



Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

Tempus & Bilateral Cooperation with Industrialised Countries

Tempus Seminar on University Governance

Kiev, Ukraine

1-2 March 2010

National Report

1 Name of the country:

Georgia

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Part 1 – Overall description of the ongoing national reforms and initiatives about University governance

Reforms of higher education system in Georgia are aiming for decentralisation of the system, while granting more autonomy to the universities. Principle of autonomy of Higher Educational Institution (HEI) is stipulated in the Law of Georgia on Higher Education (adopted in December 2004) as one of the leading principles of the higher education system in country. Society is best served if the higher education system enjoys academic freedom and the requisite institutional autonomy. The state must guarantee that.

The Law on Higher Education provides for entirely new organizational and management structure for higher education institutions, makes public universities more autonomous, more accountable to the public and democratically governed from the inside. Governance and management here are based on the principle of election, and the legislation defines faculty members, students and professors as chief agents in higher education. Private HEIs are granted absolute freedom in defining their internal structures.

Although the reforms have been implemented for only last five years, there is already a need for changes – the formal autonomy of HEIs granted by the law evolved into effective autonomy: establishment of Council of Rectors of Public Higher Educational Institutions and Council of Rectors of Private Higher Educational Institutions in 2009 reflects shift from top-down approach towards bottom-up initiatives: recommendations and suggestions for changing university governance structures, removing restrictions for public HEIs are developed by universities and become topics for nationwide discussions. Changes in law, defining university governance principles are likely to be adopted in 2010.

Part 2 – Themes to be discussed during the working groups

Theme 1: From a regulatory state to a supervisory state: new mission and functions

1 – Analyzing, designing, implementing and evaluating national development strategy plans for Higher Education

Strategy plan for Higher Education (HE) in Georgia doesn't exist in a form of one general document, but involves many different acts, rules, regulations and recommendations. Main document, defining directions of HE development, is Law of Georgia on Higher Education. Constant changes and amendments to the law during the last three years reflect on the one hand quick pace of reforms and on the other hand readiness of the government to adapt to the new needs and challenges.

Reform progress is also visible in development of accreditation rules – new mission-based institutional accreditation has been introduced in autumn 2009, changing from quantitative to more qualitative approach. Changes and amendments to all regulatory documents are often initiated by HEIs giving a clear sign of their growing self-confidence.

Deregulating HE governance (especially for public HEIs) is a hot discussion topic right now – shifting responsibilities from the state towards universities and thus enhancing

their real autonomy is a general approach. Main state institution, having influence on HE developments in the country will be National Education Accreditation Centre instead of the Ministry of Education and Science, thus state control will be focused on output.

2 – Curricula and degrees: freedom, guidance or control?

Development and approval of study programmes is responsibility of HEIs, according to the principle of academic freedom, and follows internal procedures of HEIs – system of state standards for study programmes has been abolished more than 20 years ago. Programme leaders define structure of curricula, share of compulsory and elective subjects.

The Law defines minimal volume of each cycle of higher education (min. 240 ECTS for bachelor, min. 120 ECTS for master's and min. 180 ECTS for doctoral programmes), whereas ministerial order (2005) gives definitions and examples of academic degrees to be granted.

Introduction of National Qualifications Framework (expected in 2010) with accompanying subject benchmarks will create new orientation system for curricula development and assessment – programmes will be updated in order to correspond to learning outcomes, defined by the NQF and minimal academic standards.

Control of curricula content will be subject of programme accreditation (for regulated professions expected by the end of 2010) – currently in the framework of institutional accreditation curricula evaluation is limited to checking of availability of necessary elements (such as programme goals and objectives, assessment system, learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods, etc.) and compliance with existing regulations.

Theme 2: Towards autonomous and accountable universities: financial and human resources management in a context of autonomy

3 - New budget management: consequences in terms of organisation, procedures and human resources

Change of funding model of HEIs and diversification of funding sources was one of the main directions of HE reform - the input-based lump sum financing model of education has been transformed into per capita financing. Apart from state-awarded student grants, HEIs are now entitled to receive funding from the following sources:

- ✓ funds received through private grants, contributions or a will
- ✓ research grants awarded by the state on the basis of competition
- ✓ special state-budgetary programs designed to encourage the enrolment in those specialties of a HEI, which represent priority for the state
- ✓ program financing allocated by the ministries of a relevant field
- ✓ any other sources of income allowed by the Georgian legislation, including revenue from economic activities.

In public HEIs special position of higher administrative manager – the Chancellor, responsible for financial issues, as well as material and human resources – has been created. The law provides general framework of responsibilities and rules for budget approval, whereas detailed regulations of budget offices shall be defined by the HEIs. Private HEIs may organize budget management according to their statute.

Despite differences in organizational structure, budget offices both at public and private HEIs traditionally have executive functions: providing financial and budgeting oversight in support of HEI's governance, facilitating planning, attainment and management of financial resources, providing annual financial reports, etc. Development and

recommendation of funding and budget policies, procedures and processes is the overarching responsibility of other governing structures – council of representatives and chancellor in public HEIs, and appropriate units in private HEIs.

Thus it is important to have competent personnel in charge of planning and development, as well as to establish efficient horizontal links between budget offices and other HEIs structures to enable smooth decision-making and implementation.

Lack of experienced financial managers at HEIs is obvious - new generation of chancellors/financial managers is supposed to provide financial analysis, minimize risks, boost fundraising activities, etc. – so many public HEIs invite managers from business sector, hoping to enhance institution's financial capacities and sustainability.

4 - Recruiting, motivating, evaluating and rewarding academic, technical and administrative staff

According to the Law on Higher Education, HEI has academic, administrative and supporting personnel.

The law defines categories of academic staff and qualifications needed to access these categories, as well as requirements for selection. Rules for filling academic position are same for public and private HEIs: an academic position may be filled only on the basis of open competition based on the principles of transparent, equal and fair competition. Besides of rules set in the law, HEI may define additional conditions for selection of academic staff, but in most cases lack of job management system for academic positions limits selection criteria to very formal.

For public HEIs selection rules for leading administrative positions – rector, chancellor and dean – are also stipulated by the law, whereas private HEIs are absolutely free in this issue. The law defines no specific rules for selection of supporting staff.

According to the new rules of institutional accreditation (2009) full professor (leading study process and supervising research work of associate professors, assistant professors and students) can be employed only by one university – thus universities compete for best personnel, offering higher salaries, better working conditions (the limit of a professor's teaching load is defined and approved by the HEI), flexible terms, etc., although only few HEIs develop appropriate human resource policy in order to attract and maintain best academic staff. The economic and social models (financial rewards & personal autonomy) seem to have most prominent impact on the motivation of academic staff.

Theme 3: Towards autonomous and accountable universities: governance and governing structures

5 - Involving students and external stakeholders in decision making processes and university operation

At this stage student self-governance is less effective, there is lack of dialogue between academia and “world of work”, horizontal contacts should become really effective and the process of involvement of all stakeholders should become transparent.

The law defines faculty members, students and professors as chief agents in higher education. Students are represented in two main governing bodies of public HEIs (private HEIs are free in defining their internal structure, although many have student's self-

governing organizations):

- ✓ Senate, which deals with administrative and financial issues. Students shall comprise 30% of senate. Senate may also include the alumni of the higher education institution and the representatives of the public according to the rules and the proportion prescribed by the higher education institution charter. Thus senate is the only governing structure of the public HEIs including external stakeholders, although this has rather a formal character.
- ✓ Students's self-governance and its branches in individual faculties ensure students' involvement in the higher education institution management; promote protection of students' rights; have the right to make recommendations on improving the faculty/higher education institution's management systems and quality of studying and present them to the Faculty Council, Senate and Academic Council.

Involvement of external stakeholders in university operation is mostly limited to:

- ✓ participation in curriculum development
- ✓ involvement in study process – hosting student's internships
- ✓ participation in student's evaluation – membership in examination boards/panels

Only 10% of HEIs (all of them private) involve external stakeholders (potential employers) in university governance.

6 - Reorganising university structures (faculties, departments and institutes) towards an integrated university

Mission, values and goals, devotion to scientific progress and teaching excellence are supposed to integrate the universities, whereas in fact most HEIs in Georgia are integrated rather by legal documents. Degree of integrity is also influenced by the size and complexity of HEIs.

Issues of decentralization of inter-institutional governance have been discussed in last years – some faculties at large universities argue that more autonomy would increase their effectiveness. At the same time it's obvious that interdisciplinary cooperation, interdisciplinary research, is considered to be the main future priorities for universities to develop at the European level.

Finding an optimal balance between control and contact, hierarchy and autonomy is one of main challenges for larger universities in Georgia. Reorganizing existing governing structures or establishment of new units could ensure efficient horizontal links between faculties. At the same time introduction of mission-based institutional accreditation is supposed to enhance development of “corporate identity” and support integration processes at HEI's level.