

**Vision on**  
**Strengthening and Supporting the 3rd Mission in Georgian Universities**  
**Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia**

The fundamental changes taking place in the modern world during the last decades have had a significant impact on University as an institution. The increasing globalization and internationalization of education, economic development, pushed the University to reconsider its role, which until now was mainly focused on teaching and research, and to deal with the third mission, which involves participation in the economic, social and cultural development of society. In a broad sense, the third mission of universities can be understood as a responsibility of the University for the well-being of society through the performance of specific activities and communication, which includes the cooperation of higher education institutions with non-academic society at the local, regional, national and global levels, which is related to social responsibility and horizontal accountability.

Global changes and a rapidly developing world in the 21st century highlighted the need for the university to embrace new responsibilities in a broad sense, and this is what put the adoption of a new declaration of the "Magna Charta Universitatum" on the agenda in 2020. The universities that signed the declaration confirmed that they have a responsibility to be involved and respond to the challenges of the global and local society and to promote sustainable development. Accordingly, universities have a civic and social responsibility. Linked to global development, they play a leading role in local community and ecosystem development.

The 2020 Rome Ministerial Communiqué clearly refers to the third mission of universities. The communique states: “Higher education institutions have the potential to drive major change – improving the knowledge, skills and competences of students and society to contribute to sustainability, environmental protection and other crucial objectives. They must prepare learners to become active, critical and responsible citizens and offer lifelong learning opportunities to support them in their societal role. Higher education will be a key actor in fulfilment of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. We commit to supporting our higher education institutions in bringing their educational, research and innovation capacities to bear on these fundamental global objectives and to deploying resources to ensure that our higher education systems contribute to the achievement of the SDGs”.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rome Ministerial Communiqué, 19 November, 2020

The Unified National Strategy of Education and Science of Georgia for 2022-2030 identifies the challenges in the direction of governance, accountability and funding of education, science, research, technology and innovation sectors. It is stated: “A new challenge for the higher education system, research, and innovation is to understand and implement the concept of the "third mission" in the management culture of the educational institution. There is limited cooperation with parents, the labor market, industry, civil society, and other stakeholders, which would encourage the creation of research and innovation clusters, the development of university-industry cooperation, and the implementation of the "third mission" of universities.”<sup>2</sup>

In response to this important challenge, the government has set as one of its top priorities the strengthening of cooperation between educational institutions and key stakeholders. The strategy emphasizes that “the government will take appropriate measures to support the structured implementation of the "third mission" in educational and scientific-research institutions, which means increasing the role of higher educational institutions, especially regional universities, in the social and economic development of society, meeting the needs of different regions and realizing opportunities”.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, higher educational institutions operating in Georgia have taken a number of important steps in the direction of strengthening the third mission. In this regard, Erasmus+ institutional capacity building project "Strengthening the Quality and Relevance of the 3rd mission in Georgian Universities (SQUARE)" was of outstanding importance, within the framework of which universities had the opportunity to share the experience of European universities in the context of the third mission and define the strategy and activities that they can introduce and implement in this direction. The project had important results also in terms of strengthening relevant staff of higher education institutions.

The "Erasmus+" institutional capacity building project "The Role of Universities in Regional Development (RURD)" was also of outstanding importance. One of the main goals of this project was to increase the role of regional higher educational institutions of Georgia in the regional development. Within the framework of the above-mentioned project, the missions and strategic development plans of regional higher educational institutions were modernized, as well as cooperation between universities and local authorities was strengthened, taking into consideration the specifics of each region.

In addition, it is important to note that in 2023, with the support of the World Bank, the Competitive Innovation Fund (CIF) was created for funding competitive initiatives of higher educational institutions within the framework of the "Innovation, Inclusion and Quality Project - Georgia I2Q". The purpose of the funding is to support higher educational institutions

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<sup>2</sup> Unified National Strategy of Education and Science 2022-2030, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Unified National Strategy of Education and Science 2022-2030, p. 32.

in the implementation of innovative projects focused on improving the academic and learning environment. One of the main priorities of the first grant competition within the framework of CIF was the creation/development of educational programs focused on the needs of the labor market (including the specific needs of the regions of Georgia) (smart specialization, third mission, etc.). This was one of the first funding initiatives allocated by the government to implement third mission activities in higher educational institutions.

On the part of the government, specific steps are planned so that in the future the third mission of the university will become an integral part of the role of this institution. For this purpose:

- ) **Corresponding legislative changes will be implemented.** Currently, in the Law of Georgia "On Higher Education", a higher educational institution is defined as "a training or educational scientific-research institution implementing a higher education program, the main function of which is the implementation of higher educational activities and scientific research or higher educational activities, as well as conducting creative work." The third mission of universities is not mentioned in the main activities and powers of educational institutions. Appropriate legislative amendments will be implemented with the involvement of wide range of stakeholders.
- ) **The accountability of universities in the third mission will be increased.** The third mission of universities will be integrated into the standards of authorization of higher educational institutions as a mechanism of institutional evaluation of the institution. Strengthening the activities of the third mission in the authorization standards will have a recommendatory and development-oriented character in the first stage. As one of the main principles of the authorization standards is the autonomy of universities, it will be the responsibility of the university to plan and implement the activities of the third mission in accordance with the mission and vision of the university. Relevant trainings will be conducted for all institutions participating in the process.
- ) **Funding of higher educational institutions should include activities carried out in the direction of the third mission.** With the support of the World Bank, the Ministry is working on a higher education funding model, one of the components of which is performance-based funding. Performance-based funding model, along with academic and scientific achievements, will take into account the activities carried out in the direction of the third mission of the universities.

On the other hand, higher educational institutions should ensure the allocation of necessary human and material resources, in which the government will support them. It is important for universities to systematically evaluate their third mission activities.

Accordingly:

- ) Priority should be given to the process of sharing the academic knowledge and practice accumulated in the university space, in the context of the **democratic mission**, with the **wider society**, including **school students** and **young people**. Universities, in frames of **social responsibility** and **the mission of building a democratic society**, should develop policies and practices that will strengthen schools, pupils (potential students), young people in various directions, including topics such as **democracy**, **human rights** and **citizenship**. The role of universities in fulfilling the **civic and democratic mission** of education becomes more evident every day. The university should ensure that society is more democratic, aware of its rights and responsibilities in relation to society, the state and nature.
- ) Universities should promote **lifelong learning** and **continuous professional development** by offering a variety of **certificate**, **continuous education courses** and **microcredits**.
- ) Universities should offer services aimed at **eliminating social and digital inequality** among both current and potential students.
- ) In the direction of the **social dimension**, it is important to support not only students, but also potential students for their **transition to higher education**. In this regard, universities have a specific role, they are responsible for permanent and long-term partnership with the school, as well as cooperation with the youth.
- ) Universities should take active **expert role** in the **development of legal framework**.
- ) The involvement and contribution of professors and researchers of higher educational institutions in the direction of the third mission should be recognized. Per the position, the evaluation criteria should reflect the achievements in the direction of teaching, research, and innovation, the implementation of the "third mission" of the university in practice, and successes in management and administration.<sup>4</sup>
- ) Through the **transfer of knowledge and technology**, universities should focus on **commercialization of scientific products**, **development of patents**, **start-ups**. As carriers of innovative methods, universities should be able to influence the growth rate of existing companies and contribute to the formation of a new **innovative entrepreneurial reality**. Universities have an important role to play in addressing skills shortages in various sectors by providing innovative facilities, the latest technological developments, optimizing the workforce for local companies and thereby increasing their competitiveness.
- ) It is important for higher education institutions to grasp the needs of the region and **responsibility for regional development**.
- ) The distinctive role of universities is to strengthen education system and its preparedness during times of emergencies and crisis, thus contributing to the efforts towards

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<sup>4</sup> Unified National Strategy of Education and Science 2022-2030, p. 31.

**resilience of society** and maintenance of the **lasting peace** in the country and a wider region.

- ) Universities can play a pivotal role in contribution to **gender equality** and **women's empowerment** through the employment of gender mainstreaming approaches.
- ) Universities should be actively involved in **cultural and social life**.
- ) The distinctive role of universities should be the **communication of science with society**, which includes the popularization of science.

As a result of complex and consistent measures implemented by both the state and universities, the activities of the third mission of universities should not be considered as secondary, but as one of the fundamental goals that will ultimately contribute to cultural evolution.

The University of the Future is an institution that, through the synthesis of education and research, has the ability to **transfer knowledge and technology**, to **create opportunities for lifelong learning** and to **have social responsibility**, thus being able to respond to modern global challenges.