

## Institutional Benchmarking

Institutional Benchmarking refers to the process of measuring the performance of university products, services or processes against other higher education institutions that are considered to be the best in the market.

Free Academy of Tbilisi identified several best practices, which are focused on understanding important experiences and sharing them further. The reality revealed by benchmarking is a kind of guide to take a leading position in the higher education space. The Academy this year, implemented institutional benchmarking, which included relevant educational higher education institutions, both within the country and abroad. The purpose of benchmarking is to study the successful experience of competitors, evaluate and measure the relevant situation in order to identify competitive environmental factors. The Academy assessed its place in the competitive environment space and made a realistic analysis to optimize the processes. Benchmarking is an ongoing process that identifies the existence of different and desirable values with competing institutions. Benchmarking can be one-time, but it is important to activate it on an ongoing basis in order to take into account the dynamics of the positions of leading institutions in order to share best practices and implement restructuring. Through Benchmarking, an in-depth analysis of regional and international institutions was carried out to assess their experiences for sharing. Preliminary data collection using a commercial online database was carried out, which allowed us to identify problems and identify new potential by comparing the undergraduate education programs of competing universities, teaching universities and colleges.

In order to assess academic sustainability, an assessment of the professional development opportunities of academic, scientific and invited staff was carried out, as well as an assessment of the development opportunities of teaching quality. In the process of benchmarking, a comparison of the resources, current and planned activities, achieved results, and educational

programs of competing Higher Educational Institutions taken as a target segment was carried out with those educational programs that are compatible with the educational programs of Free Academy of Tbilisi. In order to achieve reasonable goals for the students, the locations of the institutions were also measured by Benchmarking in order to prioritize the relevant segment. The total number of students was measured, which was also determined as an important element in the bidding process. One of the main objectives of benchmarking was to identify the resources of each university, to analyze the sustainability achieved by these institutions and the implementation of stability with the existing capabilities. Benchmarking made it possible not only to analyze colleges, but also to review universities and educational universities.

Benchmarking analyzed the strategies of higher education institutions, the diversity of educational programs according to the types and profiles of institutions, as well as curricula. The institution has accepted the challenge of operating in the context of intense competition both regionally, in Europe and around the world, where the most important aspect is a less stringent regulatory framework, as the competition itself is dramatically intense and rigid around the world.

Benchmarking has confirmed that the following specializations, such as business administration, law and psychology, are among the most sought-after specializations in the labor market, as the employment rate of these specializations is increasing, and at the same time, the person/s with the relevant academic degree are already recognized as best sellers. They can be employed both in the state and private sector. Therefore, in the modern labor market there is almost no field where a graduate of these fields cannot be employed. And also, the existence of the privileged position of these educational undergraduate programs is focused on the needs of employers within the country or abroad. The presence of demand for these specialties is confirmed by the higher educational institutions reviewed by us, where these faculties/schools operate successfully in the accredited mode, and moreover, the relevant part of the Higher Education Institutions even passed cluster accreditation, which unequivocally means the existence of a real demand for these specialties.

In order to conduct benchmarking, state and private higher education institutions were selected, both inside and outside the country, according to the "Webometrics" ranking, which is one of the most famous international organizations and investigates the scientific success of universities and the influence of their online resources. (<https://www.webometrics.info/en/europe/georgia%20>):

**Top three state higher educational institutions:**

- I. Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University;
- II. Georgian Technical University;
- III. Ilia state university.

**Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (TSU)** - it should be noted that Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (TSU) was recognized as the first higher educational institution in the educational space with competitive advantages and ratings and was rated as the only university from Georgia, which is among 1.5% of the best universities in the world is included in.

The first national university in the Caucasus was opened on January 26, 1918 (in the new style, February 8), the day of commemoration of Davit Agmashenebeli. The council of professors chose Petre Melikishvili as the first rector of the university on the proposal of Ivane Javakhishvili, and Ivane Javakhishvili himself headed the Faculty of Speech of Wisdom. In 1989, Tbilisi State University was named after its founder - Ivane Javakhishvili.

In addition to the leading competitive advantage, the validity established by Benchmarking is the most important, that the educational directions of economics and business (business administration), law and psychology are recognized as the dominant faculties out of the seven faculties of Tbilisi State University, which determine the priorities themselves. Also, the medical faculty, which is not the goal of our analysis at this stage. That is, out of seven faculties of TSU, in which up to 22 thousand students study, there are three dominant faculties, which were implemented in Free Academy of Tbilisi as a result of labor market analysis and empirical research of competitors, and all these directions are accredited. The purpose of benchmarking in academia was determined by comparing existing accredited

educational programs with analogues in order to develop and enable the compatibility of the modernized European dimension with analogue programmes.

Along with bachelor's, master's and doctoral educational programs, Tbilisi State University offers higher professional educational programs, as well as short and long-term certificate programs. On the basis of close cooperation with foreign universities, all students have the opportunity to participate in exchange and joint international study programs and obtain a double academic degree.

The given statistics represent the impressive number of academic staff of the Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University according to the faculties:

- Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences - 42 academic and invited staff;
- Faculty of Economics and Business - 106 academic and invited staff;
- Faculty of Law - 70 academic and invited staff;
- Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences - 149 academic and invited staff;
- Faculty of Humanities - 179 academic and invited staff;
- Faculty of Social and Political Sciences - 67 academic and invited staff;
- Faculty of Medicine - 54 academic and invited staff.

It is the vision of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University that by 2024, together with the Bloomberg Research Center, which is the only one and only belongs to TSU, to provide:

- Harmonization of educational programs with the demands of society and the labor market, including through constantly developing information and communication technologies;
- increased number of fundamental and applied researches;
- Internationalization of educational, research and administrative processes.

**Technical University of Georgia** - taking into account the specifics of the European higher education space, in order to identify the best experience for single-level qualifications, the second higher educational institution - Technical University of Georgia was searched and ranked. It should be noted that in 1928 the Polytechnic Faculty was separated from Tbilisi State University and the Polytechnic Institute of Georgia was founded on its basis. In Technical University of Georgia the core academic values were also analyzed and the mission, goals, and relevant Bachelor's educational programs of Business Administration, Faculty of Law, and Psychology were established and the experience was understood. The actions and processes by which the Technical University of Georgia reached the second place in the shortest time among the higher educational institutions measured by the ratings according to Webometrics - the international rating system of universities were analyzed. As a result of the analysis, it was determined that the Higher Educational Institutions implemented and aligned a number of components of the standard, strengthened the weak points, shared international experiences, which led to the best results in the short term. Its weakness remains the lack of publication rates in high-ranking academic journals.

**Ilia State University** - in contrast to Technical University of Georgia, it was important to understand the experience of Ilia State University from the point of view that if Technical University of Georgia was able to rank as the second highest educational institution in a minimum time, what was the reason that the leader of Ilia State University with such great achievements and successful experience the position was given to Technical University of Georgia. In order to understand, it was important to evaluate Ilia State University, whose results according to the unified national exams of 2014, in accordance with the rate of filling vacant places, Ilia State University ranked second among the state higher education institutions of its profile. Ilia State University was also in the leading positions according to the choice of entrants - according to the registration indicators of entrants, the most popular Bachelor's programs of Ilia State University are business, law, philosophy, Georgian philology and biology. Ilia State University's Bachelor's educational program in law ranks first among similar programs among state universities, according to the first choice of applicants.

Benchmarking of private higher education institutions from the first ten ratings was also carried out:

- Institute of Public Affairs of Georgia - "JIPA";
- Black Sea International University - "IBSU";
- Alte University;
- New higher education institution - "Newun" (college).

**Institute of Public Affairs of Georgia "GIPA"** - Institute of Public Affairs of Georgia "GIPA" was founded in 1994 and it includes 10 undergraduate educational programs, which are united in the following schools:

- School of Government;
- Caucasian School of Journalism and Media Management;
- School of Law and Politics;
- School of Social Sciences

Today, GIPA has about 3,000 alumni, 90% of whom are successfully working in the public and business sectors, private, non-governmental and international organizations. In parallel with educational programs and training courses, GIPA successfully implements different types of projects, manages the first English-language student radio in Georgia, which broadcasts on the frequency FM 94.3 (RADIO GIPA), also periodically hosts meetings and conducts debates on current issues in the club "Frontline Georgia".

GIPA's main strategies were analysed, their educational programmes, program needs were assessed and European dimensions were identified to analyze the levels of achievement of curriculum objectives and expected learning outcomes. GIPA's strengths are high public awareness and prestige, strong international connections and diversity of projects. The total number of academic and visiting professors in all faculties looks like this:

- Total academic staff - 92
- Total invited personnel – 200

**The University of the Black Sea - "IBSU" (year of establishment: 1995)** - The University of the Black Sea carries out bachelor's and master's programs, among which the business administration program in Georgian and foreign languages, the law program in Georgian and foreign languages occupy a dominant position. The university is focused on engaging in exchange projects for successful and high-achieving students. It has a media center - Ibsu blog.

The total number of academic and invited professors in all faculties looks like this:

School of Computer Science and Architecture:

- academic staff - 9;
- Invited personnel - 22.

School of Business:

- academic staff - 24;
- Invited personnel - 61.

School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences:

- academic staff - 38;
- Invited personnel - 78.

School of Law and Public Administration:

- academic staff - 20;
- Invited personnel - 21.

**Alte University (formerly "Open University")** - Founded in 2000 - "Aalte University" offers 12 academic programs at both Bachelor and Master levels: Psychology, Business Administration, Law and others. The university has: exchange programs with partner universities in Europe, Asia and the Caucasus region. The priorities of "Alte" University are: full financing of studies

by the "University Fund" in case of high academic performance and promotion of employment with the active involvement of "Student Success Service".

One of the most important segments of the university is the offer of free Chinese language courses for students at the Confucius Institute, as well as exchange programs at leading universities in Europe and Asia. And as for the number of academic staff, it looks like this:

School of Information Technology (IT):

Academic staff - 8.

International School of Medicine:

Academic staff - 7.

School of Humanities and Social Sciences:

Academic staff - 14.

School of law:

Academic staff - 18.

School of Business

Academic staff - 10.

**A new higher education institution - "Newuni"** was established in 2013 - the most priority need was to implement Benchmarking of the new higher education institution. It represents a college and positions itself in the educational market only in the direction of business administration, tourism and international relations.



Benchmarking identified institutions with the best experience and public responsibility in Europe, where relevant ranking criteria were taken into account:

- I. QS ranking of the best universities;
- II. Ranking of world universities of Times Higher Education;
- III. Educational program accreditation.

### **International Higher Educational Institutions:**

**Oxford University - University of Oxford, United Kingdom** <https://www.ox.ac.uk/> Year of foundation: There is no exact date of foundation, although some form of teaching has existed at Oxford since 1096.

The University of Oxford is one of the largest and consistently ranked in the top ten universities in the world in terms of numbers and number of programs. One of the main dimensions of the conceptual approach of the University of Oxford is the cornerstone of quality development, which is an important condition for relevance, mobility and attractiveness. The strength of the University of Oxford is the law school/faculty, which a priori determines its leadership on a global scale. The University of Oxford is a federation of thirty law schools. Legal scholars are faculty members at colleges and universities, and they coordinate and support the teaching process of 143 academics. Through their standard structure, this faculty is able to support, teach and research a diverse and distinguished group of students from around the world. Due to their excellent programs, the student-to-academic staff ratio is around 7:1, which is really the best indicator. In addition to a strong law school and a corresponding attraction, the University of Oxford offers programs in psychology and experimental psychology. Oxford's Department of Experimental Psychology is regarded as one of the leading psychology departments in the UK. Currently, there are particularly strong groups in the fields of human cognitive processes, neuroscience, language, development, social psychology, and psychological disorders. It is interesting to note that the University of Oxford does not offer a business administration program at the undergraduate level, but business administration is taught only at the graduate level. But it should be noted that the bachelor's program is implemented in the direction of economics and management.

**Cambridge University - University of Cambridge, Great Britain** Year of foundation: The first college in Cambridge was founded by the Bishop of Ely in 1284.

The priority of educational programs at the University of Cambridge is determined by the presence of such areas as psychological and behavioral sciences undergraduate programs. An undergraduate law program has been in place at Cambridge since the thirteenth century. The main subjects of legal study in all European universities were civil law (ancient Roman law) and canon law of the Church. The University Law Society is open to all members of the University and in particular to all law students and those who wish to pursue a successful legal career. The society has principal officers who are law students and they offer members a variety of opportunities, both academically and socially. It should be noted that the University of Cambridge does not offer a business administration program at the undergraduate level, but it does offer an undergraduate program in management studies, which covers 6 main areas:

- economics of firms and markets;
- finance and accounting;
- marketing;
- operations management;
- organizational behavior;
- Quantitative methods.

The University of Cambridge has always been focused on research, because research is the driving force behind higher education in the modern era.

**Michigan State University - Michigan State University (MSU).** Michigan State University is a member of the Association of American Universities and one of the top 100 universities in the world. It was founded in 1855. It is known for its traditionally strong academic disciplines and professional programs. The main mission of the University of Michigan is to develop the knowledge of students and change their lives for career advancement.

MSU is committed to fostering a safe and inclusive community characterized by care and respect for others.

The University of Michigan includes 17 colleges, 400 undergraduate, graduate and certificate programs. Students can choose their preferred faculty based on their career interests.

**University College London, UCL** - Great Britain has been studied with particular attention due to its status. University College London is considered to have a rich heritage of philosophical research, which is still successfully pursued. The mentioned component is a priority worldwide as a driving force of education. Located in the heart of London, the global legal capital, UCL continues to attract a unique and diverse international student body and staff. Because of their hard work, their research has a worldwide impact, shaping legal and judicial policy in the UK and around the world. UCL is consistently ranked because they have received top marks for research and are also ranked highly in student surveys.

**London Kings College** - London Kings College is the fourth oldest university in England. The college is represented by more than 31,000 students from over 150 countries and more than 8,500 employees. King's College continuously offers students professional study profiles in banking, taxation, entrepreneurial companies and others, which speaks to their innovative and competitive nature. They provide students not only with quality education, but also with the research conducted and also the training programs offered.

**The University of Edinburgh** <https://www.ed.ac.uk/> - A world-leading institution shaped centuries ago (the University of Edinburgh officially opened in 1583) by values and beliefs, a commitment to excellence and the success and other achievements of its staff, students and alumni. The University of Edinburgh is home to a law school that influences civic change both locally and globally. According to the World University Rankings, the University of Edinburgh's reputation with employers is impressive and reaches 97.2%. The University of Edinburgh runs an undergraduate psychology degree program with an excellent reputation for research, teaching and student support. The University of Edinburgh has a strong business school that runs a variety of business programs and is taught by world-leading industry

professionals and researchers. The University of Edinburgh Business School is training the next generation of strategic leaders.

**Queen Mary University of London** <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/> - Queen Mary University of London was founded in 1785 and has a distinguished history. Queen Mary University of London is one of the leading research-oriented higher education institutions in the United Kingdom. Queen Mary University offers students access to and access to a high-quality learning experience. There is a separate independent business and management school at Queen Mary University of London, which aims to create responsible future leaders with the skills to interpret problems, analyze and make innovative solutions. Queen Mary University of London also has an independent School of Psychology, where psychology is taught within the School of Biological and Behavioral Sciences. Queen Mary University turned out to be the best case for Tbilisi Free Academy, since it matches the reality of TTA with the student contingent. Founded in 1965, the Law School has grown from 30 students and four academic staff to over 2,000 students and 130 academic staff in 2020. Their consistent growth makes them enter the list of the best law schools in Europe. The main actors of the Law School are the Department of Law and the Center for Commercial Law Studies (CCLS).

**Catholic University of Louvane** - Catholic University, Belgium founded in 1425. The Catholic University of Louvain is one of the oldest universities in the world, which also meets the highest modern scientific requirements. With a research expenditure of €365 million in 2012, the Catholic University of Leuven is the leading research university in Europe. Many of its graduates hold vital positions in central and regional public administration in Belgium and in the European and international community in Brussels and elsewhere.

**Leiden University** - Netherlands <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en> Leiden University has seven faculties. Leiden University was founded in 1575 and is one of the leading international research universities in Europe. It has been a top-ranked university for many years. It leads the ranking of Dutch universities and is among the top 100 universities in the world. Research and education are closely linked at Leiden University. This means that the teaching is often carried

out by top researchers and it means that their students are exposed to research from the start of their first year. Leiden University operates an undergraduate psychology education program that offers a variety of teaching formats, modern ICT tools and blended learning to support teaching in the undergraduate program. Leiden University does not offer a bachelor's degree in business administration. However, it implements a joint undergraduate educational program of economics, public administration and management.

**University of Paris 1 Pantheon - Sorbonne** - - Sorbonne University is distinguished by the fact that they teach all law courses in English. Panthéon - Sorbonne University is known for legal practitioners and visiting scholars who lecture students and share practical experience. University students have the opportunity to take a practical course in the most important legal institutions of France, such as the Senate, the National Assembly, the Constitutional Council and others.

**By benchmarking it was determined:**

The conceptual approach of Oxford University in the direction of the cornerstone of quality development, which represents an important condition for relevance, mobility and attractiveness, became an important challenge for Free Academy of Tbilisi. The Academy, within the framework of its activity and full autonomy is based on this standard step by step to bring this realistic indicator to the final goal and to transfer the knowledge and practical skills relevant to the sixth level of students in the academic environment. Here is an unmistakable proof of the real environmental factor, which Academy was able to implement at this stage. In 2023, seven educational programs were granted unconditional accreditation with the involvement of an international expert. If we analyze the scale of mobility promotion, not only in relation to competing colleges, but also in the scale of the corresponding educational universities, the mobility process of Free Academy of Tbilisi is one of the most successful in the region and the dynamics of the indicators is increasing. Finally, the rebranding that the institution has implemented in this short period is not only the cornerstone of the

development of the quality culture, but also represents the best example of gaining a competitive advantage.

In addition to identifying institutional standards, Benchmarking assessed the performance of all undergraduate educational programs of Tbilisi Free Academy in accordance with the goals and expected learning outcomes set by the curriculum.

**As a result of benchmarking, the strengths of the academy were highlighted** - educational programs in demand in the labor market, the presence of a strong "intellectual" resource, the best indicator of the ratio of students and academic staff, low rate of strong "intellectual drain"; Life long learning; The best infrastructure, the campus in the city center and the best location; Current material and technical base.

**As a result of benchmarking, the improvement areas of the academy were identified** - scientific research, strengthening of internationalization policy, attraction of local and foreign practitioners, improvement of the quality and relevance of the third mission.

**Based on the conclusions obtained by benchmarking, the best experiences were shared and systematic international perspectives were defined:** sharing of interdisciplinary views, addition of joint undergraduate educational programs, implementation of systematic international perspectives, etc.

Free Academy of Tbilisi is an autonomous institution with fundamental historical heritage, special values and long-term social opportunities. The results obtained by benchmarking should be taken into account and in some cases it is possible to define them as fundamental principles, since the Tbilisi Free Academy has been an alma mater institution in the educational space since 1996, and the educational programs implemented in the academy have been presented as a priority direction over the years.

Benchmarking parameters were selected for comparison. It could be a number of criteria, such as in the case of our study; The collected information was carefully analyzed and a project of

changes included in its function was developed; Changes have been made at the institutional and programmatic level, and the planned changes are also being prepared; Changes are being made in the academic and practical activities of the Academy.

### **Conclusion:**

By identifying the educational dimensions of local and foreign universities, important priorities were determined:

**First** - the main value of Free Academy of Tbilisi is the constant striving for changes, looking beyond the existing borders, and at the same time striving for new challenges, to be the best in what we do.

**Second** - like Louvain Catholic University and others, Free Academy of Tbilisi has a long tradition of employment in the public and private sector.

**Thirdly** - the majority of foreign institutions are universities with great traditions, which span many centuries of establishment (eg: First College in Cambridge, Leiden University, King's College in London, etc.), and Tbilisi Free Academy is one of the first private institutions in the region, which in the field of education It has the best experience of existence in relation to other private higher institutions. Tbilisi Free Academy currently has more than 2,800 graduates, 90% of whom are successfully working in the public and business sectors, in particular, in non-governmental and international organizations, and among them 68% of graduates are employed according to their field.

