employer stakeholders, labour market analysis, and alignment with ISU's strategic priorities. Internal quality assurance processes also ensured compliance with national qualification standards and subject-specific benchmarks in Education Policy.

Graduates will be prepared for careers in university administration, public institutions, international organisations, research centres, and consultancy. They will also be equipped to continue doctoral studies. Core competencies include advanced policy analysis, qualitative and quantitative research methods, institutional assessment, ethical leadership, change management, and professional communication.

The programme places strong emphasis on research and independent inquiry. Students develop the ability to analyse governance, funding, quality assurance, research management, and teaching systems, and to produce evidence-informed recommendations for institutional and policy improvement. Leadership development and stakeholder engagement are also central components that prepare graduates to lead reforms and contribute to democratic and inclusive higher education systems.

Internationalisation is embedded throughout the curriculum. Courses address comparative and global higher education trends, including internationalisation, transnational education, and global governance, while incorporating perspectives from both the Global North and South, as well as the post-Soviet region. Selected courses involve co-teaching with international academics and contributions from guest experts and practitioners.

Appraisal:

The panel noticed that the programme development process was extensive and involved collaboration with international partners, ensuring both academic rigour and practical relevance. Benchmarking against international programmes, labour market analysis, and external expert feedback played a central role in shaping the curriculum, learning outcomes, and teaching approaches.

The subject-specific qualification objectives of the study programme are clearly defined and align with the intended academic level upon graduation. The objectives consider the requirements of the national qualification framework and the individual student's personal development. The graduation profile is aligned with the targeted professional field and emphasises developing the employability skills necessary for students' chosen careers.

		Exceptional	Exceed	Meet	Does not meet	n.r.	Recommendation
1.1*	Subject-specific qualifications and employability of students (Asterisk Criterion)			X			

1.2 Positioning of the study programme on the educational market

The programme is positioned as a specialised, internationally oriented programme that addresses a gap in the educational market in Georgia and the wider region. Its positioning is grounded in a comprehensive market research study examining global trends in higher education, the existing educational landscape, and emerging competency needs for higher education professionals.

The study identified the growing demand for professionals who can:

- navigate system complexity and ambiguity;
- lead institutional development and organisational change;
- produce and use evidence for decision-making;
- strengthen governance and policy design; and
- support internationalisation, research management, and digital transformation.

At the national level, the programme addresses an unmet need within the Georgian higher education sector. An analysis of existing Georgian programmes in education administration and education sciences demonstrates that none focus exclusively on higher education as a distinct academic and professional field. Higher education topics are addressed only marginally within broader education programmes, while critical domains such as science policy, research management, digital transformation, and innovation ecosystems are largely absent. Therefore, the programme addresses a gap by providing holistic and specialised preparation for professionals working within increasingly complex higher education systems.

A review of programmes in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Kazakhstan demonstrates that most existing programmes focus on general education management rather than higher education specifically. Thus, the programme offers a distinctive alternative within the region by providing:

- a holistic understanding of higher education systems, policy, and geopolitics;
- a strong grounding in organisational theory and change management;
- strategic management and institutional research competencies;
- advanced quality assurance and governance expertise;
- integrated content on digital transformation and AI governance; and
- sustainability as a transversal institutional agenda.

This positions the programme as a regional hub for the professionalisation of higher education within the South Caucasus and the wider post-Soviet region. The programme's identity is shaped by five distinguishing strengths, such as exclusive specialisation in higher education systems and institutional innovation, strong theoretical grounding integrated with practice, a future-oriented curriculum aligned with major global trends, including geopolitics, digital transformation, AI governance, sustainability, and innovation ecosystems, and evidence-based competencies derived from original research.

Appraisal:

The panel was **impressed** by the detailed and comprehensive education market research and analysis provided by ISU. Furthermore, the panel **appreciates** the unique profile of the study programme, particularly its strong specialisation in higher education systems and institutional innovation, as well as its alignment with current international trends and regional needs.

The reasons given for positioning this study programme in the educational market are comprehensive and plausible, given the described qualification objectives and the graduation profile. The programme's positioning is further reinforced by its qualification objectives and graduate profile, which emphasise competencies increasingly in demand in contemporary higher education environments.

The HEI has demonstrably examined the educational market and established a unique and competitive profile of the study programme.

		Exceptional	Exceed	Meet	Does not meet	n.r.	Recommendation
1.2	Positioning of the study programme on the educational market		X				

1.3 Positioning of the study programme within the HEI's overall strategic concept

The programme is aligned with ISU's mission to create, disseminate, and apply knowledge for scientific progress and societal development. The programme reflects the University's core principles by integrating research and teaching, combining broad analytical and ethical competencies with specialised expertise in higher education systems and institutional management, and connecting global perspectives with local and regional challenges. The programme supports ISU's vision of preparing intellectually independent, socially responsible, and globally engaged graduates.

Appraisal:

The study programme is convincingly integrated into the HEI's overall strategic concept. The study programme's qualification objectives are in line with the HEI's mission and vision.

		Exceptional	Exceed	Meet	Does not meet	n.r.	Recommendation
1.3	Positioning of the study programme within the HEI's overall strategic concept			X			

2. ADMISSION

2.1 Admission requirements (Asterisk Criterion)

The admission requirements are set out in the official document “Programme Admission Requirements and Assessment System,” approved by the Academic Council. The programme is designed to attract both Georgian and international applicants, particularly from the wider regional context, and therefore combines national admission regulations with an internal University selection process.

For Georgian applicants, admission is based on the national unified Master’s examination in accordance with Georgian legislation, followed by an internal University selection procedure. Applicants are required to submit an online application form, CV, academic diplomas, a motivation video, recommendation letters, and identification documents. Candidates must also hold a Bachelor’s degree in any field and demonstrate English language proficiency at the B2 level, as the programme is delivered entirely in English.

To support student recruitment and increase programme visibility, ISU will publish admission information through official University and national examination platforms, organise information sessions and Open-Door Day events, and actively promote the programme both locally and internationally with the support of the University’s Public Relations and Marketing Offices.

2.2 Ensuring foreign language proficiency (Asterisk Criterion only for study programmes offering courses in a foreign language)

As the programme is delivered entirely in English, applicants are required to demonstrate English language proficiency at the minimum CEFR B2 level. Accepted proof of proficiency includes internationally recognised examinations such as Cambridge English, IELTS, PTE Academic, and TOEFL iBT, as well as English language tests administered by Ilia State University. All submitted certificates and test results are formally verified during the admission process.

Applicants may be exempt from the language requirement if they have completed secondary or higher education in English in a designated English-speaking country or an EU/EEA country. In some cases, exemption requests may be supported through a brief online interview to confirm that the applicant possesses the language skills necessary for active participation in the programme.

2.3 Professional experience (if relevant; Asterisk Criterion for master programmes that require professional experience)

N/A

2.4 Selection procedure (if relevant)

The selection process is regulated by the Admission Requirements and Assessment System. The procedure is designed to ensure transparency, fairness, and merit-based evaluation for both Georgian and international applicants.

The programme is open to candidates holding a Bachelor's degree in any field. Georgian applicants are additionally required to pass the National Master's Examination, while international applicants are admitted through an individual review process.

Admissions decisions are made by a three-member committee appointed by the Dean. Applicants are evaluated according to three main criteria: academic and professional interests, motivation to pursue the programme, and communication and interpersonal skills. Assessment is conducted through standardised rubrics and weighted scoring to ensure consistency and objectivity. In some cases, additional interviews may be conducted before final decisions are made, in accordance with University regulations.

2.5 Counselling for prospective students

ISU provides several counselling and support channels for applicants throughout the admission period. Within the School of Education, a dedicated programme coordinator and administrative interns assist prospective students by phone and email, offering guidance on admission procedures, programme content, academic suitability, and career opportunities. Applicant feedback consistently highlights the responsiveness and usefulness of this support.

International applicants receive additional assistance from the International Students and Programme Marketing Office, which guides applications, documentation, visa procedures, and relocation processes. The office also conducts international outreach through educational exhibitions, partner organisations, and recruitment networks to increase the visibility of ISU programmes abroad.

Prior to arrival, international students are supported through individual consultations, online meetings, and detailed communication regarding travel, visa requirements, and document preparation. Updated information is continuously provided through official University channels, while orientation and integration activities help students adapt to the academic and social environment after arrival.

Appraisal:

The admission requirements are defined and comprehensible. The national requirements are presented and considered. The admission requirements and procedure are described, documented, and accessible for interested parties.

The admission requirements clearly and transparently specify the required level of English language proficiency for entry into the programme.

The selection procedure is based on transparent criteria and ensures that qualified students are admitted. The selection procedure is described, documented, and accessible to interested parties. Nonetheless, the panel **suggests** providing clearer information on how the student

cohort will be formed. This would help applicants better understand the programme's intended profile of admitted students. The selection decision is communicated to all applicants. The panel **welcomes** the approach of involving the School's alumni in the interview stage of the admissions process. Alumni can contribute valuable insights drawn from their academic and professional experiences.

Applicants can turn directly to a student counselling service at the HEI for clarification on specific questions, personal aptitudes, or career perspectives. Personal dialogue between applicants and the HEI is provided. Vulnerable students, such as those in special circumstances, are assisted on an individual basis. International students receive tailored counselling and support through the International Office, which assists them with admissions procedures, documentation, orientation, and integration into the University environment.

		Exceptional	Exceed	Meet	Does not meet	n.r.	Recommendation
2.1*	Admission requirements (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
2.2 (*)	Ensuring foreign language proficiency (Asterisk Criterion only for study programmes offering courses in a foreign language)			X			
2.3 (*)	Professional experience (if relevant; Asterisk Criterion for master programmes that require professional experience)					X	
2.4	Selection procedure (if relevant)			X			
2.5	Counselling for prospective students			X			

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME

3.1 Structure and Content

Structure of the study programme

Study programmes	Comments
Projected study time (semesters, months/trimesters, years)	4 semesters, 2 years
Number of credits (national credits and ECTS credits)	120 ECTS credits (1 ECTS credit - 25 hours)
Workload per national credit	n/a
Workload per ECTS credit	120 ECTS credits (1 ECTS credit - 25 hours)
Conversion from national credits to ECTS credits, if applicable	n/a
Weeks per semester	15 weeks
Credits for the final thesis/ final project and time awarded for writing	24 ECTS credits, one (final) semester

The programme is structured to ensure the coherent achievement of all intended learning outcomes within the standard two-year study period (120 ECTS credits). The curriculum combines mandatory courses, elective components, internship experience, and an independent Master's thesis, creating a balanced progression from theoretical foundations to applied learning and research. The internship and thesis components further support the integration of academic knowledge with practical and research-based experience.

Consistent with Ilia State University's student-centred approach, the programme also provides academic advising and individual support to assist students with study planning, course selection, and successful completion of the degree.

Rationale for degree and programme name

The programme awards the Master of Education Policy degree, which is aligned with the programme's objectives, curriculum, and the requirements of Georgia's National Qualifications Framework for second-cycle higher education. The degree title reflects the programme's disciplinary foundation in education policy, while the specialisation Higher Education Systems and Institutional Innovation defines its academic and professional focus.

The programme title describes three interconnected dimensions. Higher Education Systems highlights the study of governance, policy frameworks, and the broader social and institutional dynamics shaping higher education. Institutional reflects the programme's focus on universities and the organisational structures, norms, and practices that support institutional development and sustainability. Innovation underlines the programme's orientation toward evidence-based change, analytical thinking, and research-informed solutions in higher education policy and management.

Conceptual coherence of the curriculum

The curriculum is designed to ensure the achievement of the programme's qualification objectives and learning outcomes. The programme moves from foundational theoretical knowledge to advanced analytical, research, leadership, and practice-oriented competencies. The curriculum directly operationalises the programme's three main objectives. The first objective, advancing critical knowledge and inquiry in higher education, is addressed through courses on higher education systems and organisational theories, which provide students with historical, comparative, and conceptual perspectives on governance, policy, and institutional transformation. The second objective, cultivating ethical and transformative leadership, is implemented through courses in institutional management and experiential learning, where students develop competencies in strategic planning, quality assurance, governance, leadership, and organisational change. The third objective, integrating research, policy, and practice for innovation, is achieved through research methods courses, electives, and the Master's thesis, enabling students to conduct independent research and apply evidence-based approaches to policy and institutional development.

Early stages focus on conceptual foundations and research methods, while later semesters emphasise applied institutional analysis, governance, and strategic management. The final stage integrates theory and practice through internships, electives, and the Master's thesis, which serves as the culmination of students' academic and professional development.

Elective courses provide specialisation in emerging areas such as digital transformation and AI in higher education, sustainability, teaching and learning innovation, research management, and post-Soviet higher education transformations.

The curriculum overview is provided in [Annex 1](#).

Study and exam regulations

Student assessment and examination procedures at the University are regulated in accordance with both national legislation and the University's internal policies, ensuring transparency, consistency, and compliance with higher education standards. The principles of objectivity, reliability, validity, and transparency guide assessment practices.

All courses use a multi-component assessment system that combines midterm and final evaluations. Midterm assessments may include written assignments, tests, presentations, participation, and other forms of continuous assessment, while final assessments evaluate overall learning achievements at the end of the semester. Assessment is conducted on a 100-point scale in line with the ECTS grading system. Students who receive an FX grade are entitled to an additional examination opportunity, while students receiving an F grade must repeat the course.

Each course syllabus defines assessment methods, grading criteria, and learning outcomes. All assessment-related information is published in advance through the University's LMS,

Argus, which also enables continuous communication and feedback between students and lecturers. Students receive formative feedback throughout the semester, particularly after midterm assessments, to support their academic development and improvement.

The University also maintains formal procedures for appeals and ensures inclusive assessment arrangements for students with special educational needs through individualised accommodations such as adapted assessment methods, extended examination time, or flexible deadlines. In addition, ISU uses Turnitin Feedback Studio to promote originality and provide detailed feedback on academic work.

Examination and final thesis

The programme uses diverse examination and assessment formats to evaluate students' achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Assessment methods within individual courses are tailored to course objectives and include written assignments, case analyses, debates, presentations, and creative outputs such as blog posts, infographics, posters, short videos, and policy-oriented materials. Students receive regular constructive feedback throughout the learning process, supporting continuous improvement and reflective learning.

The independent research project is expected to be developed during the third and fourth semesters. Through the thesis process, students identify a research topic, design and conduct a study, analyse findings, and produce original academic work grounded in theoretical and methodological rigour. The thesis follows established academic and ethical standards, including guidelines, and students are supported through supervision, thesis seminars, and regular academic guidance.

The thesis is evaluated by the supervisor, a second reader, and a defence committee using standardised assessment criteria that assess the quality of the research design, theoretical framework, analytical depth, academic writing, and the study's relevance. The final stage is a public thesis defence, during which students present and discuss their findings before the committee. The final grade combines evaluation of the written thesis and the oral defence.

Appraisal:

The study programme's structure supports the smooth implementation of the curriculum and helps students to reach the intended learning outcomes. The study programme consists of courses and assigns credits per course based on regularly conducted workload assessments. It can be completed within the projected study time. The panel noted that the descriptions of the content and competencies of the various modules are of a high standard, demonstrating the programme's great ambitions. However, the panel noted that, in some courses, the volume of compulsory reading appears excessively extensive relative to the allocated student workload. For example, in the module Policy and System Level Governance of Higher Education, Research & Innovation (6 ECTS = 150 working hours), approximately 1,000 pages of compulsory reading are assigned. Therefore, the panel **recommends** reviewing and balancing the required reading load to ensure that it is realistic, manageable, and aligned with the expected student workload under the ECTS framework.

Practical components are designed and integrated to enable the earning of credits. The course descriptions provide detailed descriptions of intended learning outcomes, and the information is defined in the ECTS Users' Guide 2015.

The degree and study programme name correspond to the curriculum and the study programme's qualification objectives and are in line with national requirements.

The curriculum adequately reflects the qualification objectives of the study programme. The contents of the courses are well-balanced, logically connected and oriented towards the intended learning outcomes.

Electives are an integral part of the curriculum, enabling students to gain additional competencies and skills. The panel **recommends** introducing an elective course related to legal aspects. The panel is of the view that knowledge of regulatory frameworks, governance structures, and legal issues is relevant for professionals working in higher education policy and institutional management.

Although the programme aims to attract not only Georgian students but also students from the wider region, the panel noted that the Georgian context is particularly represented throughout the curriculum. Therefore, the panel **recommends** broadening some courses beyond country-specific perspectives to strengthen the programme's international orientation.

There are guidelines which contain all the necessary rules and procedures for teaching, studies and examinations. The panel acknowledges that the University has taken ongoing developments related to artificial intelligence into account. However, these principles and procedures are not yet consolidated into a formal document. During the site visit, the panel was informed that a University-level policy on the use of AI in teaching, learning, and assessment is currently under development and awaiting final approvals. Therefore, the panel recommends the following **condition**:

The University adopts a comprehensive institutional policy on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in teaching and learning, providing clear guidance for students and academic staff on its appropriate and responsible use.

The faculty has available solutions to detect forms of plagiarism.

The final theses are evaluated based on previously published and coherently applied criteria, rules, and procedures, and are checked to prevent plagiarism.

Students with disabilities are provided with affirmative actions concerning time and formal standards/requirements throughout the study programme and examinations.

The recognition of degrees and periods of study at other HEIs is regulated in accordance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention; the recognition of periods of practical work, insofar as intended, is also clearly defined.

The University provides a Grade Distribution Table, including an ECTS Grading Table, along with the degree certificate, transcript, and Diploma Supplement upon graduation. This is stipulated in a binding document.

All examinations, as they are defined for the courses, are suited in format and content to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The requirements align with the desired qualification level. A wide variety of test formats characterise the examinations.

		Exceptional	Exceed	Meet	Does not meet	n.r.	Recommendation
3.1	Structure and content						
3.1.1*	Structure of the study programme (Asterisk Criterion)			X			X
3.1.2*	Rationale for degree and programme name (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
3.1.3*	Conceptual coherence of the curriculum (Asterisk Criterion)			X			X
3.1.4*	Study and exam regulations (Asterisk Criterion)				Condition		
3.1.5*	Examination and final thesis (Asterisk Criterion)			X			

3.2 Intended competences and skills

Methods and scientific practice

The programme develops students' methodological competencies and their ability to conduct independent scientific research through a combination of rigorous coursework, applied learning, and continuous academic supervision. Research training is organised through a progressive sequence of courses. Research Design introduces students to research paradigms, methodological frameworks, and the logic of scientific inquiry. Research in Higher Education: Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis develops advanced analytical skills in both qualitative and quantitative methods, including statistical analysis, coding, thematic interpretation, and mixed methods approaches. In addition, the elective course Integrated Research Practice in Higher Education provides hands-on experience conducting independent research projects, from design through data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Methodological competencies are further strengthened through project-based learning, case studies, internships, simulations, and experiential learning activities that connect theory with real institutional and policy challenges. The Master's thesis serves as the central component of scientific training, requiring students to conduct original research under structured supervision and to attend research seminars independently. Continuous formative and summative feedback should ensure the development of high-level research and analytical skills.

Integration of theory and practice

Courses such as Policy and System-Level Governance of Higher Education, University Strategic Management, Higher Education Organisational Theory, and Research & Innovation introduce students to key theories, governance models, and international frameworks while engaging them in case studies, problem-based learning, institutional scenarios, and project-based assignments. Through these activities, students apply theoretical perspectives to real-world challenges in higher education and develop evidence-based policy and management solutions.

The integration of theory and practice is further strengthened through the internship and experiential learning component, where students work directly with higher education institutions, governmental bodies, research centres, or international organisations. The Master's thesis serves as an additional integrative element by requiring students to conduct empirical research on concrete institutional or policy-related issues.

Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary thinking

Core courses integrate perspectives from sociology, economics, public policy, organisational studies, management, philosophy, anthropology, and political science. For example, courses on higher education governance and policy draw on public policy theories, while courses on organisational theory and strategic management incorporate concepts from management and

institutional studies. Similarly, financing and quality assurance courses combine economic, governance, and policy perspectives to examine contemporary challenges in higher education. The research methods component further reinforces interdisciplinarity by introducing students to qualitative and quantitative approaches widely used across the social sciences. Students learn to apply mixed and integrated methodological frameworks when conducting institutional and policy analysis.

Interdisciplinary learning is also strengthened through elective courses. These include topics such as sustainability, digital transformation, policy analysis, organisational behaviour, European studies, communication, and history, allowing students to engage with higher-education issues from additional disciplinary perspectives. University-wide electives offered across different faculties further support academic flexibility and intellectual diversity.

The programme's interdisciplinary orientation is reflected not only in the curriculum but also in its teaching and learning environment. Courses such as Higher Education Forum encourage students to engage with experts from different sectors and rethink educational challenges in broader social, technological, and policy contexts.

International contents

International and intercultural perspectives are integrated into the curriculum through course content, academic literature, teaching practices, and the composition of both faculty and students. The programme draws on extensive international and comparative scholarship, including literature from the Global North, Global South, and post-Soviet contexts, enabling students to engage critically with diverse higher education systems, policies, and academic traditions worldwide.

Four of the twelve faculty members are international scholars, bringing global case studies, comparative perspectives, and diverse academic experiences into the classroom. In addition, many Georgian faculty members have completed their studies abroad, participate in international research networks, and are actively involved in international academic and policy projects. Intercultural learning is also supported through the programme's recruitment strategy, which aims to attract students from Georgia as well as the wider regional and international context.

Professional ethics and societal issues

The University has established a comprehensive framework through its Code of Ethics, Academic Integrity Policy, and Research Ethics regulations, which provide clear guidance for students and staff on ethical behaviour, research standards, and academic responsibility. Ethics and responsible research practices are integrated directly into the curriculum, particularly through research methods courses and thesis preparation. Students are expected to develop competencies in ethical decision-making, the protection of research participants, responsible data use, and the ethical application of digital and AI-based tools in academic work. These principles are further reinforced through regular workshops and training sessions on research ethics and responsible AI use organised by the University.

Research involving human participants requires approval from the School of Education Research Ethics Committee before data collection begins. Ethical compliance is monitored throughout the research process by supervisors, reviewers, and thesis defence committees, ensuring adherence to academic and professional standards.

ISU also plays a leading role nationally by coordinating the Erasmus+ Capacity Building project ETHICS, funded by the European Commission. The project aims to strengthen research integrity, ethical standards, and responsible conduct of research across Georgian higher education institutions and research organisations.

In addition, the University established the Centre for Digital Learning and Academic Integrity in 2025 to support ethical and transparent practices in both digital and face-to-face learning environments. The Centre promotes academic honesty, responsible use of technology, and integrity in teaching, learning, and research, reinforcing ISU's commitment to high ethical standards in an increasingly digital academic environment.

Appraisal:

Students are expected to acquire methodological competencies and are equipped to conduct scientific work at the required level. Students are encouraged and trained to use AI technologies ethically to support their learning and research, and to reflect critically on AI's influence on their studies. However, the **panel noted** that these practices currently appear to be implemented more on an ad hoc basis rather than through a fully formalised and systematic institutional framework. Thus, the panel **recommends** providing AI-related training more systematically and organising dedicated introductory workshops for students before the beginning of their studies to ensure consistent understanding of the ethical, responsible, and effective use of AI technologies in academic work. Such training would also be beneficial for the academic staff.

Theory and practice are systematically integrated throughout the curriculum, promoting students' ability to apply theoretical knowledge to practical challenges in higher education. The programme includes an internship component designed to strengthen students' professional competencies and practical experience. However, the **panel noted** that students with relevant professional experience may receive recognition of prior practice and be exempted from the internship requirement. In this regard, the panel **suggests** providing students with opportunities to gain practical experience in areas beyond their current professional roles to broaden their perspectives.

The participants acquire interdisciplinary and/or transdisciplinary qualifications in accordance with the qualification objectives. This is supported by appropriate didactic and methodological measures. As mentioned above, the **panel is of the view** that including law-related courses as electives would be beneficial for the study programme, particularly in strengthening students' understanding of legal frameworks, governance, regulation, and policy processes in higher education.

The intended interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary competences students are expected to acquire are derived from benchmarking regarding the educational market.

International content is anchored in the curriculum and aligned with the qualification objectives to prepare students to work in an international environment.

Ethical implications, intercultural perspectives and current societal issues are appropriately integrated in the study programme.

		Exceptional	Exceed	Meet	Does not meet	n.r.	Recommendation
3.2	Intended competences and skills						
3.2.1*	Methods and scientific practice (Asterisk Criterion)			X			X
3.2.2*	Integration of theory and practice (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
3.2.3*	Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary thinking (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
3.2.4*	International contents (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
3.2.5*	Professional ethics and societal issues (Asterisk Criterion)			X			

3.3 Teaching and Learning Methodology

Logic and plausibility of the Teaching and Learning Methodology

The programme employs diverse, interactive, and student-centred teaching and learning methods to support the achievement of its qualification objectives and learning outcomes. The curriculum includes active student participation, critical reflection, collaboration, and the practical application of knowledge to real-world challenges in higher education. Teaching methods include interactive lectures and seminars, case studies, problem-based and project-based learning, collaborative group work, practice-oriented assignments, and situational simulations. These approaches are carefully aligned with course-specific learning outcomes and support the development of analytical, research, leadership, policy, and communication competencies.

ISU also provides strong digital infrastructure to support teaching and learning through its LMS, e-learning platform, and the Argus academic management system. The digital environment also supports experiential learning, research supervision, and project-based activities. Students also benefit from access to the University library, international scientific databases,

and Turnitin plagiarism-detection software, ensuring effective support for academic study and independent research.

Acquisition of future and soft skills

Communication skills are integrated throughout the curriculum and developed through presentations, debates, simulations, collaborative projects, and research-based assignments. Students learn to communicate complex ideas clearly, adapt their communication strategies to different contexts, and participate constructively in professional dialogue.

A central role in developing these competencies is played by the Higher Education Forum course, which provides students with practical opportunities to engage with contemporary debates in higher education and to interact directly with policymakers, university leaders, scholars, and practitioners. Through activities such as moderating discussions, organising events, producing blogs and podcasts, and participating in public-facing initiatives, students strengthen their public speaking, argumentation, collaboration, and stakeholder engagement skills.

Communication competencies are further reinforced through the internship component, in which students work at universities, government bodies, research centres, or international organisations. These experiences require students to collaborate with diverse stakeholders, contribute to institutional projects, and communicate findings and recommendations in both written and oral forms to specialist and non-specialist audiences.

Course materials and recommended literature

At ISU, the preparation and ongoing development of course materials follow a systematic, collaborative process to ensure academic quality, relevance, and alignment with programme learning outcomes. Faculty members select mandatory and supplementary literature that reflects both foundational theories and emerging developments in the field, enabling students to engage with core concepts while exploring specialised topics in greater depth.

Course materials include textbooks, academic articles, case studies, policy papers, and professional reports, ensuring that teaching remains research-informed, current, and closely connected to contemporary higher education practice and policy. Digital and multimedia resources are also integrated into teaching to support interactive learning in both face-to-face and online formats.

The development of the curriculum and course content was carried out collaboratively in multiple stages. Core courses were initially designed jointly by several academic staff members, strengthening interdisciplinary perspectives and conceptual coherence across the programme. Draft syllabi and reading lists were then reviewed collectively by the broader academic team through structured feedback and discussion sessions. This collaborative review model proved effective and has been adopted as a regular mechanism for the annual revision and updating of course content.

Extracurricular events

ISU offers extracurricular activities that support students' personal development, professional growth, and active participation in university life. Although bachelor's students primarily utilise these activities, master's students also actively benefit from them. Activities are coordinated mainly by the Student Affairs Department and include workshops, employment forums, advisory meetings, field schools, sports and cultural events, and student camps. Student engagement is further supported through a network of student clubs and a dedicated student project support fund, which enables students to initiate and implement their own academic, cultural, social, and entrepreneurial projects. The University also promotes experiential and intercultural learning through field schools, international seasonal schools, and international mobility opportunities supported by the International Relations Office, including Erasmus+ exchange programmes.

Guest lectures, conferences, and public discussions also play a significant role in enriching the academic environment. The recently established Education Research Centre regularly organises lectures and discussions with scholars, policymakers, practitioners, and civil society representatives on contemporary educational and policy issues.

Appraisal:

The teaching and learning methodology of the study programme is plausible and oriented towards the qualification objectives. It enables the use of diverse teaching and learning methods, including AI. Students are encouraged to take an active role in creating the learning process. The teaching and learning methods are described for each course in the course descriptions. The HEI uses the LMS as a practical tool to facilitate programme delivery.

The students are expected to acquire future skills that are currently in demand on the labour market and will be even more in demand in the future. Students are trained in digital literacy, communication, and presentation skills in accordance with the intended qualification level. Appropriate teaching and learning methods support this. The study programme offers internships or practical work experiences.

The accompanying course materials, including literature recommendations, are up to date and aligned with the intended learning outcomes. They correspond to the required qualification level and reflect research and trends in the programme's areas of study. The course materials are compatible with digital education techniques, and access is barrier-free. They support the learning process according to students' needs and motivate students to engage in further independent studies. The digital databases and electronic library resources were demonstrated to the panel during the site visit. The panel **welcomes** the Centre for Digital Learning and Academic Integrity, designed to advance ethics and integrity across both digital and face-to-face learning environments.

The HEI organises extracurricular events that contribute to the students' qualification process, e.g., by inviting external lecturers with specialised expertise, whether from professional practice, scientific work, or culture and politics (on-campus or online). However, the panel

recommends inviting guest lecturers more actively. Up to 30 student clubs are offering a wide range of extracurricular activities, which are highly appreciated and actively used by students.

		Exceptional	Exceed	Meet	Does not meet	n.r.	Recommendation
3.3	Teaching and Learning Methodology						
3.3.1*	Logic and plausibility of the Teaching and Learning Methodology (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
3.3.2	Acquisition of future and soft skills			X			
3.3.3*	Course materials and recommended literature (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
3.3.4	Extracurricular events			X			X

3.4 International environment and mobility opportunities

Foreign language contents

The programme will be delivered entirely in English, and all teaching and learning materials, including syllabi, academic readings, case studies, and assessment guidelines, are provided in English. The curriculum is based primarily on international scholarly literature, including contemporary academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and policy reports from leading researchers and organisations in higher education.

Given the limited availability of advanced academic literature on higher education systems, governance, and policy in Georgian, English-medium instruction is essential for ensuring direct access to the most current research, theoretical frameworks, and international debates in the field. In this sense, the use of English serves not only the programme's internationalisation goals but also its commitment to academic quality and research-informed teaching.

At the same time, studying in English enables both Georgian and international students to strengthen their academic and professional communication skills and to operate confidently in international higher education, policy, and research environments, thereby fully supporting the programme's qualification objectives and global orientation.

International mobility of students and teaching staff

ISU focuses on the internationalisation of teaching, learning, and research, actively supporting the mobility of students and academic staff as a key strategic priority. The University's International Relations Office coordinates international partnerships, exchange programmes, and collaborative initiatives that strengthen ISU's global engagement. Students benefit from

extensive international mobility opportunities through the Erasmus+ programme and partnerships with nearly 125 universities across 24 European countries. ISU is also expanding cooperation beyond Europe through initiatives with institutions in other regions, further supporting students' intercultural competence and international academic experience.

Particularly relevant to this programme is the university's collaboration with Tampere University, established through the World Bank-supported Competitive Innovation Fund (I2Q). The programme itself was developed in cooperation with Tampere University's Higher Education Team, leading to long-term academic collaboration and Erasmus+ mobility activities for both staff and students. Exchanges and joint initiatives have already begun and are expected to continue expanding.

Academic staff are also engaged in international exchanges, conferences, and collaborative research projects. The University regularly supports faculty participation in mobility schemes and systematically collects feedback from participants to improve the quality and sustainability of internationalisation activities.

ISU's international engagement additionally extends to broader institutional and societal initiatives. Through participation in Erasmus+ capacity-building and Third Mission projects, the University contributes to the development of regional higher education, social responsibility, and institutional innovation. The Office of Development further strengthens international cooperation by supporting project development, international fundraising, and partnerships with global institutions and organisations.

International composition of students and teaching staff

The study programme has been designed with a strong international orientation. It aims to attract students from Georgia and the wider region, including the countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The international diversity of the student body is considered a key component of the programme, fostering an intercultural learning environment that encourages the exchange of perspectives, collaborative learning, and a broader global understanding.

Courses are delivered jointly by faculty members from ISU and partner institutions, including Tampere University and Conservatoire numérique des Arts et Métiers. This collaborative teaching model exposes students to different academic traditions, research approaches, and professional perspectives, enhancing both the quality and international relevance of the programme.

Appraisal:

Students benefit from courses conducted in English and from English-language course materials.

The HEI implements targeted measures to enhance international student exchange and mobility, fostering students' intercultural skills. Given that many Master's students are already

employed, the panel **recommends** offering more short-term mobility opportunities and online exchange formats to increase accessibility and participation in international activities.

Additionally, the HEI actively supports academic mobility for teaching staff, facilitating their participation in international conferences, teaching assignments, and research projects - both individual and collaborative. It also encourages the publication of work at an international level. All measures are strategically designed to achieve specific goals.

The international composition of the student body (including incoming and outgoing students) is expected to align with the study programme's concept.

The international composition of the teaching staff (lecturers from foreign countries and lecturers with international academic degrees and/or international professional experience) aligns with the study programme's concept. The panel **welcomes** the co-teaching approach and the involvement of representatives from international organisations in the teaching and learning process.

		Exceptional	Exceed	Meet	Does not meet	n.r.	Recommendation
3.4	International environment and mobility opportunities						
3.4.1	Foreign language contents			X			
3.4.2	International mobility of students and teaching staff			X			X
3.4.3	International composition of students and teaching staff			X			

4. ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT AND FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS

4.1 Teaching staff

Structure and quantity of teaching staff

Full-time teaching staff	4
Part-time teaching staff incl. visiting/adjunct lecturers	8
Total number of teaching staff	12
<i>Among them:</i>	
Teaching staff with professional experience	5
Teaching staff with international experience	12
Number of professors	2
Number of associate professors	3
Number of assistant professors	1
Number of senior lecturers	0
Number of lecturers	5
<i>PhD holders</i>	9
Master degree holders	3
Guest lecturers	0

The programme is delivered by a team of 12 academic staff members with strong international backgrounds, active research profiles, and substantial expertise in higher education studies, policy, governance, leadership, quality assurance, funding, and research methodologies.

The academic team provides full coverage of the programme's mandatory and elective courses, thesis supervision, and internship and experiential learning components. All instructors possess advanced academic qualifications, with the majority holding doctoral degrees and actively participating in international research collaborations and initiatives in higher education development. Their combined academic, research, and professional experience ensures that students gain both strong theoretical foundations and practical competencies relevant to higher education policy and institutional development.

Academic and comprehensive qualifications of teaching staff

Teaching responsibilities are assigned through established institutional procedures at ISU, which include the verification of academic qualifications, research achievements, and relevant professional experience. All core faculty members hold doctoral degrees and maintain active research portfolios in fields directly relevant to the programme. The teaching team includes

both international and local adjunct lecturers, the majority of whom hold doctoral degrees, while others are advanced doctoral candidates actively engaged in academic research.

Faculty expertise covers key areas such as higher education policy and governance, institutional autonomy, strategic management, quality assurance, leadership, economics of education, institutional development, and international higher education.

ISU uses formal, competitive procedures to recruit and evaluate academic staff. These procedures include verification of academic credentials, assessment of research productivity and international publications, evaluation of teaching effectiveness through student feedback, and regular reviews of faculty qualifications in accordance with university regulations.

Pedagogical qualification of teaching staff

The teaching staff has pedagogical competencies that are fully aligned with the programme's qualification objectives and graduate-level teaching requirements. ISU ensures that all instructors demonstrate both academic and teaching proficiency through formal institutional procedures that evaluate pedagogical preparation, university teaching experience, curriculum design, assessment practices, and the use of diverse student-centred teaching methods.

Faculty members involved in the programme have experience in higher education teaching, research supervision, curriculum development, and academic advising. Their pedagogical expertise is closely connected to their active scholarly work in areas such as higher education policy, governance, quality assurance, academic work, and learning innovation, ensuring a strong integration of research and teaching.

The University also supports the continuous professional development of academic staff through faculty development initiatives, training opportunities, participation in international conferences, and Erasmus+ teaching mobility programmes, with a focus on innovative pedagogy, educational technologies, and higher education reform.

Professional experience of teaching staff

The programme is delivered by an academic team whose professional backgrounds support the integration of theory and practice. The teaching staff includes both scholars and practitioners with extensive expertise in higher education management, policy development, educational research, institutional leadership, and international cooperation. Most faculty members have held administrative, managerial, or policy-related positions within higher education institutions and organisations.

Internal cooperation

Within the School, faculty members work in close and systematic collaboration to ensure the coherence, quality, and alignment of programmes with their qualification objectives. Regular coordination meetings are held each semester to review student feedback, discuss course

content and assessment methods, and plan improvements for subsequent semesters. The same collaborative coordination model will guide the programme's implementation.

Faculty collaboration has been a defining feature of the programme from its initial development stage. Although a smaller working group initiated the programme concept, the design of individual courses was carried out collaboratively by multiple academic staff members, ensuring shared ownership, interdisciplinary integration, and conceptual consistency across the curriculum. Draft syllabi and reading lists were then collectively reviewed and refined through structured feedback sessions involving the broader academic team.

Many courses are implemented through co-teaching arrangements, which encourage continuous academic exchange, integration of diverse expertise, and the incorporation of innovative research and teaching approaches. In addition, students may choose co-supervision for their Master's theses, further strengthening academic cooperation and interdisciplinary support throughout the programme.

Student support from the teaching staff

At ISU, student support is considered a central component of the teaching and learning environment. Teaching staff maintain regular office hours and remain accessible through in-person meetings, email communication, and the University's e-learning platforms. Students receive ongoing support with coursework, research projects, academic planning, and the application of theoretical knowledge to practical higher education contexts.

To address the diverse academic and personal needs of students, the University offers the possibility of individualised study plans in accordance with institutional regulations. These plans allow for flexible organisation of studies and may include adapted teaching, learning, and assessment arrangements tailored to students' academic backgrounds or special educational needs. Additional support mechanisms and adapted learning environments are provided where necessary to ensure equal participation and inclusion.

Faculty members also provide individual mentoring for Master's thesis development, research activities, and career planning. Particular attention is given to students who may require additional academic guidance or support in developing specific competencies.

Appraisal:

The structure and number of teaching staff in the study programme ensure the achievement of the intended qualification objectives. The HEI has a gender equality policy adopted in 2022, which ensures equal treatment of staff and counters gender bias in hiring processes.

The academic qualifications of the teaching staff in the study programme align with its qualification objectives. The HEI verifies the qualifications of the teaching staff through an established procedure. Specific measures to further academic qualifications and comprehensive qualifications (e.g., training on inclusion and equity) for the teaching staff are implemented. Regular scientific publications demonstrate academic qualifications. The panel

suggests that once the programme develops and student numbers increase, the HEI should consider expanding the number of full-time lecturers involved in the programme. The panel welcomes the involvement of adjunct lecturers in the study programme and **suggests** maintaining and further strengthening their engagement in teaching and academic activities.

The HEI offers and promotes pedagogical training for its teaching staff or verifies their pedagogical qualifications through an established procedure. The pedagogical qualifications of the teaching staff align with the qualification objectives of the study programme. The panel **welcomes** the co-teaching approach and the strong cross-border cooperation with partner universities and sees significant opportunities for further development of international academic collaboration, joint teaching, and research activities. The panel **suggests** encouraging the teaching staff to further develop research activities in higher education and strengthening collaborative and team-based research initiatives. The panel also **suggests** expanding joint research activities with partner higher education institutions, particularly those in Finland and France, to enhance the study programme's international research profile and academic cooperation.

The professional experience of the teaching staff corresponds to the qualification objectives of the study programme. The teaching staff include their experience and practical examples in their teaching.

There is a regular process for internal cooperation among the teaching staff of the study programme, the programme management, and external teaching staff (from other study programmes and guest lecturers). They cooperate to align the courses with the overall qualification objectives. Cooperation also takes place through joint teaching activities, joint research projects, and regular exchange opportunities.

Student support is offered regularly and helps students to study successfully. The panel **welcomes** the “buddy” approach, in which existing students support newly enrolled students with their academic and social integration into the University environment. The teaching staff take the time to address their inquiries and holds regular office hours for consultation. Furthermore, activities organised by the University, such as the ISU Picnic, provide valuable opportunities for students and staff to socialise, strengthen the sense of community, and support informal integration within the University environment. The panel had the **impression** that students receive strong, supportive guidance from both the teaching and administrative staff throughout their studies.

		Exceptional	Exceed	Meet	Does not meet	n.r.	Recommendation
4.1	Teaching staff						
4.1.1*	Structure and quantity of teaching staff (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
4.1.2*	Academic and comprehensive qualification of teaching staff (Asterisk Criterion)			X			

		Exceptional	Exceed	Meet	Does not meet	n.r.	Recommendation
4.1.3*	Pedagogical qualification of teaching staff (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
4.1.4	Professional experience of teaching staff			X			
4.1.5*	Internal cooperation (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
4.1.6*	Student support by the teaching staff (Asterisk Criterion)			X			

4.2 Programme management and administrative support

Programme management

The management is organised through a programme working group, which serves as the central internal coordination and management body. The group includes the Programme Head, the Quality Assurance (QA) Specialist, and representatives of the academic staff, ensuring balanced academic oversight, quality monitoring, and collaborative decision-making.

The Programme Head is responsible for the overall academic coordination of the programme, including curriculum implementation, communication with faculty leadership, and the supervision of programme delivery. The QA Specialist oversees internal quality assurance procedures, coordinates student and programme evaluations, and ensures compliance with institutional and national quality standards. Together with other members of the working group, they monitor the programme's implementation and address operational or academic issues throughout the academic year.

The working group meets regularly, including at least one formal meeting each semester, to review programme implementation, analyse student feedback, discuss course delivery and assessment practices, and plan improvements for future semesters. In addition, an annual comprehensive internal review is conducted with the participation of the academic staff to evaluate programme performance, student evaluations, and areas for further development.

Substantial changes to the curriculum, course structure, or academic staff composition are communicated to the Head of the School and, where necessary, submitted to the Faculty Academic Council for formal approval.

Administrative support

ISU provides administrative support for both students and academic staff, ensuring the effective delivery of the programme and supporting academic success, professional development, and well-being. The programme is supported administratively by a QA Specialist

and an Administrative Coordinator. The QA Specialist assists students with academic matters such as course selection, credit allocation, and programme requirements, while the Administrative Coordinator supports organisational and procedural processes. The same administrative structure also assists faculty members in navigating institutional procedures and ensuring smooth programme implementation.

ISU further strengthens academic quality through specialised institutional support units. The Personal and Professional Development Centre (PPDC) offers professional development opportunities for academic and administrative staff, including training in teaching methodologies, assessment practices, curriculum design, doctoral supervision, and the use of digital learning technologies such as Moodle, Argus, Zoom, and Turnitin. These activities align with international best practices and support innovation in teaching and learning.

The University also provides institutional support for research and innovation through internal project funding schemes, support for international publications and conference participation, and academic publishing opportunities through the University Press and digital repositories. These initiatives encourage interdisciplinary collaboration and the integration of research and teaching.

In addition to academic and administrative services, ISU supports the well-being of its community through the Psychological Support Centre, which provides counselling and mental health support for students and staff. The University also established the Centre for Distance Learning and Academic Integrity in 2025 to promote ethical and responsible use of digital technologies, including AI tools, while supporting high-quality online learning and academic integrity practices.

Public information

Information will be published once the programme is accredited.

Inclusive and equitable education

The University promotes equal opportunities, diversity, social responsibility, integrity, and transparency across its governance structures, academic programmes, and student support systems. ISU has developed an inclusive physical and learning environment that supports students from diverse social, cultural, and educational backgrounds, including students with disabilities, international students, economically disadvantaged learners, and students with family responsibilities. Most University facilities are already adapted for accessibility, including elevators, ramps, accessible restrooms, adapted parking spaces, and mobility support infrastructure.

The University also provides individualised academic and personal support for students with special educational needs. Through cooperation with the Child Development Institute and other support services, students may receive individualised learning plans, adapted teaching and assessment arrangements, and, where necessary, additional assistance and mentoring.

Faculty are encouraged to implement flexible and inclusive teaching approaches while maintaining academic standards.

ISU promotes diversity and multiculturalism within the academic community. International students receive structured support before arrival and throughout their studies through the International Students and Programmes Marketing Office, which assists with integration, orientation, and administrative processes. Faculty members also participate in professional development activities related to multiculturalism and inclusive teaching practices.

The University further incorporates principles of equity into international mobility and academic opportunities by giving additional consideration to students with disabilities, those from socially vulnerable backgrounds, and others in special circumstances when evaluating applications for exchange programmes and related opportunities.

At the programme level, inclusive and equitable education principles are reflected in recruitment procedures, curriculum design, teaching methods, assessment arrangements, and student support services. The programme works closely with University support structures to ensure that all students can fully participate in academic, research, and professional development activities regardless of their background or individual circumstances.

Career counselling and placement service

ISU provides comprehensive career counselling and placement services that support students' academic, professional, and personal development. These activities are coordinated by the Student Affairs Department in collaboration with other University units and external partners, ensuring that students are actively supported in their transition to the labour market.

Students have access to both individual and group-based career services, including personalised career counselling, guidance on professional pathways, and support with career planning and job market preparation. The University regularly organises employment forums, networking events, and meetings with employers and professionals across various sectors, creating opportunities for students to build professional connections and explore employment opportunities.

One of the University's key initiatives is the UNIJOBS programme, which connects students and graduates with vacancies, internships, and career development opportunities. Through this platform, students receive regular updates on available positions and employer activities. The University maintains partnerships with a large network of employers and annually disseminates information on numerous vacancies and internships across various academic fields.

Additional career development resources include online tutorials, employment weeks, thematic career forums, and direct engagement with company representatives. Information about these opportunities is actively shared through University communication channels, including email, social media, and the University website.

Alumni activities

At the Master's level, many students balance studies with professional and family responsibilities. The University is working systematically to establish more structured and sustainable alumni networks.

ISU collects feedback from graduates through surveys and focus groups to monitor employment outcomes, identify labour market trends, and evaluate the relevance of academic programmes. Alumni feedback is used to support curriculum development, improve student services, and maintain ongoing connections between graduates and the University.

To formalise these relationships, the University is developing institutional and programme-level alumni networks supported by a dedicated governance framework. These structures are intended to create opportunities for mentorship, professional networking, career guidance, and collaboration between alumni and current students.

Within the School, alumni engagement practices are already more established. For example, the Educational Administration programme maintains an active LinkedIn alumni network through which graduates share professional experiences, opportunities, and sector developments. Alumni are also involved in programme-related activities, including participation in admissions interviews and meetings with current students, where they contribute practical insights and professional perspectives.

Building on these experiences, the programme aims to further integrate alumni into its life cycle through mentorship, networking, student engagement, and ongoing programme development.

Appraisal:

The responsibilities for programme management, in academic and organisational terms, are defined to ensure the programme runs smoothly.

Administrative staff support teaching staff and students in organising the study programme. Decision-making processes for administrative support services are clearly defined and take into account the special circumstances of students and teaching staff. The HEI offers the administrative staff opportunities for continuous professional development. The University provides opportunities for the further professional development of administrative staff through training activities, institutional support mechanisms, and continuous capacity-building initiatives. The panel **welcomes** staff mobility and development opportunities. The panel gained the impression that cooperation between academic and administrative staff functions smoothly and in a supportive manner, contributing positively to the implementation of the programme. On the University level, the criteria are exceeded; however, given that this is a concept accreditation, the current assessment is limited to meet.

The study programme complies with the principles of inclusive and equitable education and non-discrimination policies. There is assistance and support for students in special circumstances. At the time of the site visit, the panel learned that the University's policy on

inclusion and inclusive education was still under development. The panel **suggests** establishing a child-friendly space or childcare corner for students and teaching staff with children to strengthen further the University's inclusive and supportive learning and working environment.

The HEI offers students and graduates career counselling support. Although the alumni support system is relatively new, the University has already established an active alumni network. Placement services (including internships) take place through available channels and events, such as job fairs and resume workshops. Furthermore, the panel learned that the HEI supports students in internship placements, including opportunities within the University's own institutional units and administrative offices.

To facilitate career development, an alumni organisation has been established, even at different levels within the HEI, if applicable. It connects graduates with current students and provides them with access to professional networks, mentorship opportunities, and job placement assistance tailored to their specific fields of study. During the site visit, the panel observed a career-related event featuring guest speakers and HR professionals who guided CV writing, job applications, and career development. Job fairs take place twice a year.

The panel views that the career counselling and placement service and alumni activities look very promising.

		Exceptional	Exceed	Meet	Does not meet	n.r.	Recommendation
4.2	Programme management and administrative support						
4.2.1	Programme management			X			
4.2.2	Administrative support			X			
4.2.3	Public information					X	
4.2.4*	Inclusive and equitable education (Asterisk Criterion)			X			X
4.2.5	Career counselling and placement service			X			
4.2.6	Alumni activities			X			

4.3 Cooperation and partnerships

Cooperation with HEIs and other academic institutions or networks

ISU participates in strategic national and international partnerships. Through membership in international academic and professional networks such as the European Science Engagement Association and the European Network for Academic Integrity, the University engages in

international knowledge exchange, collaborative initiatives, and professional development activities with experts and institutions across Europe.

The academic staff involved in the programme maintain close cooperation with national and international universities through multiple Erasmus+ Capacity Building projects, including ETHICS, Re-Direction, PRODIGE, and PeaceEDU. Previously completed projects such as INTEGRITY, LOVEDistance, and DITECH have also strengthened collaboration with Georgian and regional higher education institutions.

A particularly important partnership for this programme is the collaboration with Tampere University. Faculty members from Tampere University have directly contributed to curriculum development and continue to collaborate on the co-design and co-teaching of courses. This cooperation enriches the programme with international expertise, comparative perspectives, and diverse academic approaches.

Cooperation with professional fields

To support practice-based learning, ISU is currently finalising cooperation agreements with several external institutions, including private higher education institutions and a public library, which will serve as internship and collaboration partners. The programme has developed a flexible internship structure that includes project-based experiential learning, internship waivers for students already employed in relevant professional positions, and traditional internship placements.

Given the projected cohort size, the programme is expected to provide sufficient and diverse practical learning opportunities through a combination of external partnerships and internal University placements.

Appraisal:

Cooperation with academic institutions and networks relevant to the programme is plausibly presented and actively pursued. The agreements forming the basis of the cooperation are documented.

Cooperation with the professional field relevant to the programme is plausibly presented and actively pursued. The agreements forming the basis of the cooperation are documented.

		Exceptional	Exceed	Meet	Does not meet	n.r.	Recommendation
4.3	Cooperation and partnerships						
4.3.1 (*)	Cooperation with HEIs and other academic institutions or networks (Asterisk Criterion for			X			

		Exceptional	Exceed	Meet	Does not meet	n.r.	Recommendation
	cooperation programmes)						
4.3.2 (*)	Cooperation with professional fields (Asterisk Criterion for educational and vocational programmes, franchise programmes)			X			

4.4 Facilities and equipment

Quantity, quality, media and IT equipment of HEI's facilities

ISU provides a modern, well-equipped, and continuously developing physical and digital infrastructure that fully supports the delivery of its study programmes and research activities. University buildings are recently renovated and include auditoriums, laboratories, libraries, conference halls, offices, administrative spaces, and dedicated areas for group work and student interaction. The University maintains a wide range of educational and research facilities that correspond to the needs of its academic programmes. Accessibility and inclusiveness are institutional priorities. Most educational spaces are adapted for students and staff with special educational needs and include elevators, ramps, adapted restrooms, and designated parking areas.

The Information Technologies Office supports teaching, research, and administration through advanced hardware and software infrastructure. Classrooms are equipped with computers, projectors or LCD screens, and full internet connectivity, while computer resource centres provide students with free access to digital tools and resources. Academic and administrative staff are also supported with modern equipment, licensed software, and technical assistance.

ISU operates a robust and secure IT infrastructure with backup systems, cloud storage, virtualisation technologies, and continuous network monitoring to ensure service reliability and continuity. Digital learning is fully integrated into the University's educational model through the Moodle platform and other e-learning systems, which support blended and online learning, communication, assessments, and access to multimedia materials. Turnitin plagiarism detection software is also integrated into the digital learning environment.

As previously mentioned, in 2025, the University established the Centre for Digital Learning and Academic Integrity to support the quality, inclusiveness, and ethical standards of online and blended learning. The Centre provides training, consultations, and technical support related to digital education and academic integrity. ISU is also actively involved in international initiatives related to digital higher education, including participation in the Erasmus+ Capacity Building project PRODIGE, which focuses on strengthening digital education capacities and promoting high-quality technology-enhanced learning in Georgia.

Access to literature

The Library of ISU provides comprehensive, modern, and continuously updated academic resources that fully support the University's teaching, learning, and research activities. The library offers well-equipped reading halls, group study areas, computer resource centres, multimedia facilities, and additional services designed to support diverse learning and research needs. Specialised reading spaces and extended opening hours ensure convenient, flexible access for students and academic staff.

The library maintains a continuously updated print collection closely aligned with study programmes and research priorities. In cooperation with academic units, new books, textbooks, academic monographs, and specialist literature are regularly acquired to reflect current developments in different disciplines. The library also prepares course-specific readers and electronic materials in compliance with copyright standards.

ISU provides access to a broad range of international electronic databases, journals, and digital research resources, including major academic platforms such as EBSCO, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis, ProQuest, Sage, and Cambridge Journals. These resources are accessible both on campus and remotely through secure authentication systems, supporting flexible and inclusive learning and research.

The library actively supports the development of students' and staff members' research and information literacy skills through consultations, training sessions, and workshops on academic databases, citation tools, and digital research methods. Orientation activities and regular training sessions are organised throughout the academic year to ensure effective use of library services and electronic resources.

The University's institutional repository, Eprints, further supports open science and the dissemination of research by providing access to publications, conference papers, theses, and other scholarly outputs produced by students and academic staff. The electronic catalogue, Evergreen, offers advanced search functionality and global access to the University's print and digital collections.

The library operates within a continuous quality improvement framework, regularly evaluating user feedback and updating resources to ensure they remain relevant and adequate for current study programmes. In addition, ISU maintains cooperation and resource-sharing agreements with national and international libraries, further strengthening access to specialised academic materials and enhancing the University's integration into the broader academic information network.

Appraisal:

The quantity, quality and equipment of the facilities correspond to the necessities described for the study programme. A sufficient number of workplaces (both individual and group) are available. Sufficient IT equipment and software appropriate for the programme are available. Further, the technical equipment is adequate for online learning elements as applied by the study programme's concept and content. Technical support is offered to students during working hours.

The requirements for students with special needs are adequately provided.

The panel visited an important component of the University's innovation ecosystem — Fablab Iliuni, the University-based fabrication laboratory in Georgia, modelled after the MIT Media Lab. Through training in digital technologies, programming, robotics, design, and

entrepreneurship, students are encouraged to develop practical skills, prototypes, and startup initiatives. The panel **welcomes and supports** this initiative.

Aspects of sustainability and cybersecurity are taken into account for the provision of the infrastructure.

Students have access to relevant recent literature, including in other languages, international and national magazines, licensed subscriptions and databases required for the study programme. The library's opening hours and facilities take students' needs into sufficient account. Relevant digital resources can be accessed from outside the campus, where possible, outside normal working hours. A support system for students is available. Furthermore, training and exchange opportunities are also provided for library staff, supporting their professional development and ensuring the continuous improvement of library services and academic support.

		Exceptional	Exceed	Meet	Does not meet	n.r.	Recommendation
4.4	Facilities and equipment						
4.4.1*	Quantity, quality, media and IT equipment of HEI's facilities (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
4.4.2*	Access to literature (Asterisk Criterion)			X			

4.5 Financing of the study programme (Asterisk Criterion)

The financial sustainability of the programme is ensured through Ilia State University's centralised budgeting system and tuition-based income. The University's institutional budget covers the core costs associated with programme delivery, including academic staff salaries, infrastructure, library resources, digital services, and academic activities, ensuring stable implementation throughout the accreditation period.

The educational process is primarily supported by the academic staff of the School of Education, whose salaries are already included in the University's central budget. Local adjunct faculty are also financed through the institutional budgeting framework. International faculty members participate mainly through existing academic partnerships and Erasmus+ mobility schemes, which support short-term teaching visits and reduce the need for additional personnel expenditures.

Additional programme-related expenses such as library acquisitions, electronic databases, software, digital tools, teaching infrastructure, research activities, and conference participation are financed through University and faculty budgets.

Tuition fees constitute an important source of programme income. Under the current national funding system, the Government of Georgia covers tuition fees for Georgian citizens enrolled in public universities. International student tuition fees are calculated based on the overall programme costs, including academic delivery, administrative support, digital resources, accreditation, and programme development expenses.

Appraisal:

The income from the study programme ensures that each cohort of students starting during the accreditation period can complete the programme.

		Exceptional	Exceed	Meet	Does not meet	n.r.	Recommendation
4.5*	Financing of the study programme (Asterisk Criterion)			X			

5. QUALITY ASSURANCE

5.1 Quality assurance and quality development with respect to contents, processes and outcomes

The programme is fully integrated into ISU's broader quality assurance system, ensuring continuous and systematic monitoring of programme content, teaching and learning processes, and intended outcomes. Programme evaluation is based on regular data collection and analysis, including student academic performance, semester-based course and programme evaluations, feedback from graduating students and alumni, employer assessments, and monitoring of programme target benchmarks. These data form the basis of the programme's internal self-evaluation process, which identifies strengths, areas for improvement, and developmental trends across reporting periods. The evaluation process supports evidence-based programme development and helps ensure the ongoing relevance and quality of the curriculum.

The University maintains a clearly structured quality assurance framework with defined responsibilities for programme directors, academic and invited staff, administrative units, and quality assurance specialists. Following each evaluation cycle, the programme committee develops recommendations for improvement, which are reviewed by the Faculty Council and subsequently integrated into institutional quality assurance processes. The Faculty Quality Assurance Service and the University Quality Assurance Service further consolidate and report findings to University leadership and the Academic Council, ensuring institutional oversight and implementation of necessary improvements.

In recent years, ISU has strengthened its internal quality assurance mechanisms by introducing improved programme evaluation tools, enhanced data analysis systems, and capacity-building activities for academic and administrative staff. The University has also developed comprehensive programme evaluation guidelines aligned with international good practices. Graduates and employer representatives are actively involved in programme evaluation and review processes, contributing practical insights and labour market perspectives. Their participation helps ensure that the programme remains academically relevant, professionally responsive, and aligned with developments in the higher education sector.

5.2 Instruments of quality assurance

Evaluation by students

Student evaluation is conducted regularly as part of the University's established quality assurance system. Each semester, the Quality Assurance Office conducts University-wide student satisfaction surveys via the Argus system, the University's central platform for collecting and processing student feedback.

The surveys assess various aspects of the student experience, including teaching and learning processes, course organisation, academic and administrative support, workload, and overall programme quality. They also include questions designed to identify special circumstances that may affect students' academic participation and performance, such as financial challenges, caregiving responsibilities, or other personal factors.

The QA Office systematically analyses the collected data in cooperation with programme staff and quality assurance specialists. The findings are used to identify strengths, address potential issues, and support the continuous improvement of course delivery, student support services, and overall programme implementation.

As the programme has not yet enrolled students, its initial development was informed primarily by a comprehensive study of the market and higher education trends, which examined sectoral needs, regional demand, and emerging professional competencies relevant to higher education policy and institutional development. This research provided an evidence-based foundation for the programme's design and strategic orientation.

Evaluation by teaching staff

As outlined earlier, programme management and quality assurance are coordinated by a dedicated programme working group comprising the Programme Head, the QA Specialist, and academic staff involved in the programme. The group meets regularly throughout the academic year, including at least one formal meeting each semester, to review programme implementation, analyse student feedback, discuss ongoing issues, and prepare for the following semester.

At the end of each academic year, the Programme Head organises an internal review with all academic staff who teach in the programme. This review evaluates student feedback, course evaluations, and observations gathered throughout the year to identify strengths, challenges, and areas for further development. Significant curriculum changes, including major revisions to course content or changes to the programme's structure, are communicated to the Head of the School of Education and, where necessary, submitted to the Faculty Academic Council for approval.

ISU also conducts annual satisfaction surveys among academic and visiting staff as part of its institutional quality assurance framework. These surveys assess a wide range of issues related to teaching and working conditions, including administrative and academic support services, workload distribution, access to teaching resources, digital learning platforms, communication processes, and opportunities for professional development. Visiting staff also evaluate the effectiveness of institutional support and the clarity of administrative procedures for course planning and delivery.

The results of these surveys are analysed by the QA Office and shared with faculties and programme teams. Findings are integrated into the University's broader quality assurance cycle to identify organisational challenges, improve teaching conditions, and strengthen staff engagement and programme quality.

External evaluation by alumni, employers and third parties

External evaluation of the study programme is conducted through multiple mechanisms involving alumni, employers, and independent external experts, in accordance with ISU's quality assurance procedures. These evaluations are conducted regularly and contribute to the programme's continuous improvement and relevance.

External peer evaluation is organised at least once during each full programme cycle. It involves independent experts who assess the curriculum structure, learning outcomes, teaching and learning processes, and the programme's alignment with developments in the higher education sector and labour market needs. The results of these reviews are documented in formal evaluation reports and used by the programme team and faculty leadership to identify areas for improvement and future development.

The University also conducts employer surveys and consultations with organisations relevant to higher education and education policy. These evaluations assess the relevance of programme learning outcomes, graduates' preparedness for professional roles, and emerging competency needs in the labour market. Alumni feedback is additionally collected through graduate surveys and consultation meetings, providing insights into career trajectories, programme relevance, and potential areas for curricular enhancement.

The findings of external evaluations are systematically integrated into the programme's quality assurance and development processes. Feedback from employers, graduates, and experts informs curriculum revisions, course updates, internship development, and broader cooperation with professional and academic partners.

Before the launch of the study programme, external stakeholders were actively involved in its development process. Potential employers and alumni of related programmes participated in market research and consultation activities that informed the programme's conceptual design. The programme also underwent external academic validation by experts from the University of Hong Kong and Tampere University, whose reviews contributed to further refinement of the curriculum and programme structure.

After the first student cohort is admitted, the programme will continue to be evaluated through the University's established internal and external quality assurance mechanisms.

Appraisal:

A quality assurance and development procedure that systematically and continuously monitors and enhances the quality of the study programme across its contents, processes, and outcomes has been established. This also includes demands on online teaching, if applicable. The procedure takes into account the evaluation results and an analysis of student workload, success rate and graduate employment. Responsibilities for quality management are clearly defined. The HEI ensures that necessary measures and developments are implemented and

documented. Representatives of faculty members and students are involved in the quality assurance and development procedures.

An evaluation of the study programme by the students, in particular of teaching and learning processes, is carried out regularly and in accordance with a prescribed procedure. The results are documented and clearly communicated to the students. The panel **recommends** providing students with information on the results of course evaluations and on planned follow-up activities or improvements based on the evaluation findings.

The survey includes questions that enable the HEI to identify and assess the types and frequency of special circumstances among its students.

Quality control of the programme by the internal and external teaching staff is carried out regularly and in accordance with a prescribed procedure; the outcomes are documented and communicated effectively, and they inform the quality development process.

An external evaluation is carried out regularly and in accordance with a prescribed procedure; the outcomes are communicated and provide input to the quality development process, for instance, in the form of an employment report.

		Exceptional	Exceed	Meet	Does not meet	n.r.	Recommendation
5.1*	Quality assurance and quality development with respect to contents, processes and outcomes (Asterisk Criterion)			X			
5.2	Instruments of quality assurance						
5.2.1	Evaluation by students			X			X
5.2.2	Evaluation by teaching staff			X			
5.2.3	External evaluation by alumni, employers and third parties			X			

Annex 1

Curriculum Overview										
MA in Higher Education Systems and Institutional Innovation, 4 Semesters										
1st Semester: total 30 ECTS credits										
Modul No.	Title of Module / Course Unit + Compulsory or elective?	Credit Points per Semester				Workload		Method of Teaching i.e. lecture course, seminar	Form and Duration of Examinations	weight of exam related to final grade
		1.	2.	3.	4.	Hours in Class	Hours Self-Study			
M1	Module 1: Higher Education System and Organizational Theories/Mandatory (total 24 ECTS)	12								
M 1.1	The Idea of the University: Traditions, Transformations, and Futures	6				32	118	L/S	Conceptual Mapping / Policy Paper 10 hours	30/100
M 1.2	Policy and System Level Governance of Higher Education, Research & Innovation	6				30	120	L/S	Simulation; Group Debate 8 hours	30/100
M2	MODULE 2: Institutional Management / Mandatory (total: 18 ECTS)	6								
M 2.1	Quality Assurance and in Higher Education	6				30	120	L/S	Project Essay / Presentation 8 hours	30/100
M3	MODULE 3: Methods and Research(er's) Skills / Mandatory (total: 12 ECTS)	6								
M 3.1	Research I: Research Design	6				32	118	L/S	Quizzes, Research Project - 10 hours	30/100
M6	MODULE 6: Discipline-specific electives (can select 1 course) (total Electives: 36 ECTS, Discipline-specific - at least 18 ECTS)	0-6								
M 6.1	Curriculum and Instruction in Higher Education	6				32	118	L/S	Written Responses, Group Projects - 8	30/100
M 6.2	Digital Transformation in Higher Education	6				32	118	L/S	Quiz, Digital Transformation Plan, Peer-Review 10 hours	30/100
M 6.3	Transformations of Higher Education in the Post-Soviet Space	6				30	120	L/S	Reflection Journal, Final Paper - 8 hours	30/100
M6	MODULE 6: University-wide electives (can select 1 course) (total Electives: 36 ECTS, university-wide - at least 6 ECTS)	0-6								

M 6.4	Practical Course of Georgian for Foreigners (A1.1)	6			64	86	L/S	Summarizin Worksheet, Speaking, Writing 10 hours	28/100
M 6.5	Remembering the Soviet Past in Georgia: Between Memory and History. An Introduction into Interdisciplinary Memory Studies	6			32	118	L/S	Book Review, Research Paper 8 hours	30/100
M 6.6	The History of Soviet Georgia	6			30	120	L/S	Draft of the papers, Final Paper 8 hours	30/100
M 6.7	Forms & Consequences of Europeanisation in the Caucasus: Introduction to the Concept and its Application	6			30	120	L/S	Book Review, Research Paper 8 hours	30/100
M 6.8	Organizational Behavior	6			32	118	L/S	Home Assignments, Group	30/100
2nd Semester: Total 30 ECTS credits									
M1	Module 1: Higher Education System and Organizational Theories/Mandatory (total 24 credits)	12							
M1.3	Higher Education Organizational Theory	6			32	118	L/S	Multi theoretical Cases Studies; In depth theoretical analyses 8 hours	30/100
M1.4	Higher Education Forum: Technologies for Action	6			32	118	L/S	Public Forum; Guest Speaker 8 hours	30/100
M2	MODULE 2: Institutional Management / Mandatory (total: 18 ECTS)	###							
M2.3	University Strategic Management	6			30	120	L/S	Capstone Project; 8 hours	30/100
M2.4	Financing Higher Education: Economics and Policy	6			30	120	L/S	Policy Brief; Quizes 8 hours	30/100
M.3	MODULE 3: Methods and Research(er's) Skills (total:12 ECTS)	6							
M 3.2	Research II: Research in Higher Education: Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis	...	6	...	...	32	118	L/S	Mix-Method Mini Study 8 hours
M6	MODULE 6: Discipline-specific electives (can select 1 course) (total Electives: 36 ECTS, Discipline-specific - at least 18 ECTS)	0-6							
M 6.9	Institutional Research and Policy Analysis in Higher Education	6			30	120	L/S	Policy Paper + Presentation 8 hours	30/100
M	Research Policy and Management	6			30	120	L/S	Indiv. Final Paper ; Assignments 8 hours	30/100
M 6.11	Scenario Planning	6			32	118	L/S	Expert Panel Presentation; Thematic Conference Contr. 10 hours	30/100

3rd Semester: total 30 ECTS credits									
M1	Module 1: Higher Education System and Organizational Theories/Mandatory (total 24 ECTS)	0-6							
M.1.5	Higher Education Forum: Technologies for Action		6	32	118	L/S	Public Forum, Guest Speaker 8 hours	30/100	
M6	MODULE 6: Discipline-specific electives (can select 2 course) (total Electives: 36 ECTS, Discipline-specific - at least 18 ECTS)		###						
M	Curriculum and Instruction in Higher Education		6	32	118	L/S	Written Responses, Group Projects - 8	30/100	
M	Institutional Research and Policy Analysis in Higher Education		6	32	118	L/S	Policy Paper + Presentation 8 hours	30/100	
M	Transformations of Higher Education in the Post-Soviet Space		6	32	118	L/S	Reflection Journal, Final Paper - 8 hours	30/100	
M6	MODULE 6: University-wide electives (can select 2 course) (total Electives: 36 ECTS, university-wide - at least 6 ECTS)		###						
M 6.15	Forms & Consequences of Europeanisation in the Caucasus: Introduction to the Concept and its Application		6	30	120	L/S	Book Review, Research Paper 8 hours	30/100	
M	Strategic Human Resources Management		6	32	118	L/S	Group Presentations, Final Projects - 8	30/100	
M	Strategic Integrated Marketing Communication		6	32	118	L/S	Group Presentations, Final Projects - 8	30/100	
M5	MODULE 5: Internship / Mandatory (6 ECTS)								
M 5.1	Internship		6		150		Internship Plan, Internship Performance;	30/100	
4th Semester: total 30 ECTS credits									
M6	MODULE 6: Discipline-specific electives (can select 1 course) (total Electives: 36 ECTS, Discipline-specific - at least 18 ECTS)		0-6						
M 4.1	Digital Transformation in Higher Education		6	32	118	L/S	Quiz, Digital Transformation Plan, Peer-Review 10 hours	30/100	
M 4.2	Sustainable Development in Higher Education		6	32	118	L/S	Policy Paper, Assignments 8 hours	30/100	
M 4.3	Institutional Research and Policy Analysis in Higher Education		6	30	120	L/S	Policy Paper + Presentation 8 hours	30/100	
M 4.4	Scenario Planning		6	32	118	L/S	Expert Panel Presentation; Thematic Conference Contr. 10 hours	30/100	
M 6	MODULE 6: University-wide electives (can select 1 course) (total Electives: 36 ECTS, university-wide - at least 6 ECTS)		0-6						

M 4.5	Innovation Based Entrepreneurship				6	32	118	L/S	Case Study, Final Group Project 8 hours	30/100
M 4.6	Negotiation Mastery				6	32	118	L/S	Moc-up Negotiations; Individual Negotiations with professionals 8 hours	30/100
M 4.7	Strategic Brand Management				6	32	118	L/S	Brand Audit assignment; Brand repositioning assignment 8 hours	20/100
M 4.8	Strategic Integrated Marketing Communication				6	32	118	L/S	Group Presentations, Final Projects - 8 hours	30/100
M 4	MA Thesis / Mandatory				24	30	570			
total		30	30	30	30	1160	4840			