

Assessment of the Ongoing Reforms in the National System of Higher Education in the Movement of The Lisbon Convention

Final Report

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- Attachment 1 – In-Depth Interview Guide
- Attachment 2 – Focus Group Guide

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1

Summary

1.1 Introduction

This is a final report of the study conducted to estimate compliance of the national system of higher education in Georgia with the Lisbon Convention. The study was conducted by independent experts within the framework of International Institute of Education Policy Planning and Management (EPPM) project of Eurasia Foundation financially supported by the USAID and British Government Global Conflict Prevention Fund. The study was conducted from November 19, 2003 to February 29, 2004.

The study aimed at assessing the ongoing reform of the national higher education system in the context of the major requirements of the Lisbon Convention.

The study applied quantitative research methodology, such as a focus group discussion and in-depth interview. The focus group discussions were held at the premises of the independent Georgian research agency “Analysis and Consultation Team,” and the in-depth interviews – at the respondents’ job places.

The following chapters consequently present methodology and major findings of the research:

- ❖ Summary
- ❖ Preface
- ❖ Study Design
- ❖ Results, Analysis, and Interpretation

1.2 Main Findings

The following is a synopsis of the main findings:

THE LISBON CONVENTION

- ❖ Implementation of the Lisbon Convention in Georgia is hampered by incompliance of the acting legislation with international declarations;
- ❖ Education system of Georgia does not have a unified policy supporting implementation of the Lisbon Convention as well as any other international declaration;
- ❖ The State Ministry of Education ignores responsibilities undertaken under the Lisbon Convention and does not proceed with timely adoption of the regulations incorporated in the document;
- ❖ Due to the lack of access to relevant information, representatives of Georgian educational system are less aware about specific issues and requirements of the Convention;
- ❖ Independent national information center responsible for the implementation of the Lisbon Convention was not launched and its functions have been reconciled by the Department of Academic Mobility and Recognition at the Ministry of Education.
- ❖ As a member of the ENIC Network, the Department of Academic Mobility and Recognition at the Ministry of Education cooperates with higher education institutions and information centers in western countries. This includes annual information sharing meetings of the heads of respective information centers as well as regular exchange over e-mail. Cooperation at the local level (i.e. national higher education institutions and representatives of the national system of education) does not go beyond informal personal relations. Thus, activities and functions of the Department are more known outside Georgia than locally.
- ❖ Without any financial support, the Department of Academic Mobility and Recognition lacks organizational capacity. Access to computers, printers and Internet is provided at the Black Sea International University, which significantly hampers daily operation of the Department.
- ❖ The Department responds to the inquiries of the ENIC Network members and foreign higher education institutions. A top matter of interest relates to formal assessment of national higher education institutions and programs, such as accreditation, rating, quality assurance, etc. In responding to this inquiries, the Department encounters the following problems:
 - inexistence of a formal assessment of higher education institutions and programs. Since accreditation of educational institutions has not yet started, information provided by the Department is limited to the State licensing;
 - inexistence of systematic information about the status and development of national higher education institutions.
- ❖ Another challenge faced by the Department is increasing number of forged diplomas and certificates. Exposure of forgery does not simulate any administrative measures.

RECOGNITION OF PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

- ❖ Lack of quality management and incomparable standards hamper international recognition of professional qualifications granted in Georgia. Namely:
 - International experts are unable to rate Georgian educational institutions;
 - Georgian students and professionals have to “translate” their academic degrees, qualifications, and study period to make them comparable to the “western standards.”
- ❖ National system of education as well as overall situation in the country makes Georgia less attractive to foreign qualification-holders. Job environment for further academic activities is not supportive as well: there is underemployment, low salary rates, poor work conditions, etc.
- ❖ Foreign qualifications and academic degrees are recognized by the “westernized” higher education institutions, where administration seeks to introduce international standards. Such institutions manage to attract professionals and specialists qualified outside of Georgia.

MAIN ISSUES OF INTEGRATION INTO THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA

- ❖ Specific reforms in the national system of higher education are limited to the introduction of Master and Bachelor’s degrees, while basic changes in the system of scientific degrees have not yet started.
- ❖ With few exceptions, introduction of Master and Bachelor’s degrees does not involve fundamental and systematic changes. In many cases, this is a formal imitation rather than a qualitative, contextual transformation.
- ❖ Some higher education institutions fail to implement the new model of academic degrees due to the lack of readiness of teachers and professors.
- ❖ The following factors determine a relative success of the reforms in some educational institutions:
 - Increasing demand for new specialties and professions;
 - More developed organizational capacity (R&D plant);
 - Contacts with leading educational institutions in Europe.
- ❖ Present system of academic degrees does not conform to the international standards. Therefore, it only hampers further development of young professionals.
- ❖ Introduction of credit system has already started. However, its success is limited to the higher education institutions and departments where external factors (e.g. cooperation with foreign partners) coincide with internal situation (i.e. awareness and readiness of professors and teachers).
- ❖ In most educational institutions, introduction of the credit system has been only formal and has not led to substantial changes:
 - Curriculum and study periods are determined by a single-headed administrative decision; there is no mechanism like a module group, teamwork and group discussion, to ensure involvement of teachers and professors in decision-making.
 - Formal attitude of students to selection of disciplines. Lack of awareness about new models causes their indifference.

- Inexistence of detailed descriptions of disciplines (syllabi). To date, only few faculties managed to design syllabi.
- Credit calculation is based on lecture hours and rarely considers time-periods spent over an independent work.
- Progressive evaluation system – more than one evaluation during an education period – is not in place.
- ❖ The Council of Europe supported development of Georgian Diploma Supplement conforming to international standards. At present, only several institutions and departments where basic changes have been undertaken are eligible to issue new diplomas.
- ❖ Formal system of quality assurance has not been yet launched in Georgia. The situation is similar regarding accreditation of higher education institutions. Some educational institutions attempt at getting quality certificates and accreditation through associations and accreditation centers outside Georgia, or develop quality assurance institutions on their own.
- ❖ Lack of objective assessment criteria implies a formal character of the State licensing as well as “mushrooming” of higher education institutions.
- ❖ Public demand plays a significant role in education quality control. In Georgia, quality education has not yet become a public priority; higher education institutions do not face strict requirements to ensure a quality of teaching process.
- ❖ With few exceptions, there are no quality assurance centers in Georgia. So far quality control system is established in several educational institutions, which managed to receive support and expert consultations through cooperation with western partners.

1.3 Recommendations

The following is a synopsis of recommendations developed under the present study.

- ❑ Implementation of the Lisbon Convention in Georgia requires compliance of the national system of education with international standards;
- ❑ One of the key issues to address implementation of any international declaration and convention is the development of a supportive legal environment providing regulative norms and implementation mechanisms.
- ❑ The Ministry of Education should proceed with its immediate responsibilities for timely introduction and implementation of the Lisbon Convention and any other international agreement concerning education;
- ❑ The agency responsible for overseeing and implementing the Lisbon Convention in Georgia – Department of Academic Mobility and Recognition - should be provided with more substantial support, such as:
 - Facilitate local conferences to discuss international agreements and declarations concerning education and set up implementation mechanisms;

- ❑ Launch information bank accumulating information on specific higher education institutions as well as changes and reforms in the national system of education;
- ❑ Ensure awareness about the Lisbon Convention by providing updated version of the document to the representatives of national system of education;
- ❑ Facilitate development of a unified education policy ensuring involvement of the State and public to support successful reforms in the national system of education;
- ❑ Develop a strategy and implementation mechanisms to facilitate a complex transformation of the national system and ensure fund-raising and professional support to specific activities.

2

Introduction

2.1 Background

Through the support from Eurasia Foundation, USAID and British Government Global Conflict Prevention Fund, the Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management (EPPM) implements the “Project on Evaluation of the Degree of Integration and Harmonization of the South Caucasus States with 1997 Lisbon Convention.”

The project aims at accomplishing the following objectives:

- ❖ Assess how Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are integrated into European higher education area;
- ❖ Assess compliance of the legislative environment in these countries with the Lisbon Convention;
- ❖ Develop recommendations to meet requirements of the Convention at both local and regional levels.

The project envisions three major phases. At the first stage, in September – October 2003, desk researches were conducted in all three countries to provide situational analysis of the educational systems. The second stage included quantitative studies (focus groups and in-depths interviews) to ensure a detailed research of the topic. The study revealed obstacles hampering integration into the European education area; the recommendations were developed based on experts’ opinion. At the final stage, results obtained by the researches in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia will be compiled into a final report and presented to the representatives of education system, local and international organizations.

First conference under the auspices of the project was held with the support of the American Councils for International Education on December 9, 2003. The conference was attended by representatives of education system, educational experts and specialists. The participants discussed development constrains of the national system of education in the context of compliance with the Lisbon Convention, and suggested various ways for further advancement.

2.2 Objectives

Major objective of the present study is to assess current reform of the Georgian higher education system in the context of the Lisbon Convention. Based on expert analysis, the study aims to accomplish the following specific tasks:

- ❖ Identify implementation mechanism of the Lisbon Convention;
- ❖ Reveal basic obstacles hampering implementation of the Convention;
- ❖ Develop recommendations for effective introduction of the Convention;
- ❖ Assess integration into the European educational area;
- ❖ Reveal basic challenges faced by the national system of higher education in the light of the Convention;
- ❖ Develop recommendations to overcome existing obstacles.

3

Study Design

The following is the overview of the methodology applied by the study. The chapter describes the study methods and tools, sampling, procedure and timeline, field works and related constraints.

3.1 Study Tools

The study was implemented in two stages and applied different methods of a qualitative research.

3.1.1. I STAGE

“Secondary Data” Collection

“Secondary data” means collection of the available information about a research topic. This provides opportunity for initial analysis as well as relevant interpretation of data obtained at the following stages.

Secondary Information Sources

The following sources of information were used to obtain secondary data in the present study:

- International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management (EPPM);
- Department of Academic Mobility and Recognition;
- Reports of the previous researches; expert materials;
- Other sources

3.1.2. II STAGE

At the second stage, views of the educational system representatives and foreign qualification-holders were surveyed through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.

(a) Focus Group Method

Focus Group methodology considers group discussions of the issues suggested by a group leader (moderator). The moderator supports constructive discussion, encourages individual opinions and facilitates reactions at each other's statements. The methodology is most efficient for generating new ideas and developing group evaluation of the research topic.

Study Tool

Group Moderator's Guide¹ developed by the independent experts in accordance with the study objectives was applied as a study tool.

¹ See Attachment 1 – In-Depth Interview Guide

(b) In-Depth Interview Method

An in-depth interview methodology is applied to obtain more substantial information on the research topic. Face-to-face interviews are most efficient to identify individual visions of the selected respondents.

Study Tool

In-Depth Interview Guide (Questionnaire)² was applied as a study tool. The Guide was designed in accordance with the study aims and includes non-structured questions.

3.2 Target Group and Sampling

3.2.1 FOCUS GROUP RECRUITMENT

Respondents for the focus group discussions were recruited among the specialists and professionals with foreign qualifications and study/work experience both in and outside of Georgia.

The recruitment was undertaken by the independent experts, while the selection of potential respondents was based on the specially designed application form.

3.2.2 FOCUS GROUP COMPOSITION

Two focus group discussions attended by 13 respondents were conducted during the study.

Tables 1 and 2 present composition and demo-social parameters for each of the groups:

Table 1 – I Group

#	Gender	Age	Country	Higher Educational Institution	Donor	Job Place	Position	Income
1	Female	27	Sweden	Karolinska Institute	Int'l organization	National Narcology Center	Post-graduate medical	GEL 0-150
2	Male	27	USA, Turkey	Department of Medicine at the New York U-ty / Hacettee University	Training program / Int'l organization	Central Clinic of the Medical U-ty	Surgeon	GEL 0-150
3	Male	33	USA	Case Western Reserve U-ty	Training program	Geo-Engineering	Marketing Director	Over GEL 700
4	Female	34	France	Department of Medicine at the Deckart U-ty, Paris / Mediterranean U-ty, Marseille	Gov't of France	Tbilisi Medical U-ty	Head of the Department of Int'l Relations / Cardiologist	GEL 151 – 300
5	Female	32	Hungary, USA	Central European U-ty	Training Program	Tbilisi Technical U-ty	Lecturer	GEL 0-150
6	Female	27	Italy	U-ty of Parma	Private donor	Ministry of Justice	Head of the Department of Int'l Relations	GEL 151-300

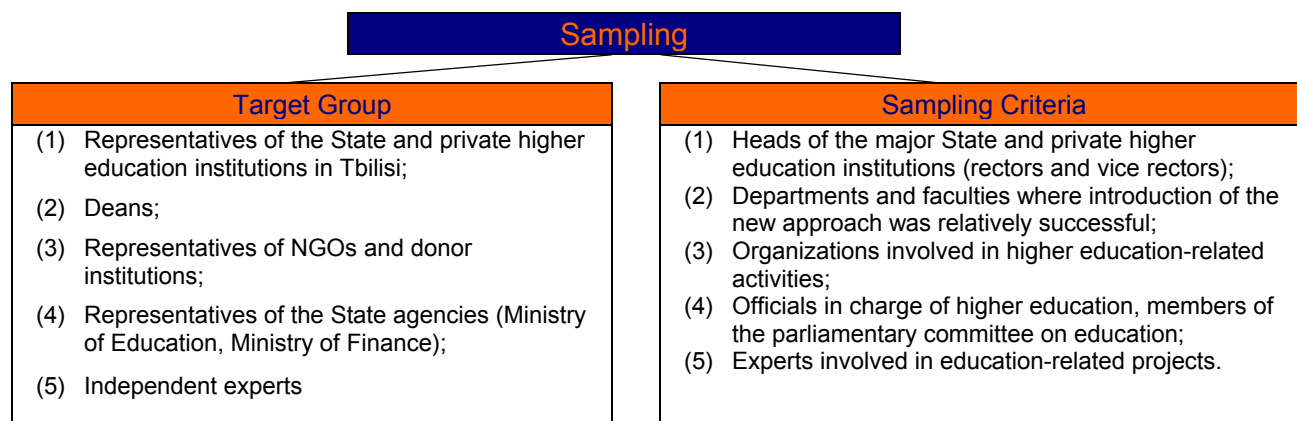
² See Attachment 1 – List of Sources

Table 2 – II Group

#	Gender	Age	Country	Higher Educational Institution	Donor	Job Place	Position	Income
1	Male	28	Hungary	Central European U-ty	Training Program	State Chancellery	Deputy Head of the Department of Economic Reform and Cooperation with Int'l Organizations	GEL 0-150
2	Female	27	UK, Hungary	U-ty of Sussex / Central European U-ty	Training Program	TSU	PhD student	GEL 501-700
3	Female	24	USA	Rutgers University	OSI, int'l organization	"Cezanne," publishing company	Marketing Manager	Over GEL 700
4	Male	25	Russia	Ivanov's Clinic	Family funds	Unemployed	=====	=====
5	Female	30	Scotland, Germany	Edinburgh U-ty	Training Program	TSU	Lecturer	GEL 0-150
6	Female	23	Italy	Bologna U-ty	Ministry of Foreign affairs of Italy	GTZ / FRCS	Consultant	GEL 501-700
7	Female	24	USA, Hungary	Central European U-ty	Training Program	European Union	Assistant to Representative of Secretary General	Over GEL 700

3.2.3 SAMPLING FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Sampling for in-depth interviews aimed at ensuring representation of all target groups related to different spheres of education. The following presents sampling criteria for each of the target groups:



Overall, 54 in-depth interviews were conducted under the present study³.

³ See Attachment 3 – List of the Respondents

3.3 Stages and Procedures

The table below presents study stages and timeframe.

#	Stages	Weeks								
		I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
1	SECONDARY DATA RESEARCH									
	Secondary data collection									
	Secondary data analysis									
	Identification of the research topics									
2	IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS									
	Design of a study tool									
	Interviews									
	Transcripts development									
	Primary report									
3	FOCUS GROUPS									
	Design of a study tool									
	Respondents recruitment									
	Focus groups									
	Transcripts development									
	Primary report									
	Final report									
	Revision of the translation									

3.4 Field Work

Field works took time-period from December 20, 2003 to February 4, 2004. The respondents demonstrated a positive attitude to the research topic and expressed their interest in getting more information about the Lisbon Convention⁴. The Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management received a high estimation from one part of the respondents. They noted that EPPM is one of the few and most successful organizations in Georgia involved in the activities related to the reforms of the national system of educational.

A previously designed guide had to be transformed in accordance with awareness and activities of the respondents. A number of additional questions was added.

Sampling and recruitment faced the following challenges:

- Time-period of the study clashed with the winter holiday's season, which complicated meeting arrangements with potential respondents. Private educational institutions were most problematic in this regard – up to the end of January, no members of administration were available at work.
- Another challenge was a political crisis in Georgia prior and after the parliamentary elections. The leaders of NGOs as well as the independent experts were almost impossible to reach.

⁴ The respondents asked to provide a Georgian translation of the Lisbon Convention.

4

Results, Analysis and Interpretation

The following chapter presents analysis and interpretation of the study results. The conclusions are based on the views and opinions obtained through in-depth interviews and focus group⁵ discussions.

Analysis and interpretation cover the following issues:

- ❖ The Lisbon Convention
- ❖ Department of Academic Mobility and Recognition
- ❖ Recognition of professional qualifications
- ❖ Major components of unified European higher education area
- ❖ Donor institutions

4.1 The Lisbon Convention

General information on the Lisbon Convention covers the following:

- ❖ Pre-conditions and implementation stages of the Lisbon Convention;
- ❖ Role of the State in the implementation of the Convention;
- ❖ Public awareness and attitude

4.1.1 PRE-CONDITIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION STAGES OF THE LISBON CONVENTION

In 1997, Georgia signed the Lisbon Convention on recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European Region. In 1999, the Convention was ratified by the Parliament of Georgia. According to the Deputy Minister of Education, final editing of the Convention was done in 1996 at the international conference held in Hague and attended, among the others, by the representatives of Georgia.

Drafted under the joint auspices of UNESCO and the Council of Europe, the Lisbon Convention goes beyond the European Region. The Convention aims to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, certificates and diplomas granted in different countries. It is designed to streamline the legal framework at European level and in the long run to replace six conventions⁶ adopted by the Council of Europe or UNESCO. The following bodies were launched to facilitate the implementation of the Convention:

- (1) Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region

and

⁵ Since the groups were homogeneous, the analysis is based on the aggregated data.

⁶ (a) European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities (1964); (b) European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study (1956); (c) European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications (1958); (d) International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean (1976); (e) Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region (1979); (f) European Convention on the General Equivalence of Periods of University Study (1990).

- (2) European Network of National Information Centers on academic mobility and recognition (the ENIC Network).

To date, the ENIC Networks includes 52 countries in and outside of Europe. The Network seeks **to oversee, promote and facilitate the implementation of the Convention**.

The implementation of the Convention envisions supporting the development of unified European education area. Number of conferences was held in this matter and some important declarations were adopted. The Bologna Declaration signed by the Ministers of Education of 29 European countries in 1999, is one of the most important documents adopted. The Declaration considers further steps for the development of the European higher education area and introduction of relevant mechanisms to facilitate recognition of qualifications and academic mobility (establishment of credit system, adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance with the view to develop comparable criteria and methodologies, etc.). Integration of the European higher education area should be completed by 2010. Georgia has not yet joined this process. The representatives of the Georgian system of education name the following obstacles:

- Stagnancy of the Ministry of Education and the lack of good will;
- Unsupportive legislation;
- Inefficiency of the national system of education in adoption of the Declaration (obstacles and delays of the reforms)

Alternatively, the other part of the respondents suggests that certain steps have been already made; for example, official letter was drafted to be presented to the Council of Europe. Some of the higher education institutions managed to establish a system of international standards, which creates a ground for future advancement.

4.1.2 ROLE OF THE STATE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

The Lisbon Conventions assigns responsibility for its implementation to the signing States. The State is obliged to launch an institution – national information center – appointed as a member of the ENIC Network to cooperate with the Committee of the Convention as well as with national information centers in other countries.

In Georgia, this scenario was not followed. Once the Convention was ratified in 1999, the Department of Science at the Ministry of Education, instead of launching an independent institution, reconciled the responsibilities of a national information center. In 2000, this body was re-named as the Department of Academic Mobility and Recognition⁷.

Educational system representatives and the members of the Department name the following obstacles hampering establishment of the national information center:

- Lack of funds;
- Stagnancy of the State;
- Lack of public support

The respondents particularly emphasize the role of the State. Representatives of the educational system and the members of the focus groups agree that adoption and implementation of the international documents, such as the Lisbon Convention, is the State competence. The State is responsible for providing respective measures, such as:

⁷ The next chapter reviews activities and challenges faced by the Department.

- Establishment of independent institutions responsible for promotion and implementation of the Convention;
- Adoption of relevant legal regulations, norms and procedures;
- Adoption of the unified educational policy

In Georgia, irresponsibility and ignorance of the State hampers successful application of the Lisbon Convention, as well as of any other international agreement or declaration. Among the major factors hampering integration of Georgia into the European education area, the respondents name inexistence of the **unified education policy** and **unsupportive legislative environment**. The Ministry of Education fails to take a lead in this direction. Stagnancy of the Ministry creates obstacles to the adoption of important agreements. A decree on recognition of foreign diplomas developed by the Department of Academic Mobility and Recognition, representing one of the top priority documents, was not adopted since it had been lacking response and feedback for three years. When outdated, the document required further work to be renewed.

Accreditation of higher education institutions was also mentioned as one of the competence areas of the State. According to the representatives of the educational system and the Department of Academic Mobility and Recognition, acknowledgment of qualifications until accreditation system is in place, significantly hinders implementation of the Convention. Inexistence of a national accreditation and quality assurance systems prevents objective assessment of Georgian higher education institutions.

Political crises in Georgia⁸ greatly affected public attitude to the State and government. Accordingly, it was reflected in the present study. A statement of a new president acknowledging education among the top State priorities, gave new hope to the representatives of the educational system. The respondents expect the State to provide more support to the education reform in the country.

4.1.3 PUBLIC AWARENESS AND ATTITUDES

The study aimed at tracking awareness about the Lisbon Convention among representatives of the system of education as well as specialists and professionals with foreign qualifications⁹.

Representatives of the higher education institutions are more or less informed about the international documents and declarations adopted in the sphere of education. However, the respondents note that no consistent measures have ever been undertaken to promote the Lisbon Convention or other official documents. The representatives of the higher education institutions have to get information on their own. The following sources of information were named:

- Personal contacts with colleagues from different European higher education institutions;
- Participation in the international conferences and meetings;
- Personal relations with the representatives of the Department of Academic Mobility and Recognition or other people involved in the implementation of the Convention

The responses vary whether knowledge of the Lisbon Convention is mandatory for the representatives of higher education institutions. Some respondents are convinced that administration and teachers of higher education institutions should be thoroughly informed about the important documents, such as the Lisbon Convention. The other part of the

⁸ November revolution, change of government

⁹ Quantitative research does not provide a chance to specify individual opinions for a particular institution.

respondents considers knowledge of all legal acts in education unnecessary for most specialists unless they are directly involved in the implementation of these documents.

The respondents voting for access to information requested that updated version of the Convention be presented to education professionals and public.

As for the foreign qualification-holders, most of them were informed about the Lisbon Convention, although, sources of information do not differ much from those named by the representatives of the national education institutions. Personal relations and contacts with the representatives of the European higher education institutions were named as the major information sources.

4.2 Department of Academic Mobility and Recognition

The chapter presents information on capacity, functions, activities and international cooperation opportunities of the Department of Academic Mobility and Recognition.

4.2.1 ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND FINANCIAL VIABILITY

The Department of Academic Mobility and Recognition occupies one room at the Ministry of Education. To date, it employs three staff members. According to information provided by the Head of the Department, their R&D plant is at zero level lacking computers, printers, Internet access, or other equipment. This significantly hampers networking with other European information centers and educational institutions. The Black Sea University and some other organizations provide basic facilities for documentation and Internet access. Nevertheless, no funding is provided to cover the needs of the Department. Even basic office supplies, such as paper, folders, etc., are not available. Establishment of authenticity requires international shipment and visits to different institutions, which is often done at personal expense of the Department staff. To date, staff enthusiasm and commitment is the only basis for coping with the numerous challenges.

4.2.2 FUNCTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

The Department aims at accomplishing the following tasks:

- ❖ Information-consulting services;
- ❖ Establishment of diploma authenticity

Information-consulting services

Despite the financial and operational obstacles, the Department finds ways to proceed with its primary functions. Main recipients of information provided by the Department about the national and foreign systems of education and educational institutions are:

- Interested persons in Georgia;
- Local educational institutions;
- National information centers appointed to the ENIC Network;
- Representatives of higher education institutions outside Georgia

Inquiries from outside of Georgia are more frequent, since European information centers are more aware about its functions and purposes. The following are top matters of interest:

- National assessment system for higher education institutions (i.e. accreditation, rating, quality assurance criteria);
- National system of qualifications (including scientific degrees);
- Evaluation of students' performance;
- Other

In responding to these inquiries, the Department faces the following challenges:

Challenges:

- No formal assessment system of higher education institutions is in place. Inexistence of national accreditation system limits information provided by the Department to the State licensing.
- Information on status and developments of national higher education institutions is not compiled into a systematic database.
- With few exceptions¹⁰, qualification references are not available.

Establishment of diploma authenticity

One of the primary responsibilities of the Department is establishment of authenticity of diplomas and certificates awarded by national and foreign institutions.

This information is used by:

- Georgian citizens seeking at validating their diplomas at the educational institutions outside Georgia;
- Foreign educational institutions investigating about Georgian diplomas;
- Persons seeking at validating qualifications they received outside Georgia

As it was mentioned above, the Department receives more inquiries from foreign higher education institutions about Georgian diplomas¹¹. Authentication/evaluation of foreign diplomas is less frequent since Georgian students are less likely to come back in order to complete their studies in Georgia. Establishment of authenticity takes the following steps:

- Submission of application to the Head of a relevant Department;
- Collection of the required documents (e.g. copy of diploma, list of grades, etc.);
- Authentication of documents submitted to educational or other institutions (e.g. embassies, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice, etc.)

In some cases, translation and notarization of diploma is required.

Focus group discussions revealed diversity of opinions about the authenticity establishment procedure. Based on personal experience, the respondents suggest that the process takes too long (1-3 months) and a formal procedure is too complicated (visits to different agencies, such as embassies, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice, etc). Translation and notarization creates additional problems. In some cases, documents are not translated properly. The respondents suggest improvements in order to simplify procedures and make services of the Department more efficient; namely, establishment of the **translation office** (or a service agreement with an existing translation bureau) and a **notary service** at the Department.

An increasing number of forged diplomas constitutes another challenge faced by the Department. The Head of the Department constantly receives inquiries from the European higher education institutions asking to authenticate documents submitted by Georgian

¹⁰ Department of Communications at the Technical University issues Diploma Supplement fulfilling the international standards. A Supplement includes a thorough description of granted qualification.

¹¹ In one case, the Department was asked to establish authenticity of a diploma awarded in Yerevan, Armenia.

students. Most inquiries come from Germany where the highest number of forged Georgian diplomas is registered. One reason for this is a relatively easy access to higher education that makes Germany attractive to Georgian students.

Private higher education institutions, especially medical educational institutions, take a lead by the number of forged diplomas. Investigations on falsification mechanisms as well as administration of the respective measures go far beyond authority of the Department. The Ministry of Education avoids addressing this issue, although the Head of the Department keeps raising it. The respondents suggest that problems with forged diplomas should be addressed by establishing respective institutions and introducing relevant regulations.

4.2.3. COOPERATION AT THE LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

The Department of Academic Mobility and Recognition maintains professional contacts at the local and international level.

As a member of the ENIC Network, the Department extensively cooperates with higher education institutions and information centers in and outside of Europe. Administrative staff of the information centers holds annual meetings to discuss prospects and constrains of the national education systems and exchanges information over e-mail¹².

At the local level, the Department maintains contacts with the following agencies:

- Embassies
- State and commercial educational institutions
- State agencies, such as the ministries, etc.

The Department has a flexible cooperation scenario for different agencies. Authentication of diplomas and certificates requires interaction with various state agencies and institutions. Foreign embassies based in Georgia are notified about activities of the Department and, thus, refuse to issue study visas without their verification. Due to the lack of legal regulation mechanism, the cooperation with national higher education institutions has an informal character and is based on personal relations. There is no common vision about a cooperation model between the Department and higher education institutions. One part of the respondents acknowledges a crucial role of the Department in overseeing and coordinating activities of national higher education institutions. These respondents suggest that this model is envisaged and supported by the Lisbon Convention. Alternatively, the other part of the respondents is convinced that no mediating body is necessary to regulate the relations between the higher educational institutions and the State.

4.3 Recognition of Qualifications

Recognition of foreign qualifications is one of the principle issues raised by the Lisbon Convention. **(a) Academic** and **(b) professional** aspects of recognition should be differentiated. The Convention commits each Party to recognize qualifications issued by other Parties. If recognition is withheld, the reasons for the refusal to grant recognition shall be stated. Assessment of the qualification shall be based on objective criteria.

The following is a synopsis of issues related to recognition of qualifications issued in Georgia and abroad.

¹² Transactional education became one of the top priorities at the last meeting of the ENIC Network member countries. Transactional education provides a framework for sending students to different educational institutions. The ministries of education were provided with the recommendations about overseeing and coordinating activities of the respective institutions in their countries.

4.2.1 RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS ISSUED IN GEORGIA

The respondents expressed alternative views about recognition of qualifications issued in Georgia.

Academic Recognition

Academic recognition of qualification along with authentication of diploma facilitates access to further academic activities. The focus group members did not report any substantial problems with the academic recognition of their qualifications. One reason for this is that they had been granted the right to proceed with academic activities at the foreign educational institutions on the basis of exchange education programs. Nevertheless, the respondents noted that information provided in Georgian diplomas is not sufficient. Foreign higher education institutions require further details on educational programs and curriculum, study periods and credits, etc.

Incomparable systems of standards in Georgian and foreign educational institutions is considered a main reason for the obstacles. Georgian students and specialists have to “translate” their qualifications to make them relevant to the European standards. In most cases, they have to present verbal explanations about their qualification, study periods, workload, etc.

Representatives of the education system have different opinions on this matter: foreign educational institutions have the following reasons to distrust qualifications issued in Georgia:

- Forged diplomas;
- Inexistence of a national assessment system for higher education institutions (i.e. accreditation, rating, etc.);
- Ineffective evaluation system of students’ performance – grades indicated in a diploma do not always reflect a real knowledge.

On the other hand, successful and well-qualified students create a positive view about Georgian higher education. Such cases were also mentioned by the respondents.

Professional Recognition

The respondents agree that professional recognition is more problematic since it facilitates an access to labor market. Professional recognition requires completion of certain stages, such as the quality certificate awarded by professional associations, re-training courses or internships, etc. In western countries, labor market is challenging even to local citizens. Qualifications issued in Georgia are often insufficient for professional acknowledgement. Specialists seeking recognition should meet quality assurance criteria adopted in western countries. In addition, their employment should be a matter of interest of a potential employer.

4.2.2 RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS IN GEORGIA

Recognition of foreign qualifications was discussed by the focus group members and representatives of national education system.

Academic Recognition

Focus group members emphasized the attitude of Georgian higher education institutions to foreign qualifications. Some of the respondents encountered difficulties verifying their qualifications in Georgia. The respondents named the following problems:

- Recurrent examination/withhold of the exams passed abroad;
- Refusal to provide admission to examinations;
- Refusal to provide admission to lectures

Educational institutions, where the reforms were relatively successful and administration is interested in innovations, are less likely to encounter the mentioned problems. At some departments and faculties, foreign qualification-holders are encouraged rather than prevented.

In general, the respondents agree that the existing education system neither supports foreign qualification-holders nor provides them with proper environment for further academic activities. When rejected recognition in Georgia, foreign qualification-holders have to continue their work and study abroad.

Professional Recognition

Professional recognition of foreign qualifications was one of the topics of focus group discussions. In Georgia, foreign qualification-holders are involved in the following activities: (a) the State agencies (e.g. ministries and departments, etc.), (b) local non-governmental organizations, (c) international organizations, and (d) embassies.

Unlike the State agencies, international organizations provide conditions that are more adequate (qualified work, high salary, etc.).

Professional activities of foreign qualification-holders at the national educational institutions were specially noted at the group discussions. According to the respondents, foreign qualification-holders are rarely admitted to teaching. The situation is different at the educational institutions with high level of post-graduate employment¹³. These educational institutions are particularly interested in teachers with qualified outside Georgia and, thus, attempt at creating an adequate working environment – relatively high salaries, international internships, etc.

Representatives of educational system disagree about a position of foreign qualification-holders at the labor market of Georgia. Some of the respondents state Georgian and foreign higher education institutions do not alter by quality of education. Therefore, foreign qualification-holders should not be given advantages for this particular reason. This statement is supported with the examples of extremely successful Georgian students abroad. Other respondents are not that optimistic about a quality of education received in Georgia. They are convinced that foreign institutions provide higher level of education by both quality and content. Success of particular Georgian students could be regarded as a merit of their personal capability rather than of an educational institution, they attended in Georgia. In addition, the respondents mentioned that, in some cases, Georgian students abroad attend low quality, non-accredited educational institutions. This is one of the reasons for a critical attitude to foreign diplomas.

In general, the respondents agree that foreign qualification-holders should receive more support and acknowledgment. It is important for preventing a brain drain from Georgia.

¹³ ESM, GIPA, Caucasus School of Business, etc.

4.3 Critical Issues of Integration to the European Education Area

International conventions and declarations adopted in the sphere of higher education¹⁴ outline the following critical components for development of the united European education area:

- ❖ Easily readable and comparable system of qualifications;
- ❖ Compatible study periods;
- ❖ Unified system of credits;
- ❖ Quality assurance / programs affiliations;
- ❖ Promotion of academic mobility between the states: recognition and fair assessment of study, research and teaching periods in accordance with legal rights

These components constitute a complex system and may not function separately. Nevertheless, under the present study, analysis of a reform in the national system of higher education was done by each of the mentioned components, although they should not be taken out of context.

The following chapter presents an assessment of changes implemented at the higher education institutions and a revision of obstacles.

4.3.1 SYSTEM OF ACADEMIC DEGREES

Georgian academic traditions were inherited from a traditional German education system. Later, the system was modified to comply with standards adopted in the Soviet Union. Georgia still preserves an old system of academic degrees: Specialist with Diploma, Aspirant (post-graduate student), Candidate, and Doctor.

Reform of the national system of education started with introduction of Master and Bachelor's degrees; this, however, does not include changes in the system of scientific qualifications. An assessment of the implemented reforms and revision of obstacles is given below.

BACHELOR AND MASTER'S DEGREES

Almost all State and private educational institutions shifted to awarding Bachelor and Master's degrees. The experts, however, suggest that few State educational institutions¹⁵ supplemented it with complex changes. 5-year study period was mechanically divided into two parts, first out of which is considered a baccalaureate and the second – a magistrate. Curriculums were transformed by adding or reducing disciplines from each of the parts. The following factors determine successful reforms at some of the faculties and departments¹⁶:

¹⁴ The Bologna Declaration; The Sorbonne Convention; The Graz Convention; etc.

¹⁵ Commercial educational institutions show more readiness for the reforms; they govern with the international standards and aim to address a demand for new specialists (e.g., The Caucasus School of Business, The Black Sea University, GIPA, etc.).

¹⁶ Technical University: Department of Communication, Department of Energy; Medical University; I. Chavchavadze State University: Department of Philosophy and Social Science; etc.

▪ **Demand for new specialists:**

Market economy creates demand for new specialists. Some faculties and departments had to implement certain changes to meet ever-changing needs¹⁷. Along with general knowledge (baccalaureate), they now have to provide specific expertise (magistrate).

▪ **Curriculum development (selection of disciplines)**

Some departments and faculties shifted to new standards of curriculum development. Modules (integration of the related subjects, proportional representation of optional and mandatory disciplines) and syllabuses (discipline summary) provide students with a real opportunity to make a selection.

▪ **Qualification references**

Development of qualification references (descriptions) is an important component of application of Bachelor and Master's degrees. Providing thorough description of potential activity spheres of graduate students, development of qualification references does not seem possible without a preliminary market research.

▪ **New approach in teaching**

New system of academic degrees supports development of a new mentality and outlook. A teaching process should be transformed accordingly. Engaging teachers with the awareness about new methodologies, successful departments and faculties managed to concentrate on skills needed for independent work and decision-making.

▪ **R&D plant**

An organizational capacity, such as computer class, Internet access, up-to-date literature, etc., is important for successful reforms. In most cases, capacity building is supported by donor institutions.

▪ **Cooperation with the leading European universities**

Cooperation with the leading European universities – expert consultations, internships, and participation in the international conferences – had a significant impact on successful introduction of a new model of academic degrees. Practical experience about the implementation and functioning of the model allows analyze the process and provide its adaptation for Georgia.

In general, implementation of a new system of academic degrees has not been very successful. In many cases, it takes a formal character and does not result in any substantial changes. There are numerous obstacles hampering successful introduction of new standards. According to the experts, one of the major challenges is that **administration and teachers of higher education institutions are not ready for changes**. Introduction of Bachelor and Master's degrees considers qualitative transformation of higher education. Seeking to meet up-to-date requirements, new graduates should be completely different from the cadre prepared by an old system. In practice, teachers at higher education institutions fail to provide relevant skills and knowledge. This could be caused by the following reasons:

✓ **Old mentality**

Major part of teachers succeeds to the Soviet system of education. They are not familiar with western standards and values.

✓ **Incompetence at up-to-date teaching methods**

¹⁷ Rapid development of cell communication technologies determined a need to revise curriculum at the Department of Communications of the Technical University.

Traditional teaching methodology is based on mechanic transmission of knowledge rather than active involvement of students.

✓ **Lack of information**

Information on new education models is completely inaccessible to most of the teachers. They do not know much about the modules, syllabuses, or modern principles of curriculum design.

✓ **Aging**

Lack of the young cadre is another challenge hampering successful introduction of innovations. The elder teachers have troubles acquiring new skills and, thus, fail to follow new tendencies, such as IT development.

✓ **Insufficient salaries**

Low salary rates decrease teachers' motivation and prevent engagement of the young cadre.

Open cooperation with labor market was named among the major conditions for successful application of new academic degrees. In Georgia, higher education is a closed system; thus, educational institutions are incompetent and/or unable to meet changing market requirements. Less demanded professions encounter most critical problems in this regard¹⁸. The respective departments formally shift to awarding Bachelor and Master's degrees completely ignoring the need to update curriculum and develop qualification references.

The experts think that a new model of academic degrees is difficult to apply at the educational institutions with **authoritarian, centralized management**. Essential part of a new model is an increased independence of each department and faculty and active involvement of teachers and students.

Reduction or cease of research activities also hampers application of a new system of academic degrees. Representatives of the system of education suggest that re-establishment of research activities would support involvement of teachers, scientists and students in this process.

SCIENTIFIC DEGREES

Two-stage system of scientific degrees (candidate/doctor) as well as the award procedures (under the authority of the Academic Council at the Academy of Sciences) is still functional. The respondents expressed alternative opinions about the acting system of scientific degrees. Representatives of higher education consider it outdated and irrelevant to modern standards in education. Furthermore, it hampers application of a unified system of academic degrees. Old model of scientific degrees creates the following obstacles:

▪ **Further academic activities:**

Regulations established by the Academic Council impede rather than support award of scientific degrees. One example is frequent changes in the list of mandatory editions for publications required to obtain a degree. In most cases, these editions are published by the Academy of Sciences.

▪ **Recognition of foreign qualifications:**

The Academic Council withholds degrees awarded outside Georgia and requires a recurrent presentation of a thesis.

¹⁸ E.g., fundamental sciences, such as Math, ancient Georgian linguistics, etc.

▪ **Degree in modern sciences:**

Young professionals mastering in modern sciences are unable to obtain a degree in Georgia and have to apply to foreign educational institutions. In most cases, they stay abroad to proceed with an academic work.

The experts think that “aging of a scientific mind in Georgia”¹⁹ leaves the science far behind the up-to-date tendencies and technologies. Average age of Georgian scientists is about 65 while, in western countries, it varies from 35 to 45. One of the major conditions for advancement of science is support to young researchers and re-establishment of research activities at the universities ensuring involvement of students. Another critical issue is authorization of the universities to award scientific degrees. The experts also mention importance of the establishment of professional associations with the view to develop quality assurance mechanisms. Although essential and needed, implementation of these steps may cause certain problems. Namely:

- At the first stages, authorization of the universities to award scientific degrees may increase the number of unqualified scientists and researches; especially, if the authority is provided to the regional branches of the State universities as well as to private higher education institutions. One of the mechanisms to regulate this process is promotion of a healthy competition among researchers and university teachers.

Some of the respondents have an alternative opinion about the system of scientific degrees. Declining responsibility of the Academy of Science as well as transferring to a single-level (PhD) model would lessen a value of a scientific degree and, as a result, hamper advancement of Georgian science.

4.3.2 STUDY PERIODS

One of the components of the European education area is recognition of study periods (time spent for completion of an education program). Comparable periods of studies will facilitate recognition²⁰ and create a ground for academic mobility. Study periods depend on curriculum, education program, and the whole process of education. The education system representatives state that different standards in education determine differences in study periods.

Under the reform of national education system, a single-stage 5-year study period was substituted by two-stage, 4+2-year period²¹. This transformation, however, is more formal; no substantial changes, such as development of new education programs and qualifications, were provided²².

Higher education study periods constitute one stage of an overall education process and should not be taken out of context. The representatives of education system think that, in Georgia, introduction of an American 4+2 higher education model was determined by the transfer to 11-year secondary education. In Europe, university study period is different (3+5), since the secondary education takes a 12-year period.

¹⁹ Quote from one of the interviews

²⁰ The Lisbon Convention envisions recognition of study periods. Immediate decisions and implementation mechanisms, however, are considered a competence of respective educational institutions.

²¹ In Georgia as well as Europe, study periods for some specific professions (e.g. medical education) may vary.

²² With exception of several successful departments and faculties

The representatives of higher education system suggest that substitution of study periods should be predated with substantial changes in the education process, and go simultaneously with an overall reform of the secondary education.

4.3.3 SYSTEMS OF CREDITS

Joint system of credits is essential for development of the European education area. National systems of credits in Europe have a similar basis and only differ by scale (60, 90, and 120-point scales). The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is common to most higher education institutions.

Establishment of the system of credits in Georgian higher education institutions has already started, although just a few departments and faculties²³ managed to succeed. System of credits transforms assessment of the education process and requires new vision and approach from both students and teachers. The education experts suggest that implementation of the system of credits requires basic changes in the education process. Primarily, a comparative analysis of old and new assessment systems should be provided to reveal most critical differences. The experts are giving an emphasis to the following factors:

➤ **Evaluation of Students' Performance**

System of credits envisions progressive evaluation, which is completely different from the previously used model. Progressive evaluation covers an entire study period identifying a final score based on intermediary testing conducted several times within a single semester. Written tests are assessed by objective criteria. Alternatively, traditional system of 5-score evaluation gives an emphasis to the final examination disregarding a student's performance during a semester. Oral exams do not assure objective evaluation.

➤ **Selection of Disciplines**

Selection of disciplines is an important component of the system of credits. Along with mandatory disciplines, students may enroll to the optional studies they find more interesting or useful for future employment purposes. Access to relevant information about the disciplines – syllabuses and qualification references, - ensures a reasonable and conscious selection. An old model of higher education completely ignores this option. Education programs include a list of mandatory disciplines without providing any explanations and references.

➤ **Proportion of Fundamental and Applied Disciplines**

Up-to-date education programs prioritize applied disciplines giving an emphasis to practical application of knowledge. Alternatively, an old model of higher education prioritizes theoretical knowledge overloading the programs with fundamental disciplines and disregarding practical studies.

➤ **Workload of Teachers and Students**

Workload of teachers and students is estimated in accordance with the acting legislation and makes 42 hours per week. Along with actual lecture hours, more than 50% of this time should be committed to an independent work and preparation of study materials. An old

²³ Technical University: Departments of Communications, Energy, Information Technologies; Tbilisi State University: Department of Psychology; State Medical University; Robakidze University; etc.

model of time management does not envision any independent activities, which causes inappropriate workload of teachers and students.

➤ **Proportion of Students and Teachers**

Under the system of credits, reasonable number of students is assigned to one teacher. This number is even lower at the practical lessons. At Georgian higher education institutions, these proportions are not always followed. Teachers have to work with too many students, which negatively affects quality of teaching as well the students' apprehension.

➤ **Renewal of Programs and Curriculum**

The system of credits requires flexibility of the education process ensuring constant revision of programs and curriculum to fulfill ever-changing needs. Old system of education, due to its centralized nature, does not envision any substantial changes and revisions of once adopted programs.

Additional challenge is the need to provide more independence to faculties and departments. Only democratic management and active involvement of teachers and students can assure regulation of the system of credits. Georgian higher education institutions face the following problems in this regard:

- Centralized management (lack of independence of faculties and departments);
- Insufficient internal and external interaction between and inside the faculties;
- Unawareness of administration and teachers (lack of skills and information)

The following factors hamper successful establishment of the system of credits:

- ✓ Different calculation models (e.g. at the baccalaureate, 1 credit equals 15 hours, while at the magistrate – 12 hours);
- ✓ Credits are given by lecture hours disregarding a time spent for independent work;
- ✓ Education programs and curriculums are developed centrally rather than at the grass-root level (by joint decision of teachers of related disciplines and a module team work);
- ✓ Formal attitude of the students to a selection of disciplines. Lack of awareness about new models determines indifference.
- ✓ Inexistence of detailed descriptions of disciplines (syllabuses). To date, only few faculties managed to design syllabuses.

The system of credits facilitates introduction of Diploma Supplement that conforms to the international standards. The Supplement provides information on performance and credits received for different disciplines. International diplomas provide six levels of granted qualification. The Council of Europe supported development of Georgian Diploma Supplement that is already issued by some educational institutions and departments. Successful introduction of Diploma Supplement is impossible unless the above-mentioned reforms in the national system of higher education are implemented.

4.3.4 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION

Establishment of quality assurance mechanisms is one of the most important components of the European education area. The experts suggest that quality of education is a result of successful operation of the education system where the emphasis is given to a final result. According to the respondents, quality management should proceed at the following levels:

- (1) The State level (Ministry of Education, Accreditation Council/Center, etc.);
- (2) Public level (independent accreditation center, professional associations);
- (3) Higher education institutions (quality assurance centers)

The present system of education fails to provide quality management at any of those levels. In exceptional cases, higher education institutions acquire quality certificates through international accreditation centers and/or professional associations, or attempt at launching independent quality assurance centers²⁴. The following chapter presents a revision of the current situation and analysis of existed obstacles.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT AT THE STATE LEVEL

Licensing

The State, through the Ministry of Education, is responsible to facilitate licensing of higher education institutions. The experts report on the numerous breach of this process. National assessment system for higher education institutions failed to be established and no objective assessment criteria were developed. To date, licensing is a formal procedure rather than an objective assessment.

One of the breaches of licensing process is mushrooming of higher education institutions. The number of branches and private educational institutions has increased up to 300²⁵, which is too high for a small country like Georgia. Hampering quality control, this increases a number of unqualified specialists. The experts suggest necessity of recurrent licensing before an accreditation of educational institutions has started. The institutions failing to fulfill basic requirements (premises, library, human resources, etc.), should be disqualified. According to the experts, this will support establishment of quality assessment and management mechanisms.

Accreditation

No real steps have been done to facilitate State accreditation of higher education institutions. According to the scenario developed by the Accreditation Council at the Parliament, accreditation should have been completed by 2000. Nevertheless, the work of the Council was not successful. The respondents name the following reasons:

✓ **Staff Policy**

The Council includes representatives of different higher education institutions, which hampers impartial and objective accreditation.

✓ **Inability to Proceed with Concrete Activities**

The Council failed to develop a strategy and implementation mechanisms to proceed with specific activities.

✓ **Lack of Control**

The entities responsible for overseeing the work of the Council (Ministry of Education and the Parliament) failed to provide a sufficient control.

✓ **Unsupportive Legislation**

Legislative environment in Georgia does not support implementation of the accreditation process.

²⁴ National quality management centers are established at the State Medical University, Technical University, Robakidze University, etc.

²⁵ The Main Directions of Higher Education Development in Georgia, 2002 Tbilisi

The experts consider the accreditation of higher education institutions a competence of the State notwithstanding an agency assigned as an immediate implementer. The experts express different opinions about the launch of the Accreditation Council:

- Accreditation is a competence of the Ministry of Education and, therefore, the Ministry should be involved;
- Accreditation should be implemented by an independent agency completed with independent experts rather than the representatives of the Ministry of Education and higher education institutions;
- National accreditation should be supported and overseen by the European accreditation centers. This is important for the following reasons:
 - (a) Georgia does not have a relevant experience;
 - (b) Protectionism and high value of personal relations may breach impartiality.
- Accreditation can proceed at the Caucasus regional level (in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) by establishing regional accreditation centers.

Nevertheless, the experts noted that there are numerous problems related to accreditation at the European or regional accreditation centers. The following provides a brief outline of challenges mentioned by the experts:

Problems receiving accreditation at the European center:

- Language barrier (presentation of all the documents in foreign language);
- Funds (in Europe, accreditation as well as expert support is paid)

Problems receiving accreditation at the regional level:

- Lack of experience (education system in all three Caucasus states succeeds to the Soviet Union; therefore, there is no relevant expertise);
- Protectionism (this is equally relevant to all three Caucasus states);
- Language barrier (documentation in foreign language)

Self-assessment is another essential condition of successful accreditation. The respondents think that, any higher education institution in Georgia would fail to meet international standards of accreditation since their facilities (libraries, computer classes, modern technologies, etc.) do not conform to international requirements. Taking into account specific conditions of a transition period, the accreditation procedures for Georgian educational institutions could be simplified.

Some educational institutions in Georgia make efforts to establish quality assurance mechanisms through cooperation with western associations and accreditation centers²⁶. Although, the representatives of education system give a positive evaluation to such attempts, they still stress the need for a unified quality assurance policy; they consider it essential for providing successful reforms in the system of education.

²⁶ The Medical University attempts at establishing quality assurance system through support from the Association of European Universities. They receive consulting from the foreign experts.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AT PUBLIC LEVEL

Role of public was specially outlined by the respondents. Corruption in education (protectionism, bribes, etc.) is evidence that quality education has not yet become a public priority. Georgian society is indifferent to the establishment of quality assurance system. Another result of public ignorance is weak and poorly developed professional associations. In Europe, qualifications issued by higher education institutions are not valid unless authorized by the respective professional associations. This is especially important for applied professions, such as physician, vet doctor, etc.

Public involvement in quality management will be important for preventing corruption and providing equal and impartial administration of testing and examinations. This is one of the priorities of the National Center of Assessment and Testing, aiming at development of the unified examination model. The model suggested by the Center includes:

- Development and psycho-metric analysis of tests to ensure their accordance with international university standards adopted for different disciplines;
- Equal conditions of testing through establishment of testing centers conforming to the international standards;
- Launch of the monitoring system insuring active public involvement.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AT THE LEVEL OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Implementation of quality control requires establishment and functioning of the quality assurance centers at higher education institutions. The experts suggest that Georgian educational institutions do not have relevant experience and expertise in quality management. The exceptions are educational institutions where quality assurance centers were established in cooperation with the European universities or under donor-supported programs²⁷. Quality assurance system includes the following:

- Extensive communication and exchange between the faculties;
- Mutual assessment and self-assessment of students and teachers;
- Development of the objective assessment criteria;
- Transparency of the assessment process;
- According reaction to the assessment results

Two major factors hamper establishment of the quality assurance system in the national higher education institutions:

- (a) **Old stereotypes (mentality)** affect student-teacher relations as well as an entire process of education. Traditionally, students take a passive, dependent position while a teacher is leading and authoritarian. Education process is designed in a form of a monologue rather than an open interaction and information exchange.
- (b) **Lack of experience, skills and expertise**

Another challenge stressed by the respondents is development of a competitive environment, which requires a relevant financial management. Instead of providing general financial support to the educational institutions, the State should support the study of each individual student. This will promote healthy competition among the institutions and facilitate increase of quality.

²⁷ Technical University; Robakidze University; TACIS – Tempus Programme

4.3.5 ACADEMIC MOBILITY

Main objective of the European higher education area is to enhance cooperation of the states belonging to the region of Europe and facilitate development of intellectual, cultural, social and technological potential. Adoption of comparable systems of degrees, study periods, credits, quality assurance, and accreditation of educational institutions and programs will support overspread mobility among these states. In particular, this will enable students and researchers to access study and academic activity opportunities through recognition of their qualifications and study periods.

Academic mobility among the European states was one of the topics of the experts' discussion. In Georgia, social and economic challenges caused an intensive brain drain. Number of students and professionals had to travel abroad to proceed with their studies and work. Those who managed to succeed in professional carrier are less likely to return. In Georgia:

- they have less opportunity for professional advancement;
- cannot get according salary;
- a demand for their qualifications is lower.

All respondents have a common vision about the national perspectives after the integration into the European education area. Supporting unification of study and working conditions in different countries, such integration will facilitate retrieval of professionals to Georgia.

4.4 Donor Institutions

This chapter presents an overview of education-related programs implemented by donor institutions. These programs were specially outlined by the respondents.

The respondents highly estimate education-related activities of donor institutions. Nevertheless, they mention that secondary education²⁸ is given more focus and financial support. Donor support to higher education can help: (1) facilitate successful reform, and (2) provide Georgian students and professionals with access to training and further study at the leading European universities. The respondents name the following donor agencies: Open Society – Georgia Foundation (OSGF); American Council; TACIS (TACIS-Tempus Programme); Eurasia Foundation; British Council; Council of Europe, etc.²⁹ Impact of the (1) TACIS-Tempus Programme and (2) OSGF was given a special emphasis.

TACIS-Tempus Programme

Implemented at a number of higher education institutions, the project covers the following activities:

- Capacity building (R&D plant): computer classes, Internet access, libraries, supplies, etc.
- Introduction of quality assurance tools and methodology (establishment of quality assurance centers);
- Training in up-to-date teaching methodologies;
- Introduction of education management systems (recommendations about the system of credits, module group, etc.);
- Management training for the administration of higher education institutions;
- Other

Open Society – Georgia Foundation

The respondents give a high evaluation to the programs implemented by the Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management (EPPM) through support from the Open Society – Georgia Foundation:

- University Teachers Training Program
- Social Science Support Program
- Amendments to the Law on Education (Draft Law on Higher Education)

These programs supported implementation of the following activities:

- Capacity development (R&D plant);
- Teachers' re-training;
- Trainings in institutional management;
- Conferences for the representatives of educational system and the experts;
- Design of Law on Higher Education;
- Other

The experts are stressing importance of programs facilitating complex reforms in the national system of higher education.

²⁸ E.g. the World Bank project on the restructuring of the system of education selectively contributes to secondary education.

²⁹ Some higher education institutions receive support from different associations, foundations and agencies outside Georgia (e.g. Medical University).