

„Approved“
Rector, Irene Shotadze
20 December, 2023

Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy Internationalization Strategy

1. International Portfolio of TMA

Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy (TMA, hereinafter the Academy) continuously strives to strengthen the quality of internationalization and establish itself at the international arena through in such manner. Hence, internationalization for TMA serves as one of the cornerstones of the strategic vision. Subsequently, internationalization has received a rather special attention and been significantly reinforced since 2018.

Such approach towards internationalization is at most determined by ongoing globalization processes and geopolitical changes which take place in the country and around the globe. This in its turn significantly amplifies the demand to train competitive personnel, compatible with the requirements of the international labour market.

Today TMA is actively involved in various international initiatives and similarly to the western universities and through cooperation with them, aspires to settle itself and get integrated within the international educational environment, as well as engage in the international competition and establish the highest international levels of education.

By 2024, international portfolio of TMA is represented by following implemented activities:

- a. Increasing number of international students and the expanded geographic area of coverage;
- b. Increasing number of international cooperation agreements with more than 20 universities of 15 countries across Europe and Asia, including the universities of Antwerp, Sofia, Berlin, Granada, Santiago de Compostela, Altinbas (Istanbul), Catania, Molise, Vilnius, Klaipeda, Radboud (Nijmegen), Bialystok, Lodz, Warsaw, Kosice and Masaryk, Ataturk and Rize;
- c. Successful implementation of EU Erasmus+ CBHE (capacity building for higher education) projects with different roles and levels of engagement, including the roles of an applicant and successively coordinator and actively contributing member of consortia;
- d. Improved compliance of educational programmes, implemented by TMA with international standards and increased degree of international recognition through obtained accreditation in accordance with the requirements of the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME);
- e. Increased international clerkship opportunities for TMA students in different countries through cooperation with the International Federation of Medical Student Associations (IFMSA) and the Global Education Exchange Program in Medicine and Health Professions (GEMx);

2. The goal of internationalization of TMA

Internationalization strategy represents the vision of Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy towards the processes, directed in terms of internationalization and integration within the international higher educational environment and is clearly reflected in the Mission and Vision of the institution.

The main goal of this document is to support achievement of the benchmarks, determined by the Strategic Development Goals of TMA and in its turn promote establishment of international level education, thus successively ensure training of healthcare professionals at the national and international levels. In addition, internationalization strategy takes into account the updated requirements of the national benchmarks of medical education, as well as most up-to-date international trends. In conclusion, the internationalization strategy aims to create and administer the process of internationalization in a structured and systematic manner, in order to support implementation of the mission of the institution.

The main goals of the internationalization strategy can be formulated under the following key points:

- Increasing visibility in the international educational space and establishing an international reputation
- Creating an international environment, through international students, staff and "internationalisation at home";
- Delivering high-quality education in accordance to the international standards through internationalization of the curriculum and trans-cultural education
- Internationalization of research and knowledge transfer
- Promote international experience opportunities for students, academic, visiting and administrative staff of TMA by ensuring international mobility programmes of different duration and nature.

3. Objectives of internationalization

In order to ensure achievement of the strategic goals, TMA has established following objectives:

3.1 Increasing visibility in the international educational space and establishing an international reputation: - One of the most important goals for TMA is to increase international visibility and recognition, which in its turn should be reflected to the structured and targeted actions in terms of strengthening the reputation, activities and values of the institution. Increased awareness in its turn will enhance interest among potential students, create opportunities for international mobility and research collaborations, and in the long run, strengthen the Academy's position in both national and international ranking systems. This in its turn is proportional to expansion of the geographical area of coverage, both in terms of partnerships and student representation. Thus, following objectives were defined in order to achieve this goal:

3.1.1 - Develop an active and targeted partnership network by strengthening existing evidence-based partnerships and developing new strategic collaborations; which in the long term will create more opportunities for collaboration and establish potential partnerships which will be mutually beneficial for both TMA and partner institutions.

3.1.2 – Organize incoming and outgoing visits, both within Erasmus+ mobility opportunities and beyond, directed towards specific needs of TMA, which will facilitate creation of new mobility and research opportunities, establish strategic partnerships and attract both potential students, international staff and young researchers .

3.1.3 - Expand the public relation services of TMA in terms of both traditional and digital marketing services, in order to represent the strengths of the Academy, as well as disseminate knowledge and experience and introduce the Mission, Values and Vision of TMA to the wider audience;

3.1.4 – Deliver the latest western standards and recommendations of medical education, through continuous and consistent introduction of innovations within the current educational processes of TMA;

3.1.5 – Ensure consistent communication with various international organizations, potential employers, diplomatic representations, student recruitment agencies, Alumni and other stakeholders;

3.2 - Creating an international environment, through international students, staff and "internationalisation at home";

TMA aspires to expand the geographical area of student recruitment and in such way enhance the degree of internationalization of the institution. This in its turn considers extensive focus at various educational exhibitions and contact seminars across different countries, together with targeted activities in terms of securing recognition for the educational programmes, offered by TMA by the authorities of different foreign counties. In order to complete this goal, following tasks are defined:

3.2.1 – Organise and execute various promotional, marketing or information campaigns at the international level; through participation in international educational exhibitions and similar events;

3.2.2 - Prepare information and promotion materials upon the evidence, provided by the studies of the international market;

3.2.3 - Obtain official recognition of the programmes, offered by TMA in strategically important target countries and acquire the right to recruit students through completing applicable registration and authorization procedures;

3.2.4 – Encourage TMA Alumni to promote awareness regarding the Academy;

3.2.5 – Establish active cooperation with the diplomatic corps of Georgia in the target countries of high priority and the diplomatic representations of the same countries in Georgia.

3.2.6 – Ensure diversity of student representation by offering both undergraduate and postgraduate educational programmes, as well as joint Master's/PhD programmes and international short training courses;

3.2.7 – Facilitate resolution of the issues, related to social adaptation of foreign students at a high level and create conditions of domestic and cultural comfort, while ensuring safety and stability, necessary for the learning process;

3.2.8 – Establish student and Alumni clubs in accordance to their specific interests, by developing appropriate attributes, implementing cultural events and creating an empathetic environment;

3.2.9 - Develop opportunities for students for obtaining international experience through diversification and development of existing educational, research and practical activities. Among them Erasmus+ mobility grants, semester mobilities under bilateral agreements, short-term clinical internships and other international mobility opportunities.

3.2.10 - Conduct staff training sessions in order to raise awareness regarding cross-cultural issues, facilitate the educational process and to simplify the dialogue with students.

3.3 - Delivering high-quality education in accordance to the international standards through internationalization of the curriculum and trans-cultural education

Modernization of educational programmes of TMA and increasing their coherence with the Western standards, as well as national benchmarks of medical education through internationalization and trans-cultural education is one of the most important strategic goals for TMA. Thus, in order to introduce innovations among educational programmes and ensure their improvement, in 2021 was founded the Centre for Innovations in Medical Education (CIMED) in TMA, which is headed by distinguished professors and experts of medical education from the universities of Antwerp (Belgium) and Groningen (Netherlands). The Centre serves to implement innovative strategies while updating the educational programmes of TMA, based on the best international practices, which in its turn will contribute to further growth of attractiveness towards the graduates of TMA at both local and international labour markets. In order to accelerate these processes and achieve established goals, following tasks were defined:

3.3.1 – Evaluation and improvement of existing programmes through introducing innovations and best practices under the leadership of CIMED, foreign specialists and partner universities;

3.3.2 – Encourage and promote professional development of academic and visiting staff by creating opportunities for international mobility and ensuring far reaching dissemination of the mobility outcomes through proactive engagement of the Faculty Development Department;

3.3.3 – Promote improvement of language competences among the students of TMA by creating and implementing relevant opportunities;

3.3.4 – Promote acquisition of Georgian language among the foreign students TMA in order to enhance their integration into the institutional culture and the medical environment in general;

3.3.5 – Disseminate international experience and best practices, obtained throughout various international opportunities (mobility, scientific-practical event) by implementing trainings, workshops, lectures and other relevant tools.

3.4 - Internationalization of research and knowledge transfer

Contemporary education is hard to imagine without a strong, interdisciplinary and regional research component, while novel or already familiar challenges clearly accentuate the need for multidisciplinary and global approach. Therefore, establishing strong research component through international cooperation and strategic partnerships is pointed out as one of the main priorities of TMA. It can be said that since 2018, TMA has taken impressive steps in terms of creating and developing a favourable research environment. This in its turn has opened up new opportunities and expanded the future perspectives. The cardinal goal of internationalizing research is to promote and strengthen international scientific cooperation and enhance positioning within international scientific environment. In order to achieve this goal, it is important to ensure the following:

3.4.1 - Partnership development: promotion of cooperation with international universities, research institutions, industry and donors, which includes signing cooperation agreements and memoranda, as well as finding partners for research initiatives of TMA. At the same time, it is important to promote access to international research infrastructure (laboratories, centres, technological platforms, etc.).

3.4.2 - Mobility and Exchange Programmes: Seeking and developing programmes to promote research internships for staff, students and graduates.

Technology Transfer: Facilitating the Regulation of Data Management and Intellectual Property Rights Issues in International Research Projects.

3.4.3 – Evaluation and monitoring: establish mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of activities carried out towards internationalization of research, including assessment of international cooperation, directed at enhanced positioning of TMA within international scientific environment.

3.4.4 – Sustainability and continuous improvement: ensure and improve the sustainability of international research cooperation through regular review of ongoing and implemented activities, as well as planning successive projects in a timely manner. In conclusion, the internationalization policy for research activities implies both strengthening international research capabilities, as well as promoting implementation of the third mission of TMA.

4. Conclusion

Nowadays, the key towards maintaining international competitiveness is through bringing the quality of medical education and biomedical research into line with international standards. Naturally, Internationalization strategy of TMA serves to ensure achievement of these goals, while harmonization of educational processes with the international standards, as well as expansion and diversification of foreign partnerships remain to be top prerequisites for successful implementation of the objectives, determined by the internationalization strategy.

Implementation of this Internationalization Strategy will further strengthen the valuable position, established by Tbilisi Medical Academy across the educational market and enhance the well-deserved authority gained among foreign partners, while successively create a solid foundation for new achievements at the international arena.