

Study: Implementation of the new Law Benchmarks in the process of accreditation of academic programs

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Short Summary

Law of Georgia on Higher Education sets Law as a regulated profession, which implies not only granting of an academic degree to a student but passing certain qualification exams to enter the profession. The legal framework also requires adoption of law benchmarks. The benchmark is an academic standard, which sets minimum requirements to grant qualification for a bachelor and master degree.

The Law Benchmark document is a basis for accreditation of all academic law programs. The Benchmark was adopted in 2011 but due to renewal of National Qualification Framework, it required renewal as well. In 2019, a working group was created which worked on the document that was adopted by the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) in 2020².

The accreditation process of academic programs with the new Law Benchmark started from June 2020. With the USAID/PROLoG support a small survey was implemented by a local expert, Konstantine Chokoraia during April-June 2021.

Aim of the Survey: Evaluate implementation process of the new Law Benchmark in the current process of accreditation of academic law programs and provide recommendations for uniform application of the Law Benchmark and strengthening of the academic programs.

Survey methodology: During the survey, accreditation documentation of 28 academic programs from 17 universities (both bachelor and master) was evaluated. The documentation included academic programs, self-evaluation reports, accreditation expert reports and decisions of the Accreditation Board. Focus group discussions were also held with the accreditation experts, members of the Accreditation Board and representatives of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Findings and Recommendations: Based on the analysis of the accreditation documentation and focus group discussions, overall, Higher Education Institutions managed to adapt their academic programs to the new Benchmark, but some challenges were identified that should be addressed, both by NCEQE and HEIs.

Some of the major systemic findings include:

- Inconsistencies in a uniform application of the Benchmark by accreditation experts and Accreditation Board;

¹ The contents of this study is the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of East West Management Institute, USAID or the United States Government.

² USAID/PROLoG supported the process by providing international expert to advise on the draft document

- Problem of separation between bachelor and master programs (in most cases some of the master program courses were identical to the bachelor level courses);
- Poor organization of practical components at the Master and Bachelor level studies;
- Difficulty in properly identifying study results and mechanisms of evaluating these results;
- Problems in the syllabuses of the academic programs which is closely related to the qualification of the academic personnel;
- No individuality of the academic programs;
- Problems in conducting legal market studies by HEIs;
- Systemic problems at the regional universities in the structure of the programs, academic personnel, compatibility with the Benchmark, etc.

Based on the findings of the survey, expert provided following recommendations that would improve the process of implementation of the Law Benchmark and strengthen HEIs academic programs:

Recommendations to NCEQE include:

- Start discussion on cluster accreditation and increase the number of legal professionals in the Accreditation Board;
- Start discussions with broad participation of experts and all relevant stakeholders on improving standards of entry into the legal profession and establishing systemic approach towards legal education;
- Establishing practice of uniform interpretation and application of the Law Benchmark by regular meetings among HEIs, accreditation experts and Accreditation Board members;
- Develop a guideline (explanatory note) to the Law Benchmark which will ease uniform interpretation of the document;
- Improve selection process of accreditation experts and conduct their regular trainings;
- Improve administrative process of accreditation of academic programs, whereas functions of accreditation experts and Accreditation Board members are clearly separated;
- Increase support to HEIs in implementation of the quality assurance mechanisms;
- Create mechanisms for supporting regional HEIs, by sharing knowledge and experience;
- Ensure clear separation between bachelor and master's level programs by relevant indication in the Law Benchmark;
- Revisit study results section in the Law Benchmark, especially the part on practical skills.

Recommendations to HEIs include:

- Increase individual approaches toward study results and content of the academic programs;
- Strengthen partnerships with other HEIs to conduct legal market studies;
- Improve mechanisms of evaluating study results of the academic programs;
- Improve practical skills building components in the academic programs;
- Increase support to academic personnel;
- Strengthen the component of teaching transferable and research skills to students.