

Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy

## Internationalization Strategy

Initiated by: Quality Management Unit

Executed by: International Relations Unit

### 1. Preamble

Despite the existing globalization tendency and active debates in the society, the universal definition of the concept of "*Internationalization*" does not exist yet, however a consensus has been achieved that "*Internationalization*" in the field of education includes an international and multi-cultural approach to teaching, research and management.

In this document, "*Internationalization*" may be understood as integration of international, intercultural and global directions in the higher education which has the following objectives:

1. introduction and enhancement of international world vision in education and research;
2. enhancement of existing links and communication with educational institutions, research institutes and clinic in various parts of the world;

3. facilitation and stimulation of international mobility among students, pedagogues, researchers and administrative staff;
4. improvement of knowledge of the language among Georgian students and pedagogues;
5. raising cultural awareness and competence;
6. introduction of unified international standards of the quality assurance.

Since foundation until present, Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy stably aspires to gain a foothold on the international arena. Today, TMA has partners in various countries of Europe and the Near East, has successfully implemented the EU-funded program within the framework of DECERPHTEMPUS project, sends students to partner universities for internship in clinic and improvement of qualification skills on an annual basis and makes extensive efforts for establishment of new contacts in terms of learning, teaching and study as well as administrative management.

Every year, the method and level of teaching at TMA becomes more and more oriented at modern international standards, based on experience and recommendations of foreign colleagues and leading organizations of medical education.

The Academy acknowledges the active internationalization process currently ongoing in education and research and strives towards active involvement in this process together with its foreign colleagues and participation of joint, large-scale activities.

## 1.2. Driving force of internationalization

Three main factors represent the driving force of internationalization:

1. combining the higher education and scientific/clinical researches which requires comprehensive approach;

2. technological progress expressed in not only development of ultramodern clinical/research equipment and methods, but also in development of the art of communication, digital technology and electronic methods of teaching. International cooperation represents the only way of increasing availability of information and correct integration of innovations in teaching and research.<sup>1</sup>
3. willingness of students, researchers and professionals to receive international education, share international world vision, become engaged in the ongoing processes and acquire valuable experience.

Under influence of the above factors, a more practical aspect of internationalization is outlined for today, which is expressed by increasing share of research in the higher medical education and increasing concentration of funded large-scale cooperation projects which often requires engagement of participants from several countries.

International cooperation and engagement in various projects facilitates development of social and educational equality and represents a precondition for development of unified international norms of regulation of the higher medical education and professional development, which on its part, predetermine sustainable development of the higher medical education quality.

It's no coincidence that the above shifts have predetermined increase of demand and availability of mobility. Students, researchers and pedagogues are ready and strive towards international mobility and the perspective of international mobility is rather attractive for students, making them more competitive. Naturally, increased competition predetermines increase of quality and day by day, more and more educational institutions, research

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<sup>1</sup> It is clear that it is unreal for a single institution, even a high-budgeted one, to keep pace with the progress of such large scale and integrate benefits into teaching and research. For this purpose, it is expedient to cooperate both at the local and regional, as well as international level.

institutes and clinical centers are guided by "international standards" during evaluation and general activities.

Increase of internationalization at TMA is stimulated by the existing close contacts with various European universities and clinical centers, as well as the willingness to enhance them and expand the mutual cooperation in terms of the higher medical education as well as biomedicine and health sciences.

International cooperation occupies a significant place in the strategic development plan of TMA and is mainly directed at institutionalization of learning, teaching and research, through expansion of the student and staff mobility, national, regional and trans-regional cooperation network and exchange of talent, ideas and views with foreign colleagues at the international level.

It is also significant for the Academy to create educational and research conditions of international level both to Georgian and foreign students, engage in the activities developed by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia whose main purpose is to make Georgia an attractive and competitive environment for foreign students and make contribution to the development of the national educational priorities.

The above vision will facilitate development of the Academy, achievement and preservation of high standards of educational and research process.

This document represents a short overview of the internationalization strategy of TMA. Strategic directions are reviewed and updated regularly, once a week.

## 2. Institutional policy and strategy

TMA represents one of the leading institutions of higher medical education in Georgia with 25-year history, whose reputation is based on not only the developing infrastructure of the

Academy, but primarily on the current quality of competence of the teaching, research and clinical staff and aspiration to development. Maintaining the above indicators over years is much more complicated without international cooperation. In response to these challenges, the Academy will permanently review and update the strategic directions and action plans. The valid strategic document underlines the priorities of the Academy and is aimed at the future development of the Academy. Internationalization has two main goals in the strategic vision of the Academy:

1. Intensive internationalization

- creation of international student environment;
- internationalization of education;
- internationalization of research

2. Expansion of cooperation and partner network

- facilitation of specific cooperation in the field of biomedicine, biomedical sciences and health sciences;
- facilitation of specific cooperation with governmental agencies, research institutes and potential employers in terms of professional development at the international level;
- enhancement of cooperation in the field of education.

3. Education and continuous education in the international context -  
internationalization of education

Due to the multi-nationality and cultural diversity of the Academy students, it is clear that most of the Academy graduates will continue their activities beyond Georgia. Internationalization strategy in the context of continuous education defines two key points:

- internationalization of pre-diploma and post-diploma programs and development of graduates;
- facilitation of student mobility

### 3.1. Internationalization of academic programs and post-diploma education

Due to the specific requirements of the medical education and medicine as specialty, the primary goals of the Academy is to train qualified health care professionals for the further development. The Academy conducts educational programs both in Georgian and English. The Georgian program students more intensely engage in international exchange programs, scientific-research activities, international student events etc. on an annual basis. During recent years, demand on knowledge of English and the teaching quality have significantly increased in the Georgian department. Students are willing to work with English literature and other academic materials. The Academy stimulates mobility of Georgian students to the English program and implementation of joint research with participation of Georgian and foreign students. The Academy also facilitates enrollment of Georgian students to the English program. By taking such steps, the Academy is willing to improve and enhance the desire of students for international engagement, improve their competence in this regard and facilitate their integration into international activities at a respective level.

For the purpose of achieving this goal, as well as enhancing cooperation between Georgian and foreign students and educating a new generation of pedagogical staff, the Academy facilitates the practice of mutual teaching and successful students will assist the first year students in processing the material in the form of extra-curricular meetings.

For the purpose of strengthening of skills of working for foreign literature among the Georgian department students and facilitating internationalization of students, the English program of teaching will be integrated into the Georgian program which will be implemented in the form of introduction of teaching some subjects (for example, research skills) in English.

Based on the experience of the European universities, the Academy plans to integrate the English program of teaching into the Georgian program gradually and reach the 10% indicator of English teaching in the Georgian program by 20\_\_.

Currently, an updated curriculum is being introduced at the Academy which is adapted to international requirements and is also directed at development of academic, research and communication skills necessary for international activities among students which will facilitate training of competitive doctors, researchers and healthcare professionals for the international professional market.

As one of the significant means of integration at the early stage of internationalization among students, the Academy considers participation of students in various summer schools and clinical internship programs. For this purpose, the Academy plans to expand contacts with foreign universities and clinics.

### 3.2 Facilitation of student mobility

Facilitation of international mobility among students represents one of the central strategic goals of TMA. According to strategic data<sup>2</sup>, Georgia is one of the leading countries in terms of student mobility in the world. The goal of the Academy is to keep pace with this tendency and drive students towards international mobility.

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<sup>2</sup>Erasmus+ Georgia representation data (the exact publication to be inserted)

The key point of international mobility is recognition of acquired knowledge or qualification by the parties. Currently, the academic process is conducted at the Academy in accordance with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) which plays the main role in recognition of credits accumulated during (and not only) mobility. At the same time, the Academy is striving towards proper undergoing of the international accreditation process of institutions of higher medical education planned by the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME) by 2023, which will facilitate more large-scale integration of the Academy at the international arena.

For the purpose of enhancement of mobility among students, the Academy plans to expand bilateral cooperation with European universities, establish relations with the US universities and together with other exchange programs, intensively cooperate within the framework of EU-funded Erasmus+ Key Action 1 project, whose main goal is facilitation of mobility.

Enhanced mobility among students will facilitate formation and enhancement of knowledge, skills and competencies between them, which will increase their competitiveness both locally and globally.

Within the framework of the internationalization strategy, the Academy will continue seeking the funding sources for international mobility of students and enhance engagement in international projects.

For facilitation of internationalization among students, respective information will be disseminated on the Academy webpage, through social media, as well as in the premises of the Academy in printed form, and facilitation and assistance to international students for their participation in various activities will be ensured by the Department of International Relations in the form of individual and group consultations.

When selecting students for mobility purposes, the Academy will be impartial and provide equal availability for the candidates, regardless of ethnicity, religion and race.

The Academy will also take the following steps for the purpose of facilitating the student mobility:

- identification and elimination of circumstances preventing student mobility;
- development and implementation of optimal mobility framework;
- identification of students who do not meet the mobility program requirements, defining the reasons for non-meeting and stimulation of improvement;

TMA will continue the impact of student mobility on the further activity and success of students by regular surveys of the mobility program beneficiary students/graduates which will be done annually.

TMA will organize meetings where successful students/graduates of TMA who participated in the mobility program will meet the Academy students, share their experience and stimulate their engagement in international projects.

For students who are not willing, or for certain reasons cannot participate in mobility programs, "virtual mobility" program will be developed together with partner universities within the framework of which the student will be allowed to take some subjects or subject component remotely, in online mode, in accordance with the program preliminarily agreed by the parties.

The Academy will also encourage intercultural activities of students and will facilitate synergy of students into international student organizations.

#### 4. Research and transfer of knowledge in the international context

As already highlighted in the preamble to this document, during the last decade, scientific and clinical researches have acquired a collaborative nature and the leading, large-scale research projects are mainly implemented by international consortia. Funding of

international cooperative research projects increases on an annual basis which again confirms the need of internationalization of the Academy.

For the purpose of internationalization of research, the Academy will carry out activities at the national, regional and international level.

For the same purpose, the following key areas are outlined in the strategy of the Academy:

- engagement in international research projects and obtaining funding;
  - EU-funded project - Horizon 2020,
  - Shota Rustaveli National Scientific Foundation grant projects;
  - other international grant sources;
- management and internationalization of the internal scientific grant program of the Academy;
- attraction of international human resources;
- facilitation of the pedagogical staff mobility;
- regular publications in top-rated international magazines;

#### 4.1. Engagement in international research projects and obtaining funding

For the purpose of internationalization of scientific and clinical researches, seeking for foreign partners and mutual cooperation, the Academy will actively facilitate:

1. participation of TMA students, employees of Biomedical and Clinical Departments in international scientific conferences, symposiums and work meetings;
2. establishment of close, professional relations with successful compatriot scientists working in the foreign scientific-research, research institutes, using their scientific potential, sharing knowledge and experience and harmonization of the scientific

research conducted at the national research institutes and universities with international standards of scientific research;

3. engagement of TMA students, employees of Biomedical and Clinical Departments and young scientists in international scientific research projects which will facilitate development of their scientific potential and integration into the international scientific

For all the above and the scientific research activities of Biomedical and Clinical Departments of TMA, it is required to seek and obtain local and international grant funding, and the Academy will actively assist TMA students, young scientists and employees of Biomedical and Clinical Departments in this regard.

#### 4.2. Attraction of international human resources and facilitation of the pedagogical staff mobility

Success of research largely depends on recruitment of the leading researcher in the specific field and the ability of the institution to attract talented and perspective young researchers and scientists. The vital role of the international, qualified researcher in the international visibility and success of the research should also be mentioned.

Due to the above, TMA is ready to take steps in the following directions:

- attraction of interest in scientific research among students of various educational programs of the Academy, facilitating and educating them as young scientists;
- invitation of a scientist of international experience and recognition to lead the research;

- fairness and transparency of the participant selection procedure for scientific-research projects;
- offering the administrative facilitation and adaptation program to the invited researcher;
- development of qualification improvement programs for the scientific-research and pedagogical staff of the Academy, including for the purpose of improvement of language and professional competencies.

Staff mobility remains as a significant strategic objective. By the present moment, part of the academic staff had an opportunity to enjoy the pedagogical staff mobility programs and observe the work of their foreign colleagues in the UK, Latvia, Italy and Turkey and thereafter share the obtained experience with their colleagues.

For the purpose of facilitation of staff mobility, the Academy will continue to support and encourage the staff members through seeking new partners and enhancement of the existing contacts. Also, the Academy will take steps in the following directions:

- providing information to the pedagogical staff and researchers about individual travel grants established by Shota Rustaveli National Scientific Foundation;
- participation in Erasmus+ grant competition for the purpose of creating the staff mobility opportunities;
- providing consultations and administrative support to the interested staff;
- development of impartial and fair staff member selection mechanisms for the purpose of using the existing mobility opportunities;
- integration of staff mobility component within the framework of bilateral cooperation;
- development of "virtual mobility" projects for pedagogical staff;
- seeking alternative international funding sources for staff mobility.

## 5. Support of internationalization

In the long-term strategic plan of TMA, significant part is dedicated to expansion-enhancement of the international cooperation network and permanent improvement of existing positions. As a result of the efforts which will be made by TMA for achievement of the above goals, visibility and reputation of the Academy will be increased at the international scale, which will influence the growth of the number of high-level Georgian, as well as foreign students, pedagogues and scientists at the Academy and increase of the Academy engagement in various international projects.

For the purpose of supporting internationalization, the Academy will continue to develop administrative services and quality assurance in this regard.