

## **National Concept for Reforming the Higher Education System**

Higher education system in Georgia faces major challenges today. Despite the country's rich university traditions and a fairly diverse higher education landscape in place, most higher education institutions in Georgia generally fail to deliver knowledge and the provision of education in line with modern standards. Nor do they equip students with the necessary professional skills. The situation proves itself problematic insofar that it serves as one of the key factors encouraging the emigration of young people from the country. However, despite the scale of these challenges, it is entirely possible, given a clear vision and its consistent implementation, to develop a university system in Georgia capable of providing students with education that meets contemporary standards and equips them with relevant competencies. Formulating a coherent vision and strategy for reform requires a precise identification and understanding of the challenges facing Georgia's higher education system:

### **1. Excessive geographical concentration of the higher education system**

Over 85 percent of students in Georgia pursue higher education in the capital city, Tbilisi. This excessive concentration places a heavy burden on the capital and drives significant youth migration from the regions to Tbilisi, an issue that poses a serious challenge to the balanced social and economic development of the country's regions. Major urban centers outside Tbilisi remain underutilized in terms of higher education infrastructure. The facilities and academic capacities of regional universities are insufficiently developed and demand targeted investment and enhancement. Universities of Arts and Sports, along with theological seminaries operating under the auspices of the Patriarchate of Georgia, also require enhanced institutional support and advancement.

### **2. Inefficient use of resources and uneven quality of teaching across universities**

Currently, there are 19 public and 45 private higher education institutions in Georgia. While all of these institutions issue diplomas of equal rank, the quality of the education and qualifications they provide differ considerably. This inconsistency should be regarded as one of the most pressing challenges facing the higher education system. Infrastructure and human resources within the higher education sector are not being utilized efficiently. In a number of cities, multiple public universities operate concurrently with overlapping faculties, leading to a fragmented and inefficient allocation of resources, as well as shortage of academic staff with the right qualifications that meet contemporary international standards. In some public universities, disproportionate emphasis is placed on attracting foreign students. This practice diverts institutional capacity away from programs designed to train Georgian students in key areas. Furthermore, the current distribution of Georgian and international students across public and private universities fails to reflect the underlying principle that private institutions should primarily engage in commercial educational activities, whereas public universities should focus on serving national academic and developmental goals. The duration of study programs is likewise not consistently harmonized with the broader purposes of higher education, and the national system of quality assurance remains in need of substantial refinement and reform.

### **3. Lack of a coherent Human Resource strategy**

While Georgia possesses significant potential in terms of highly qualified academic personnel across various sectors, this potential is not effectively utilized within higher education institutions due to the absence of a coherent human resource policy. The distribution of teaching responsibilities among lecturers often lacks clear structure and is incoherent. In most cases, lecturers are employed on a part-time basis, and the average level of remuneration for academic staff remains low. Furthermore, there is no established, systematic mechanism for attracting foreign professors to teach in high-demand or underrepresented academic fields within Georgian higher education institutions.

### **4. Weak link between teaching and research. Shortage of contemporary educational material**

The level and scope of academic research in Georgian universities remain insufficient, and the integration of teaching and research is not effectively ensured in line with national academic standards. The existing system for funding scientific research functions largely in isolation from university education, resulting in weak institutional linkage between the two spheres. Academic staff frequently lack clearly defined roles in the development of educational programs, the conduct of research, and the preparation of university-level textbooks. Consequently, many institutions continue to operate without high-quality curricula and teaching materials, even in fundamental disciplines. The overall volume of academic research and scholarly exchange remains limited, undermining the adherence to academic standards and impeding the effective incorporation of innovation and research outcomes into the educational process.

### **5. Significant mismatch between higher education objectives and labor market requirements**

The allocation of student quotas in Georgian universities is not based on a thorough analysis of current or projected labor market demands. As a result, there is a persistent qualitative and quantitative mismatch between the qualifications of university graduates and the needs of the labor market.

### **6. Inefficient funding system**

The current grant-based model of higher education funding requires a thorough reassessment. It fails to sufficiently reflect the diverse financial requirements of individual faculties and does not effectively align with the state's strategic priorities in the higher education sector.

### **7. Inadequate infrastructure of public universities**

Public universities across Georgia, including those in Tbilisi and other major cities, possess numerous buildings and facilities, many of which are in need of substantial renovation and fail to meet modern standards. Facilities designed to foster students' cultural, athletic, and extracurricular engagement are inadequately developed and require targeted investment. Furthermore, students often lack access to affordable, high-quality accommodation and dormitory facilities, which limits equal opportunities for participation in university life.

In light of the aforementioned challenges, it becomes possible to articulate a clear set of goals and objectives that should underpin the National Concept for Higher Education Reform.

## **1. Geographical decentralization of the higher education system**

To promote the decentralization of the higher education system, a second major academic hub should be established in the city of Kutaisi. The development of new university infrastructure in Tbilisi should pursue two key objectives: alleviating the capital's excessive concentration of institutions and creating new opportunities for the development of Rustavi. Universities in Tbilisi and Kutaisi should collectively cover all principal academic disciplines, humanities, natural and exact sciences, technology, economics, law, social and political sciences, foreign languages, pedagogy, and medicine. The state must ensure that students in both cities have access to university education of equally high quality across all fields of study. At the same time, the institutional and infrastructural capacities of the five regional public universities should be substantially strengthened. The universities of Batumi, Telavi, Akhaltsikhe, Gori, and Zugdidi should evolve into specialized higher education institutions capable of providing high-quality education within their respective academic profiles. Particular attention should be given to reinforcing agricultural and pedagogical faculties. In addition, the capacities and infrastructure of the three art universities and the single sports university operating in Tbilisi should be further enhanced. Likewise, the theological seminaries under the Patriarchate of Georgia should receive sustained and increased institutional support.

## **2. Efficient resource utilization and standardization of teaching quality across universities**

To ensure the efficient and balanced use of resources within the higher education system, the principle of **“one city - one faculty”** should be adopted across public universities. Accordingly, faculties currently duplicated among various public universities in Tbilisi should be consolidated and reassigned to individual institutions, with due regard to their traditional academic profiles and historical specializations. Public universities should admit foreign students only in exceptional cases explicitly provided for by law. Except for a limited number of specialized disciplines, a **3+1 academic structure** should be introduced across the higher education system, whereby three years are allocated to undergraduate study and one year to master's-level education. The quality and internal structure of academic programs should undergo comprehensive refinement and standardization. Core and elective courses within each specialization must be determined according to a coherent and academically grounded logic. Finally, the national framework for higher education quality assurance should be strengthened to ensure that the state fully upholds its responsibility for guaranteeing consistent academic standards across all diplomas issued under its authority.

### **3. Enhancement of Human Resource policy**

University human resource policy should undergo a fundamental qualitative review. The core academic personnel should consist primarily of full-time professors who lead specific teaching and research directions within their respective faculties. Each of them should be supported by several full-time associate professors and at least ten assistant professors. The remuneration of full-time professors, associate professors and assistant professors should be increased severalfold to reflect their central role in ensuring the quality of higher education. All other teaching staff should be engaged on contractual, hourly-based terms. Priority disciplines facing a shortage of qualified professionals should be identified. Targeted measures should be introduced to attract foreign lecturers to these areas within the university system.

### **4. Strengthening the integration of teaching and research, advancing modern education programs and textbooks**

The research capacity of universities and national research institutions should be substantially enhanced, with particular emphasis placed on fostering their close and sustained integration with public universities. A new, strategically oriented system of research funding should be established to stimulate the development of academic research within universities and to promote a vibrant culture of scholarly dialogue and exchange. In alignment with a comprehensive national framework, modern, high-quality textbooks should be developed for all core and elective courses. Full-time academic staff must play a central role in this process, ensuring that teaching materials reflect both contemporary academic standards and the latest research outcomes, thereby strengthening the overall link between education and innovation.

### **5. Labour market analysis**

In close collaboration with the private sector, a comprehensive labor market analysis should be undertaken to assess both current and projected employment trends. The findings of this analysis should serve as the foundation for the state's allocation of student quotas across universities, ensuring that higher education outputs are better aligned with the needs of the labor market.

### **6. Refined funding model**

The existing university funding model requires a fundamental review. Current grant-based mechanism should be replaced with the model based on state needs, in which financial allocations are determined according to national educational priorities and the specific mandates assigned to each university. Under this approach, Georgia's financial commitments to higher education institutions should be guided by clearly articulated public policy objectives. In distributing resources, particular attention should be paid to the average cost of delivering education per student within each academic discipline, thereby ensuring both equity and efficiency in of higher education funding.

## **7. Infrastructure**

A new generation of university infrastructure should be developed in both Tbilisi and Kutaisi to establish fully integrated academic hubs. These hubs must include state-of-the-art educational and research facilities, alongside spaces that foster students' cultural, athletic, and social engagement, as well as high-quality, affordable accommodation. At the same time, the infrastructure of regional universities should be comprehensively renewed and expanded to meet modern academic and student needs, ensuring that high standards of teaching, research, and campus life are upheld throughout the national higher education system.