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Research

Uncovering the state of play of faculty professional development in Georgian higher education institutions

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Uncovering the state of play of faculty professional development in Georgian higher education institutions

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ABBREVIATIONS

DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
FPD	Faculty Professional Development
GIZ	German Corporation of International Cooperation
HEI	Higher Education Institution
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
PMCG	Policy and Management Consulting Group
QA	Quality Assurance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purposes of this study are to explore the professional development opportunities for academic staff at Georgian public higher education institutions (HEIs), to analyze their implementation and effectiveness from the perspective of HEIs and academic staff, and to uncover the ways through which these can be advanced to better serve the development goals and priorities of HEIs and faculty. The paper briefly reviews the existing literature on the evolution of faculty professional development (FPD) and its role in both fostering universities' academic and institutional transformation and in revitalizing academic staff capacity. The review also describes the common configurations of structures and practices of FPD and the aspirations for its implementation.

Some of the major findings of the study include:

✖ There is a gap between the provision of FPD by HEIs and the professional development goals of academic staff. In particular, the FPD activities provided by the HEIs are mostly oriented toward improving teaching and learning practices, while the academic staff put a stronger emphasis on the need to advance their research capacity and to enhance research performance.

✖ The approaches of FPD are somewhat scattered. None of the HEIs participating in the study have a structure or person in place leading the FPD activities. Therefore, the institutions lack a holistic view of the existing practices and the potential for their improvement.

✖ The rate of participation in training and workshops related to teaching and learning matters is the highest compared to other FPDs, while some of the most efficient FPD activities, such as sabbatical leave, faculty mentorship, and faculty learning circles, are underused.

✖ There are various challenges with regard to FPD stressed from the perspectives of both HEI leadership representatives and academic staff. The HEI leadership representatives view the scarcity of financial resources and lack of structured and coherent implementation of FPD as the most pressing challenges. Meanwhile, the academic staff emphasized the need for better and more transparent communication about FPD, and the improvement of competencies of administrative staff responsible for supporting and consulting academic staff.

The research is built on a content analysis of the institutional regulations and policies related to FPD strategies and the results of a survey conducted with HEI leadership representatives and academic staff from public HEIs. Specifically, the study contests the goals of HEIs and academic staff that they are trying to achieve through FPD and questions their relevance to existing FPD strategies and practices.

The study also challenges the structure and institutional approaches of FPD in Georgian HEIs. It analyzes the scale of participation of academic staff as well as the effectiveness of existing professional development activities, and uncovers differences between different types of public HEI. The analysis highlights prevalent higher education trends fueling the necessity of FPD, explores the professional development needs of academic staff, and underlines the current gaps and challenges of FPD practices. Finally, the paper provides proposals and recommendations for HEIs and policymakers, encouraging them to reimagine and advance the FPD strategies in the Georgian higher education space.

INTRODUCTION

As higher education systems develop, academics across the world are faced with having to adapt to the changing nature of academic work, including their changing roles, responsibilities, and expectations towards them (Teicher, Arimoto, & Cummings, 2013). During the last 30 years, the Georgian higher education system has undergone continuous waves of reform aiming to transform and modernize the system inherited from the Soviet era. Changing the Soviet system and making it compatible with the European higher education structure and Bologna process policies has drastically impacted both the working environment in education and expectations with respect to Georgian academics (Tsotniashvili, 2021). The constant changes have created the urgency for the provision of FPD opportunities to support academic staff to cope with and navigate through their new reality, meeting the new expectations set for them, and fostering advancements in teaching and research practices.

The aim of the study is to explore the state of play with regard to FPD in public HEIs in Georgia in relation to HEIs' academic and organizational goals and the professional development goals of the faculty members. The study also examines the structures, institutional approaches, and types of FPD, and perceptions and satisfaction of academic staff related to the effectiveness of professional support and existing FPD practices. Furthermore, the study uncovers challenges in implementing FPD practices from the perspectives of HEI leadership representatives and academic staff. It also explores the professional development needs of academic staff. Ultimately, it intends to respond to the following research questions:

* What are the main academic, scientific, and organizational goals of the HEIs and faculty members that they are trying to achieve through FPD strategies and activities?

* What are the FPD structures and institutional approaches, and practices being implemented in Georgian public HEIs?

* What is the scale of faculty participation in existing professional development activities and what are faculties' perceptions thereof?

* What are the FPD needs and challenges when it comes to existing approaches and practices?

The study also examines and discusses gaps and cohesion among the existing FPD approaches, the goals of the HEIs, and the professional development goals and needs of the academic staff.

THE STATE OF PLAY OF ACADEMIC JOB AND FPD IN GEORGIA

In an era of rapid changes in the political, technological, and ecological environment, HEIs face the challenge of keeping pace with global trends and being responsive to the expectations and needs of society. To address those challenges, the HEIs need to not only transform academically but also need to reconfigure their institutional settings. However, academic and institutional transformation is still obstructed by a persistent post-Soviet legacy and associated practices in the Georgian higher education space (Huisman, 2019, Kuraev, 2016). While several waves of higher education reform in Georgia have addressed structural and system-level changes, faculty development has not yet emerged as a reform priority and has thus not afforded by supported by relevant institutional or financial backing. The need for FPD in Georgian HEIs is amplified by the fact that the skills attained by academic staff during the Soviet system have become outdated (Kataeva & DeYoung, 2020; Heyneman, 2010) and there is a lack of training capacity to address this shortcoming. Specifically, the period immediately following the Georgia's independence from Soviet Union saw the impoverishment of the higher education infrastructure in the country, in which corruption grew rife and academic quality was compromised (Bregvadze & Chakhaia, 2018; Heyneman, 2010). Moreover, the quality of doctoral education still suffers from a lack of financial and human resources and research infrastructure (Gurchiani et al., 2014), which weakens its capacity to prepare highly-qualified scholars and academics.

Besides, the structure of higher education and scientific activities under the Soviet system created a different setup for roles and responsibilities of academic staff. For example, academic staff at HEIs scarcely participated in scientific activities as research functions were kept separate from universities and were instead carried out at the research institutes affiliated to the Academy of Sciences (Chankseliani et al., 2021). Moreover, the higher education curriculum was centralized, and academic staff were not involved in curriculum design or development (Reilly, 1996).

Global trends, including pertinent European reforms, in higher education have brought about changes to the roles of academic staff. In turn, the expectations regarding their academic and scholarly work have also evolved, as they now need a new set of competencies to respond to the demands of the modern academic world. With all of this in mind, the provision of relevant professional development mechanisms has become imperative.

In Georgia, the current structure and hierarchy of academic positions comprises the following four ranks (in descending order): professor, associate professor, assistant professor, and assistant. The functions and requirements for each academic rank are defined by the Law on Higher Education (2004) (see annex 1). The functions and

responsibilities for each rank of academic positions, as the law defines it, are bounded by the teaching and research activities. In the case of professors, it stresses their supervisory function with respect to educational and scholarly activities. The Higher Education Authorization Standards [1] also highlight that such work amounts to a service to society, with an emphasis placed on providing consultations to students and on participating in administrative processes as part of the academic staff's responsibilities (MoES, 2010, revision 2017). However, neither the Law nor the Authorization Standards yet fully reflect the complexity of the roles and responsibilities of academic staff (see "Functions of effective academic work" in Debowski, 2011, p. 310-312). Thus, many of the skills and much of the knowledge academic staff presently need to acquire to navigate the vastly demanding academic world are overlooked by the system.

Policy analysis undertaken on the internalization of the higher education quality assurance (QA) system in Georgia (Tsotniashvili, 2020) has underlined that because of the low salaries for academic staff, teaching work and research work are segregated in several HEIs and other organizations. For this reason, the Authorization Standards for HEIs defined the requirement for affiliation of the academic staff with one HEI. The concept of affiliation implies that academic staff perform their academic and scholarly activities exclusively at the affiliated HEI. The products of their scientific or creative activities are thus to be credited to the affiliated HEI (MoES, 2010, revision 2017). However, the same policy report emphasized that affiliation is not efficient in addressing the fragmentation of academic workload. The analysis noted that policy documents still disregard the time and effort academic staff must dedicate to scholarly activities. As a result, with faculties struggling to navigate through the new system and carry out their responsibilities as required by new standards and regulations, the education reforms have been criticized for focusing merely on formal and cosmetic changes and for having a minor effect on a qualitative academic transformation (Huisman, 2019).

Scholarly literature emphasizes that faculty development can foster academic and institutional transformation, readiness, and responsiveness to changing demands and societal expectations (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013; Smyth, 2003). Several FPD practices that have been implemented in the Georgian higher education system are described below; however, the analysis shows that their implementation has been scattered and not sufficient to respond to the needs and challenges of academic staff and Georgian HEIs.

During the last two decades, several professional development opportunities have become available for Georgian academics. Georgian faculty members also actively participate in international mobility and exchange programs mainly supported by the European Union (EU) and the United States Embassy in Georgia. However, the

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[1]   National higher education quality assurance standards that institutions must meet to acquire the status of HEI and be recognized by the state (Parliament of Georgia, 2010)

scale of the programs is not sufficient to holistically transform the Georgian system. A report on the international mobility of academic and administrative staff (Bregvadze, Gurchiani, Lortkipanidze, 2019) underlined that the obstacles in the way of more extensive academic staff participation in academic mobility programs relates to a lack of competence in the English language, a lack of awareness about the international mobility opportunities and application procedures, and limited dissemination of the knowledge and skills gained by those who do attend the mobility programs.

The Authorization Standards of HEIs established in 2017 defined the requirements related to the professional development of academic staff. Subsequently, several HEIs started to establish and strengthen their internal capacities with regard to academic staff development. According to an analytical report on implementing authorization mechanisms, HEIs provide various training courses for academic staff and financially support their participation in conferences (Darchia et al., 2019).

Usually, the professional development opportunities provided or supported by a given HEI are intended for the affiliated academic staff only. This approach motivates academic staff to establish an affiliation with specific universities and is considered a sustainable investment from the university's perspective. However, the analysis also underlines that the academic staff performance evaluation system and mechanisms to identify the needs with regard to professional development are still underdeveloped (Darchia et al., 2019). Overall, while the HEIs are increasing their efforts with respect to FPD, the existing practices still seem fragmented and detached from the HEIs' strategic development goals.

FACULTY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (FPD)

Historically, the FPD practices initiated in Western universities were intended to advance academic staff's disciplinary and research expertise. Over time, the turbulent economic, industrial, and technological development as well as students' rights movements shifted the focus of academic success from research to excellence in teaching and service (Ouellett, 2010). Thus, to reflect the broader nature and complexity of academic work, the scope of faculty development has evolved with time. In today's dynamic and rapidly-changing environment, faculty development is considered a strategy pursuant to self-renewal and enhanced vitality for faculties, ultimately helping to accomplish universities' academic and institutional missions (Camblin & Steger, 2000; Schuster, 1990).

Sorcinelli et al. (2006) outlined the following five universal goals of FPD: (1) create or sustain a culture of teaching excellence; (2) respond to and support individual faculty members; (3) advance new initiatives in teaching and learning; (4) foster collegiality within and among faculties and departments; and (5) act as an internal agent for institutional change. Depending on the mission and academic and scientific goals of the given HEI and its faculty members, the scope of FPD approaches and configurations varies across universities. This study discusses how professional development goals are presented by Georgian HEIs and how they are articulated by academic staff.

STRUCTURES AND TYPES OF FPD

As faculty development has become one of the critical drivers behind the transformation of academic and institutional quality in higher education, HEIs have developed various mechanisms and structures to support the institutionalization of faculty development efforts. A study conducted by Sorcinelli et al. (2006) in US universities and colleges found that the most common structures for faculty development were centers established with the primary goal of improving teaching and learning practices. The centers usually partner with various institutional units, such as information technologies, assessment offices, student affairs, libraries etc., to provide tailored programs for faculty members (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013). The centers also collaborate with other universities, organizations, and international partners to establish joint programs or to seek financial assistance (Cook & Marincovich, 2010). In smaller institutions, individual faculty or administrative staff members are responsible for faculty development (Sorcinelli et al. 2006).

Robertson (2010) identified the following four streams of development that can be facilitated through professional development activities: (1) instructional development; (2) faculty development; (3) curriculum development; and (4) organizational development. He conceptualized a hypothetical mission of FPD centers as follows:

The center's primary mission is to assist the university in realizing its full potential as an intentional learning organization by helping its faculty and staff, individually and collectively, to continue their rigorous and relevant ongoing development in coordination with the university's core values and strategic priorities. (p. 39)[2]

In recent years, with its growing significance for contemporary universities, faculty development work itself has become professionalized and in various North American and European HEIs positions of faculty developers have been created (Robertson, 2010) at FPD centers. Faculty developers act as mentors and change agents in these institutions. They have access to institutional data on teaching and learning, faculty assessments, and scholarly performance, and they work with individual faculty members or departments to create a meaningful learning experience for students, and to support academic staff to achieve their individual professional development goals and to meet the institutional goals of the HEIs. Wehlburg (2010) outlined the essential competencies of faculty developers and underlined that they should: have extensive knowledge of pedagogical approaches, teaching, and learning methods; and be able to assess teaching practices and suggest effective strategies for their improvement. Faculty developers also liaise with academic staff, professional development centers, or other institutional units to facilitate the provision of relevant professional development support. In addition, faculty developers should be aware of the diverse needs and motivational factors for FPD and create credible and positive experiences for faculty members. Sorcinelli et al. (2006) found that faculty developers and faculty development structures have more credibility among faculty members when staffed and managed by the faculty members themselves.

Universities have been adopting different approaches to support academic staff for years. Some long-standing practices of FPD include the provision of financial support to academic staff to attend professional meetings and conferences, and to use sabbatical leave (Centra, 1976). Sabbatical leave allows faculty members to temporarily leave their academic duties and focus on their personal and professional development instead (Mamiseishvili & Miller, 2010).

As economic and technological developments came to require that graduates be prepared adequately for the labor market needs, the achievement of excellence in teaching emerged as the priority for universities. Thus, FPD efforts have been directed toward the improvement of teaching and learning approaches. Pertinently, HEIs have established university-wide programs, including workshops, training courses/ sessions, classroom observations, orientation meetings, mentoring programs, and faculty learning communities/circles (Sorcinelli et al., 2006). With the extended scope of faculty work, universities and international organizations have also started to provide grants and fellowships for FPD (Sorcinelli et al., 2011, Lee, 2010).

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[2]   See the scope of activities of various faculty development centers:
       https://podnetwork.org/centers-programs

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS

This study utilizes mixed research methods in its design, incorporating quantitative and qualitative data analysis. To explore the state of play regarding the provision of FPD and the institutional approaches employed by public HEIs in Georgia, content analysis of staff management policies and strategic development plans has been conducted. In addition, the study has identified the organizational structures, institutional strategies, and funding and institutional support practices in place for academic staff. THE HEI leaders were asked about the FPD practices, their relevance to the academic and organizational goals of the given HEI, and the challenges of the existing FPD approaches.

All 19 public HEIs operating in Georgia were invited to participate in the research. Of these, 10 HEIs provided the requested documents, and nine completed the survey. The 10 participating institutions cover the diversity of HEIs in Georgia with regard to type (i.e. universities, and teaching universities), location (i.e. Tbilisi, and the regions), and profile (i.e. specific or general) (Table 1).

Table 1. HEIs participating in the study

Location	Tbilisi		Region	
Profile	General profile	Specific profile	General profile	Specific profile
University 7 (out of 13)	2 (out of 4)	2 (out of 4)	3 (out of 5)	-
Teaching University 3 (out of 6)	-	1 (out of 1)	1 (out of 2)	1 (out of 3)

A survey was designed to study the professional development goals, participation, perceptions, and experiences of the academic staff regarding institutional support related to FPD approaches, the effectiveness of different types of FPD practices, and the overall satisfaction of academic staff. The survey also explored the professional development needs of academic staff at the HEIs prompted by the recent developments in higher education, and the challenges regarding the current professional development practices from a faculty perspective. It also highlighted the extent to which the provided faculty development opportunities met the professional development goals and needs of the faculty members, and revealed certain gaps therein.

Nineteen HEI administrations were each asked by PMCG to send the survey to their academic staff, with nine institutions obliging. In total, 380 academic staff participated in the survey. A breakdown of their representation by academic rank, HEI type, and location is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Academic staff participating in the study

HEI type	University		Teaching University		All academic staff (380)
Academic rank	Tbilisi	Region	Tbilisi	Region	
Professor	78	28	8	17	131
Associate professor	109	43	9	19	182
Assistant professor	34	5	9	4	52
Assistant	5	8	1	3	17

The analysis compares practices with the following characteristics borne in mind: HEI type (university/teaching university); location of the HEI (Tbilisi /regions); and the profile of the HEI (specific/general). Furthermore, the data related to academic staff are analyzed in terms of their academic rank (professor, associate professor, assistant professor, or assistant).

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

GOALS OF THE HEIS THAT THEY INTEND TO ACHIEVE THROUGH FPD

The analysis of the strategic development plans showed that all institutions participating in the study had included FPD as part of their strategy to some extent. However, the rationales behind and strategies of FPD are scarcely presented in institutional documents, such as staff management policies and strategic development plans. In most cases, FPD is indicated as an activity under the strategic goals of modernizing academic programs and improving teaching and learning methods. In some individual cases, the professional development activities do expressly address the goal of internationalization by improving staff competence in the English language. In strategic development plans, FPD is included in a fragmented manner among activities sections. Thus, a holistic vision as to how FPD serves the achievement of HEIs' ongoing priorities is overlooked.

The survey conducted with HEI leadership representatives gave a more detailed picture of the goals HEIs intend to achieve through FPD activities. Similar to what was revealed in the document analysis, the development of teaching and learning practices and the modernization of the curriculum dominate across all HEIs. Regardless of their profile, universities located in Tbilisi placed an emphasis on the internationalization of academic and scientific activities, and the enhancement of research productivity, and creative productivity in the case of the HEIs with an artistic profile, as the goals they want to achieve through FPD. Meanwhile, the formulation of goals related to research activities indicated by regional HEIs put an emphasis on developing research and community service skills among academic staff.

While the scholarly literature has highlighted FPD as a mechanism for achieving academic, individual, and institutional goals (Sorcinelli et al., 2006), the reviewed institutional policies and strategies on FPD do not directly indicate the use of FPD for the latter two purposes. Therefore, the potential of FPD to create a sustainable culture of institutional and academic transformation and foster a collegial academic culture (Sorcinelli et al., 2006) is overlooked and not being fulfilled. Furthermore, the content of the documents on FPD does not indicate the goal of responding to faculty members' individual professional development goals. As for the achievement of academic goals and the improvement of teaching and learning approaches, meeting labor market needs and external QA requirements were found to be the main factors rendering professional development a necessity. Such an approach limits the capability of FPD to create a culture of teaching excellence and advancing innovative approaches in teaching and learning (Sorcinelli et al., 2006).

GOALS OF ACADEMIC STAFF THAT THEY INTEND TO ACHIEVE THROUGH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

The academic staff were surveyed about the goals they want to achieve through professional development support. The analysis revealed similar patterns with regard to the academic and scientific goals of academic staff, regardless of the institutional type and academic rank. However, taking into account the academic rank, some differences in the formulation of academic and scholarly goals were observed.

The most common goals related to scholarly work that academic staff seek to achieve are to participate in national and international conferences, to have scholarly articles, books, textbooks, and monographs published, to conduct research projects, to participate in international projects, and to obtain research grants. A number of professors surveyed also highlighted the goal of the commercialization of their scientific work and research collaboration with industries.

In terms of the goals related to teaching activities, the academic staff broadly aim to develop new educational courses and to improve their pedagogical skills. In several cases, they also underlined a desire to enhance and update their disciplinary knowledge. While the development of new courses is one of the most frequently mentioned goals, the analysis showed that in the case of professors, they are oriented more toward the development of new educational programs instead of only courses, placing an emphasis on the development of new doctoral and joint educational programs.

Thus, the academic staff generally view FPD as a means to enhance their research performance and productivity, to improve their pedagogical skills and approaches, and to develop new courses and programs. In the case of the academic staff, the academic and individual goals they aim to achieve through professional development support are intertwined. The surveyed academic staff did not highlight the role of FPD as a tool for fostering an academic culture and institutional development, which also resonates with the results of HEI leaders survey and document analysis.

The analysis revealed a gap between the perspectives of HEIs and academic staff in terms of the goals of FPD. The academic staff survey responses predominantly stressed the enhancement of research skills and performance as their main professional development goal. In contrast, the survey results and document analysis pertaining to the HEIs put less emphasis on the development of research activities and focused more on instructional development. Thus, the HEI leaderships could take the lead in reimagining the FPD as a tool for embarking on teaching and research excellence and institutional transformation through engaging the academic staff and academic departments in reconciling their goals and planning more comprehensive and relevant FPD strategy.

STRUCTURES, INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES, AND PRACTICES OF FPD

While the HEIs are increasing their efforts on FPD, their implementation lacks coordination and a structural approach. None of the HEIs participating in the study have a separate unit responsible for FPD. Although the responsibilities related to FPD are distributed among different structural units, there is not a central structure or coordinated system connecting these different units and defining the needs, priorities, strategies, and approaches with regard to FPD. This indicates that staff's professional development is still not recognized as a priority area for these institutions. Usually, the units involved in FPD are quality assurance, human resources, international relations, and research and development. In some cases, HEIs have established life-long learning or professional development centers. However, in contrast to the well-established FPD centers described in the literature (Gillespie, Robertson & Bergquist, 2010; Robertson, 2010; Sorcinelli et al. 2006), their functions are limited to technical support in the organization of training and workshops.

According to the HEI Authorization Standards (2010, revision of 2017), the HEIs should have staff management policies in place that describe the mechanisms of professional development. The analysis undertaken in this study showed that in some cases, instead of a description of the FPD mechanisms, the given policy document very briefly describes the types of professional development activities, mainly emphasizing the availability of staff training in general. In other cases, staff management policies describe different divisions of responsibilities between different units. The descriptions are usually brief and lack a holistic picture of the available FPD or procedures for its implementation. On some occasions, the structures described in the documents and their descriptions in the survey responses did not coincide. This signals that the system described in the documents differs from actual practice. Supplementing the document analysis with the results of the surveys revealed that two main structural approaches are being taken toward the organization of FPD, outlined as follows:

✖ In the first approach, the QA department is the dominant unit in assessing professional development needs, as well as planning and implementing workshops and training, meetings, and consultations with individual academic staff members or program or department teams. The FPD activities conducted by the QA units are mainly focused on teaching and learning issues or adapting to changes made in the accreditation regulations. The HR department is excluded from the FPD process. Meanwhile, the international relations office is responsible for the international mobility of the faculty and supporting them to participate in international projects. However, no coordination between the units could be observed. A professional development center, in a few cases, provides technical support in the organization of training.

✖ In the second approach, the HR department is responsible for ascertaining and defining the needs for FPD and its implementation. The QA department is re-

sponsible for conducting training and meetings on accreditation regulations, as well as on teaching and learning issues. Meanwhile, the international relations office supports the international mobility of academic staff and their participation in international projects, and the public relations office is responsible for the technical organization of training and workshops.

The institutional documents rarely indicate how different units coordinate their work. In several cases, the roles and responsibilities overlap or skip steps in the planning and implementation of FPD.

The scattered approach toward organizing FPD is also reflected in the academic staff survey results. Academic staff were asked to name the institutional units they would address if they needed professional development. Even within the same institutions, academic staff referred to different units or persons as who/what they deemed to be the central point for seeking support in their professional development. The responses given included the QA department, the dean, the rector, the chancellor, and the international relations department. None of the responses referred to the human resources department, despite this being indicated as the main unit responsible for FPD in the institutional documents. While the development of research skills and research performance is one of the primary goals for the surveyed institutions and their faculty members, it is noteworthy that their research and development departments were not identified as a point through which to seek professional development support.

It should be highlighted that according to the Law on Higher Education (2004), the main function of QA departments entails the systemic evaluation of teaching, research and staff professional development activities carried out at given HEI. However, the survey analysis shows that the QA departments are the dominant institutional structures responsible for the implementation of FPD in Georgian public HEIs, meaning that QA units are responsible for the evaluation of tasks implemented by themselves. Furthermore, given that the scholarly literature stresses the resistance of academic staff towards QA processes (Cardoso, Rosa & Stensaker, 2016; Lucas, 2014; Newton, 2000), the implementation of professional development activities by the QA units is unlikely to encourage academic staff to voluntarily participate and to see this as a means of professional development/self-development (Quinn, 2012). Thus, it is essential to restructure the organization of FPD in a way that it is purely oriented toward meeting the professional development goals and needs of HEIs and academic staff, and engaging faculties in the implementation thereof to increase the credibility and participation of academic staff in FPD activities (Sorcinelli et al., 2006).

Furthermore, it should also be noted that the Law on Higher Education (2004) only mentions staff's professional development as a subject of quality evaluation and does not expressly promote FPD practice in HEIs.

The HEIs' strategic and policy documents do not indicate how the priority areas for FPD are defined and what the FPD priorities are. Of the 10 strategic development

plans analyzed, three indicate staff development as a strategic priority. In the others, FPD is included under the priorities of institutional development, and the improvement of teaching and learning quality or internationalization. However, even when FPD is included under institutional development, the content is focused on teaching and learning issues. In several cases, tasks related to the development of FPD in the six-year strategic plans include the development of regulations and establishing faculty performance evaluation without outlining the approaches to and activities regarding FPD.

Funding for FPD

Budget allocation and the distribution of funding sources for professional development activities were analyzed to explore the institutional approaches toward planning and implementing FPD further. Out of the 10 HEIs participating in the study, only half responded to the survey question about budget allocation for FPD. This generally indicates that institutions do not see FPD as a strategic priority to which a specific portion of funding should be allocated and it is technically challenging for the HEIs to calculate the amounts spent for FPD spread across different budget lines. Thus, the practice of planning and implementation among the surveyed institutions with regard to FPD is of a somewhat fragmented nature. As for the results reported by the five HEIs who did provide answers, the FPD budget ranges from 0.5% to 5% of the institutional budget.

The academic staff survey results show that training and workshops, sabbatical leave, and research grants for academic staff are predominantly funded by the institutional budget, followed by international donors (Chart 1). Between 53% and 62% of the abovementioned FPD activities were reported to be funded by the institutional budget.

Chart 1. Funding sources for FPD
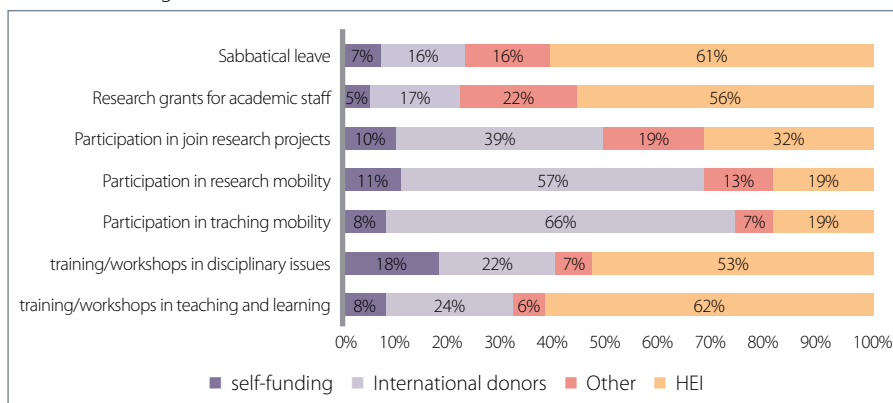
With regard to research and teaching mobility programs and joint research projects, the primary funding source is international donors. As academic staff reported, international donors provided the funding for 66% of teaching mobilities, in 57% of research mobilities, and in 39% of joint research projects.

The survey analysis revealed a difference between the distribution of FPD funding sources in different types of HEI. Notably, regional HEIs rely more on their institutional budget to fund FPD activities compared to HEIs located in Tbilisi. For example, academic staff from regional teaching universities reported that the training and workshops were funded by the internal budget in 71% of cases, while for universities located in region and in Tbilisi, this indicator was 59% and 52%, respectively. On average, the funding source for research grants in 56% of cases was the institutional budget. In comparison, academic staff from regional HEIs reported that the institutional budget was the main funding source in 74% of the cases. Overall, universities located in Tbilisi take more advantage of international donor funding compared to regional HEIs, especially when it comes to teaching universities.

Erasmus+, the United States Embassy in Georgia, DAAD, Horizon 2020, GIZ, and the Volkswagen Foundation were the funding organizations among international donors most frequently named by academic staff. As for other funding sources, the Rustaveli Foundation was the main source of funding for research and international mobility programs, followed by sectoral ministries, governmental agencies, and professional associations. It should also be emphasized that universities located in Tbilisi have more diversified sources of funding for all types of professional development activities and especially for funding research projects, compared to the regional HEIs.

Institutional support provided for academic staff

The academic staff were asked about the support they had received from HEIs to engage them in professional development activities. The results showed that in the majority of cases HEIs provide information about available professional development opportunities for academic staff, but that the provision of information about externally available professional development opportunities (68%) lags behind the provision of information regarding internally-organized FPD activities (80%) (Chart 2). Furthermore, academic staff from the regional teaching universities are the least satisfied (68%) with communication from their university administration about internal FPD, while academic staff from universities located in Tbilisi reported the weakest communication (60%) from the HEI about externally available professional development opportunities.

**Chart 2.** Type of support academic staff receive from HEI administration
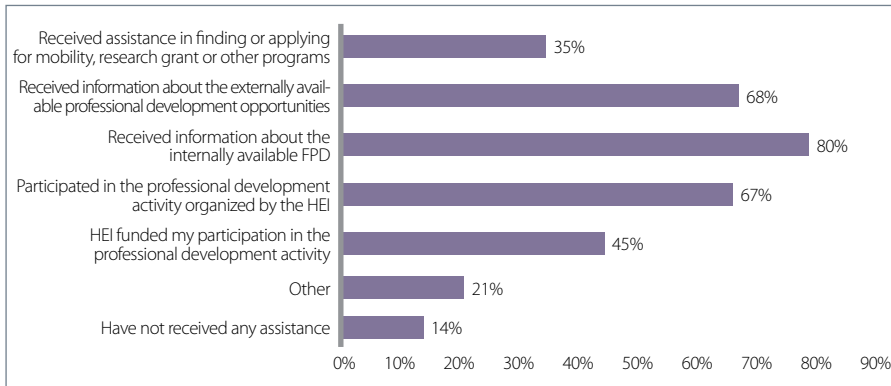
The results (Chart 2) showed that the most common form of support that they received from HEIs entailed participation in professional development activities organized by their HEI, which in most cases meant participation in training and workshop activities. According to the survey results, only 45% of academic staff reported receiving financial support from their HEI for professional development. Only 33% of academic staff from universities located in Tbilisi reported being provided with funding for FPD, while 67% of academic staff from regional universities reported that their institution had financially supported their professional development activities. Only 35% of academic staff across the surveyed institutions reported that they had received assistance from their HEI in finding or applying for mobility programs, research grants, or other programs. Meanwhile, the most frequently underlined goals according to the academic staff were increasing the participation in international projects and enhancing the research performance. Other types of support that academic staff had received from HEIs included assistance in managing grant projects, helping them to participate in innovations and science festivals, organizing conferences, gaining membership of international organizations, and organizing exhibitions. Overall, 14% of academic staff reported that they had not received any professional development support from their HEIs (survey results by institutional type are in Annex 2).

PRACTICES OF FPD

From the document analysis of staff management policies and strategic development plans, a whole spectrum of professional development activities for staff could be identified. Some of the most common practices indicated in the reviewed documents are seminars, workshops, training, international mobility of academic staff, conferences, English language courses, funding research projects, and sabbatical leave. It should be noted that in several cases, the strategic plans and staff management policies only included the provision of seminars and training for academic staff.

However, the survey results show that other professional development possibilities are also available. Thus, HEIs still struggle to see staff's professional development holistically and map it in line with its institutional and academic goals, and the individual goals of the faculty.

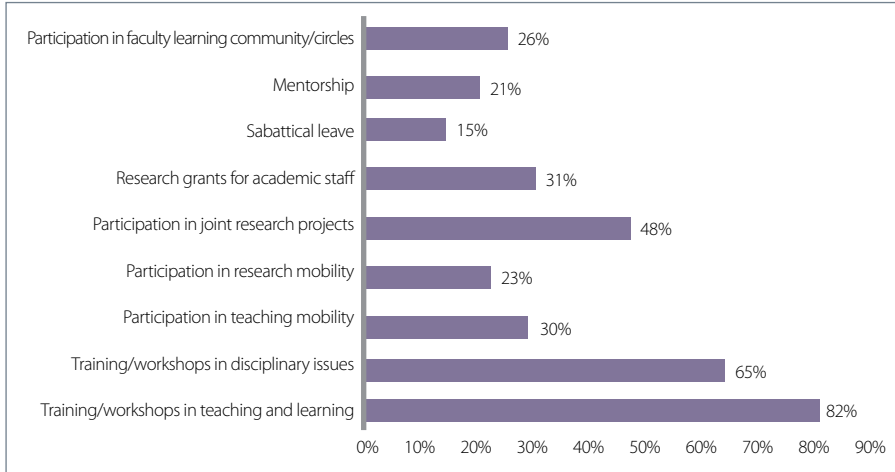**Chart 3.** Types of faculty professional development
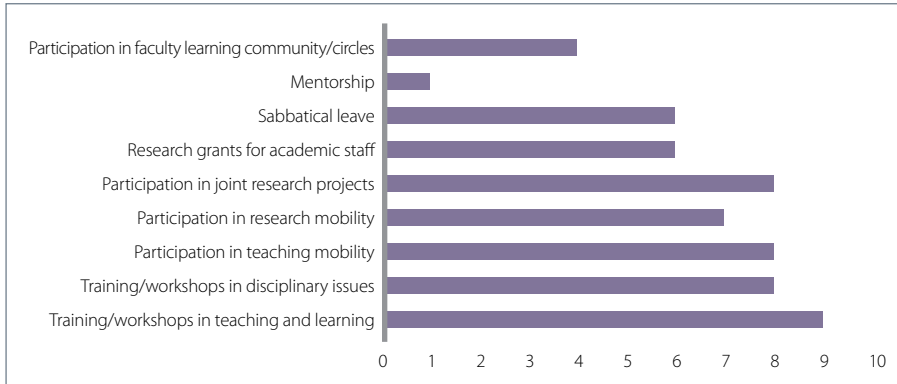
According to the survey responses gleaned from HEI representatives, training and workshops are the most common practices of FPD offered by the HEIs compared to other FPD activities (Chart 3). In addition to the responses to the survey questions, HEIs representatives and academic staff prominently indicated the funding of participation in national and international conferences as an available form of FPD. Two of the HEIs also indicated peer-observation and the development of the supplemental guidebooks for faculty members as forms of FPD practice. However, those activities were not mentioned by any of the faculty members participating in the survey. The content analysis of the university regulations (QA policies) showed that peer-observation is included as an internal QA mechanism. Thus, the academic staff generally perceive this more as a performance monitoring tool than as a professional development activity.

FACULTY PARTICIPATION IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES AND PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THEIR EFFECTIVENESS

The study explored the scale of participation of academic staff in each FPD activity and their effectiveness from a faculty perspective. According to the academic staff survey, training/workshops have a significantly higher participation rate compared to other professional development activities. The data show that the participation of academic staff in teaching and learning training stands at 82%, and in disciplinary training it is 65%, followed by research projects on 48%.

Chart 4. Participation of academic staff in FPD activities

Activity	Participation
Participation in faculty learning community/circles	26%
Mentorship	21%
Sabbatical leave	15%
Research grants for academic staff	31%
Participation in joint research projects	48%
Participation in research mobility	23%
Participation in teaching mobility	30%
Training/workshops in disciplinary issues	65%
Training/workshops in teaching and learning	82%

It is noteworthy that the three professional development activities with the highest participation were also rated as the most effective activities by the academic staff. The training/workshops in teaching and learning and disciplinary issues, and participation in the joint research projects were rated as the most effective professional development activities with 70% of academic staff rating them as "effective" or "very effective" (Chart 5).

Chart 5. Effectiveness of FPD from faculty perspective

Activity	Not effective	Less effective	Somewhat effective	Effective	Very effective
Participation in faculty learning community/circles	17%	6%	16%	29%	31%
Mentorship	17%	5%	15%	39%	24%
Sabbatical leave	21%	6%	12%	25%	36%
Research grants for academic staff	16%	7%	13%	23%	40%
Participation in joint research projects	12%	6%	12%	25%	46%
Participation in research mobility	18%	6%	13%	27%	36%
Participation in teaching mobility	15%	5%	12%	26%	41%
Training/workshops in disciplinary issues	6%	6%	14%	34%	40%
Training/workshops in teaching and learning	5%	6%	12%	38%	40%

Sabbatical leave, participation in research mobility programs, and research grants for academic staff were rated as the least effective practices as more than 20% of academic staff rated these as "not effective" or "less effective." Sabbatical leave and participation in research mobility programs have the lowest participation rates (15% and 23%, respectively) compared to other activities. While the reasons behind these

results need further exploration, from this data we can observe that the forms of FPD that are more accessible to academic staff are rated as more effective. We further explore the results related to each FPD activity and their effectiveness below.
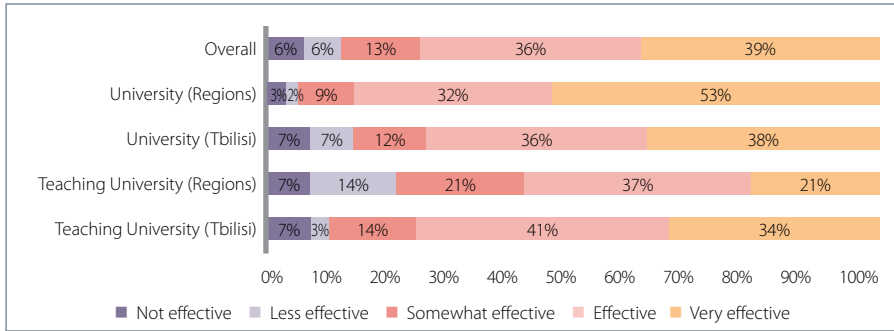
TRAINING AND WORKSHOPS

The analysis shows that training and workshops for academic staff are available at all HEIs participating in the study, and they have the highest participation rate compared to other professional development activities. The data show (Chart 6) that participation in the training and workshops in regional HEIs is higher compared to the HEIs located in Tbilisi. This indicator is lowest at the universities located in Tbilisi. The participation of academic staff in training and workshops on teaching and learning in regional universities and teaching universities stands at 95% and 92%, respectively, while the participation rate in this activity is 75% at the universities located in Tbilisi. These results suggest that the regional HEIs dedicate more effort to improving teaching and learning practices, while the universities in Tbilisi offer more diverse FPD. Those results are also reflected in the survey results regarding the diversity and accessibility of FPD at different types of HEI (see Annex 3).

Chart 6. Participation in the training and workshops by HEI type and location
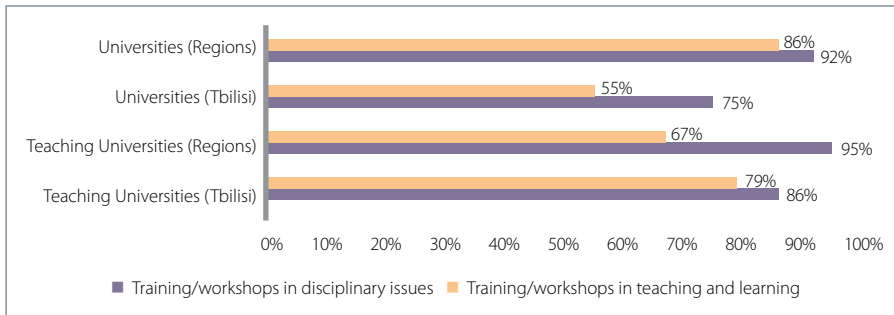
Training and workshops in teaching and learning and in disciplinary issues were rated as the most effective professional development activities with 78% and 74% of academic staff, respectively, rating them as "effective" or "very effective" (Chart 7). While the participation rate of academic staff from regional teaching universities is the highest, their opinion about the effectiveness of the provided training and workshops is the most critical. In all, 21% of the academic staff from regional teaching universities rated the effectiveness of training and workshops as "not effective" or "less effective" and only 58% of them rated these as "effective" or "very effective." In contrast, this indicator is at least 74% for other institutions. These results resonate with the survey results regarding the level of satisfaction of academic staff toward professional development activities. The analysis showed that academic staff from regional teaching universities displayed the lowest rate of satisfaction with the quality of FPD activities (Annex 3).

Chart 7. Effectiveness of Training and Workshops

|	Not effective	Less effective	Somewhat effective	Effective	Very effective
Overall	6%	6%	13%	36%	39%
University (Regions)	3%	2%	9%	32%	53%
University (Tbilisi)	7%	7%	12%	36%	38%
Teaching University (Regions)	7%	14%	21%	37%	21%
Teaching University (Tbilisi)	7%	3%	14%	41%	34%

The survey analysis revealed several prevalent themes covered in the training and workshops provided by the HEIs. The most common topics are related to program development and teaching and learning issues. Specifically, these include curriculum development, achievement of learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods, student assessment, and the development of the program accreditation self-evaluation report. Triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, e-learning and the use of technologies in teaching has also become a prevalent topic in faculty training during the last two years.

While the training and workshops for faculties are predominantly oriented toward instructional development, the survey also identified the following topics: plagiarism and using plagiarism detection software; the use of scientific library databases; institutional regulations; supervision of doctoral students; English language courses; writing research grant projects; research methods; and scholarly publications. The training and workshops in teaching and learning and using institutional resources are mostly provided through internal resources, while the training related to research and scholarly activities are mainly organized using external support and their scale is significantly smaller. This highlights the scarce internal capacity of HEIs for the provision of research-related FPD activities.

TEACHING AND RESEARCH MOBILITY PROGRAMS

Out of the 10 HEIs participating in this study, teaching mobility programs are available at nine and research mobility programs are available at eight. However, the overall participation rate in teaching mobility programs is only 30%, and in the research mobility programs it is 23%. Although mobility programs are available in almost all public HEIs, the number and availability of programs and, therefore, the participation level of academic staff depending on the type and location of the HEI varies.

Chart 8. Participation in teaching and research mobility programs by HEI type
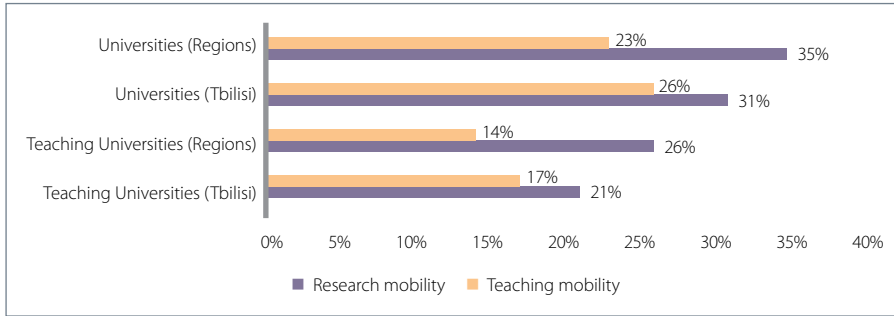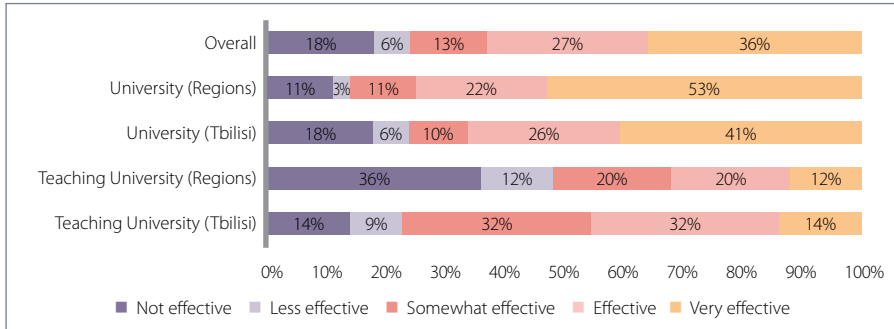

As shown on Chart 8, universities have a higher level of academic staff participation in teaching and research mobility programs compared to teaching universities. The academic staff from regional universities reported the highest participation rate in teaching mobility programs (35%), while the participation of academic staff from universities located in Tbilisi is highest for research mobility programs at 26%. Academic staff from teaching universities reported the lowest participation level in both mobility programs, which can be explained by the low diversity of academic staff mobility programs, limited support from the international relations departments, and the lack of English language competence at teaching universities.

Segregated data by academic rank showed that assistant professors and professors are more actively involved in the research and teaching mobility programs, while associate professors are more passive in both. The participation in teaching mobility programs is highest among assistant professors (42%), while professors are most active when it comes to participating in research mobility programs (29%) (Annex 4, Chart 18).

The data regarding mobility program participation by age show that, in general, the participation of academic staff in teaching mobility is higher among those under 55 (35% on average), while participation in research mobility programs is higher among academic staff aged 55 or older (25%). Besides, the participation rate of academic staff aged under 45 in research mobility programs is notably low, sitting at 15% on average (Annex 4, Chart 19).

While a report on staff international mobility (Bregvadze, Gurchiani, Lortkipanidze, 2019) outlined the lack of competence in the English language, as well as a lack of awareness about international mobility opportunities and application procedures as general obstacles hindering staff participation in such programs, the survey results also asserted that the HEI leaderships should revisit their priorities in terms of promoting the engagement of young scholars in research mobility activities.

Chart 9. Effectiveness of the research mobility programs by HEI type

Chart showing effectiveness of research mobility programs by HEI type:

	Not effective	Less effective	Somewhat effective	Effective	Very effective
Overall	18%	6%	13%	27%	36%
University (Regions)	11%	3%	11%	22%	53%
University (Tbilisi)	18%	6%	10%	26%	41%
Teaching University (Regions)	36%	12%	20%	20%	12%
Teaching University (Tbilisi)	14%	9%	32%	32%	14%

Overall, 63% of academic staff rated the research mobility programs as "effective" or "very effective" (Chart 9), while 67% of academic staff gave the same positive evaluations to the teaching mobility programs (Chart 10).

Chart 10. Effectiveness of the teaching mobility programs by HEI type

Chart showing effectiveness of teaching mobility programs by HEI type:

|	Not effective	Less effective	Somewhat effective	Effective	Very effective
Overall	15%	5%	12%	26%	41%
University (Regions)	11%	2%	4%	24%	58%
University (Tbilisi)	15%	6%	10%	26%	43%
Teaching University (Regions)	26%	10%	16%	19%	29%
Teaching University (Tbilisi)	10%	0%	33%	43%	14%
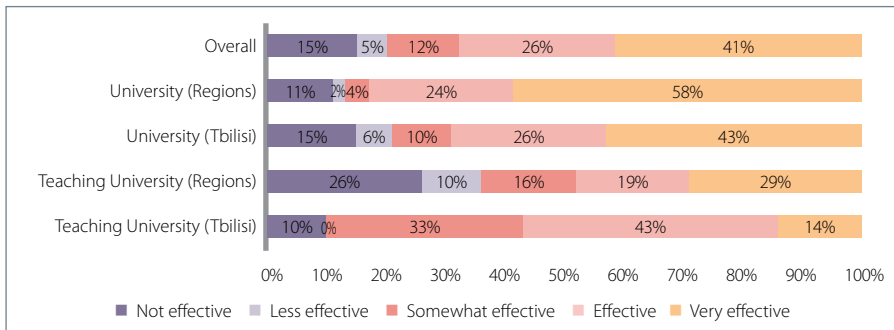
The data show that as well as having the lowest participation rate, academic staff from regional teaching universities also have the lowest opinion about the effectiveness of mobility programs. 48% of them consider that research mobility programs are "not effective" or "less effective" and 36% negatively rated the effectiveness of participation in teaching mobility programs. Academic staff from universities reported a higher level effectiveness of mobility programs. 71% of them rated participation in the research mobility programs as "effective" or "very effective," and 75% rated the teaching mobility programs as "effective" or "very effective." Looking at the results, the teaching universities, and regional ones in particular, should further explore the problematic areas related to mobility programs to better support the academic staff to overcome barriers to make mobility programs more beneficial for their professional development.
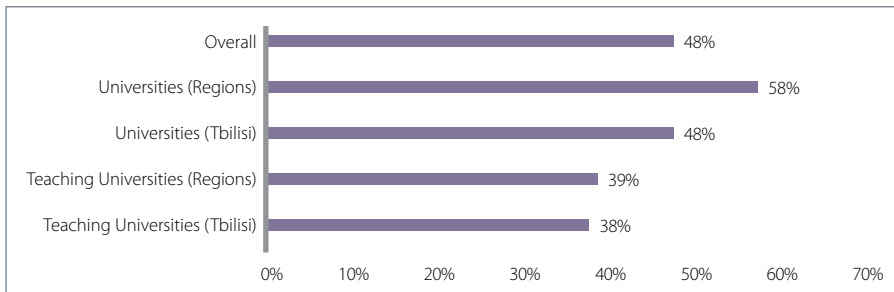
RESEARCH GRANTS AND JOINT RESEARCH PROJECTS

Seven out of ten HEIs participating in the study provide research grants for academic staff from their institutional budget. The HEIs that do not engage in such practice are those with an artistic profile.

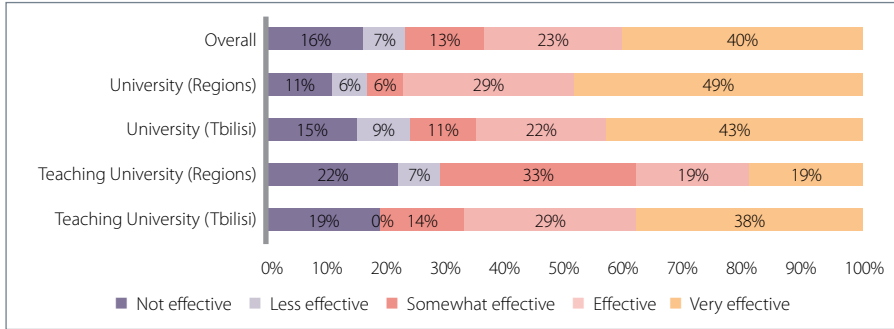**Chart 11.** Academic staff that received the grants for research projects
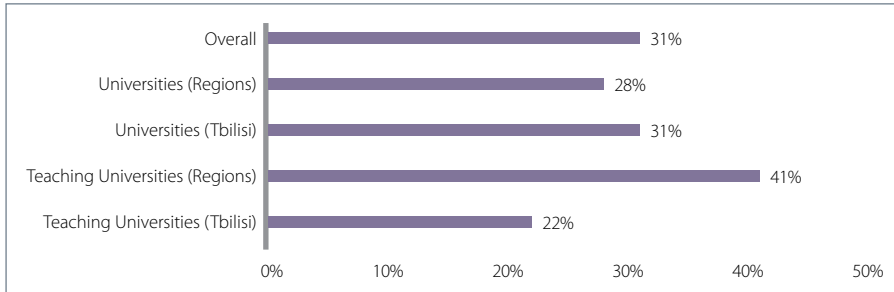
Overall, 31% of academic staff reported that they had received research grants during the last five years, while the participation rate of academic staff in joint research projects is 48%. Academic staff from the regional teaching universities reported the highest rate of receiving research grants, mainly from the institutional budget. Moreover, it should be noted that the majority of them (72%) are from the regional teaching university with a maritime profile.

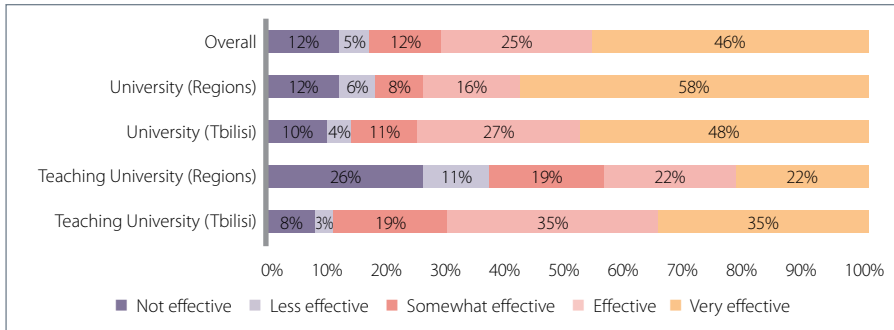**Chart 12.** Academic staff participating in the joint research projects

Academic staff from all public HEIs except one regional university participating in this study are involved in joint research projects. Universities have the higher indicator of academic staff participation in joint research projects, this stood at 58% for regional universities and 48% at universities located in Tbilisi. Meanwhile, analysis according to academic rank revealed that professors are the most frequent recipients of research grants (34% compared to an average of 31% across all ranks), while assistant professors and professors are more actively involved in joint research projects (65% and 62%, respectively, compared to an average of 48% across all ranks) (Annex 4, Charts 20 & 21).

Chart 13. Effectiveness of the research grant projects

	Not effective	Less effective	Somewhat effective	Effective	Very effective
Overall	16%	7%	13%	23%	40%
University (Regions)	11%	6%	6%	29%	49%
University (Tbilisi)	15%	9%	11%	22%	43%
Teaching University (Regions)	22%	7%	33%	19%	19%
Teaching University (Tbilisi)	19%	0%	14%	29%	38%

In total, 63% of academic staff rated the grants for research projects as "effective" or "very effective" professional development activities (Chart 13). In the case of teaching universities located in the regions, only 39% of academic staff consider the research grant projects to be effective. As their participation in research grant projects is higher compared to other types of HEI, these outcomes imply that the practice of awarding academic staff with research grants should be revisited to explore factors hindering its effectiveness. Besides, HEIs should provide further consultations and support for academic staff to maximize the benefits of research grant projects.

Chart 14. Effectiveness of the joint research projects

|	Not effective	Less effective	Somewhat effective	Effective	Very effective
Overall	12%	5%	12%	25%	46%
University (Regions)	12%	6%	8%	16%	58%
University (Tbilisi)	10%	4%	11%	27%	48%
Teaching University (Regions)	26%	11%	19%	22%	22%
Teaching University (Tbilisi)	8%	3%	19%	35%	35%

According to the academic staff responses, participation in joint research projects is the second-most effective professional development activity (after training and workshops). Overall, the joint research projects are rated as "effective" or "very effective" by 71% of survey participants (Chart 14). However, the need to support academic staff to engage in joint research projects, especially with international partners, was highlighted in the survey. Thus, HEIs should intensify their efforts to support academic staff in finding international partners, developing research collaborations, and attracting funding for joint research projects.

SABBATICAL LEAVE

The survey data show that all seven universities and none of the teaching universities participating in the study offer sabbatical leave. Sabbatical leave is paid and allows faculty members to dedicate a period of time to scholarly work of their interest or other professional development activities (Mamiseishvili & Miller, 2010). According to the internal regulations of the surveyed universities, the maximum duration of sabbatical leave ranges from 10 to 12 months and, usually, it can be taken every 5-7 years. After completing sabbatical leave, the academic staff member is expected to submit a report about their work during this period. The scholarly literature indicates that faculty sabbatical leave is one of the longest-running and most effective faculty professional development practices (McKee, 2013; Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013). However, at Georgian HEIs, sabbatical leave has the lowest faculty participation rate compared to other professional development activities (15%). Associate professors and assistant professors are more active when it comes to taking sabbatical leave (Chart 15).

Chart 15. Academic staff taking the sabbatical leave by academic position
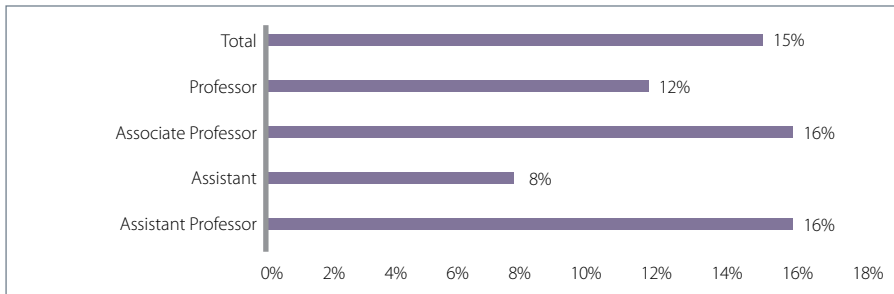
This practice is slightly more common at regional universities (16%) compared to the universities located in Tbilisi (14%). Moreover, academic staff from universities with an artistic profile have the most experience of using sabbatical leave (22%). This study revealed some of the main reasons behind the low uptake of sabbatical leave. Pertinently, academic staff are not usually even aware of the possibility of taking sabbatical leave. Furthermore, respondents shared concerns and doubts about their university or faculty administration not allowing them to use sabbatical leave.

Overall, 68% of academic staff consider sabbatical leave an "effective" or "very effective" professional development practice. The activities most frequently carried out during sabbatical leave include working on academic publications, monographs, and textbooks, developing teaching materials, and carrying out research activities. In some cases, academic staff had participated in teaching activities abroad during their sabbatical leave.

It should be noted that sabbatical leave was initially codified as a right of academic staff in the Law on Higher Education (2004) but was subsequently removed by the amendments of 2011. However, the residual about the staff's obligation to report on the work performed during their sabbatical leave still remains in the Law (Article 37, Paragraph d).

MENTORSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CIRCLES/COMMUNITIES

According to the document analysis and results from the HEI leaders survey, mentorship and professional learning communities are the least practiced FPD activities. Of the surveyed institutions, only one teaching university claimed to provide mentorship as an FPD activity and only four HEIs offer professional learning circles and communities. However, academic staff from all HEIs mentioned that they had been involved in faculty mentorship activities and academic staff from seven HEIs had participated in faculty learning circles. This implies that some FPD activities are department- or faculty-based initiatives carried out informally and independently from the central administration.

**Chart 16.** Faculty participation in mentorship and learning circles
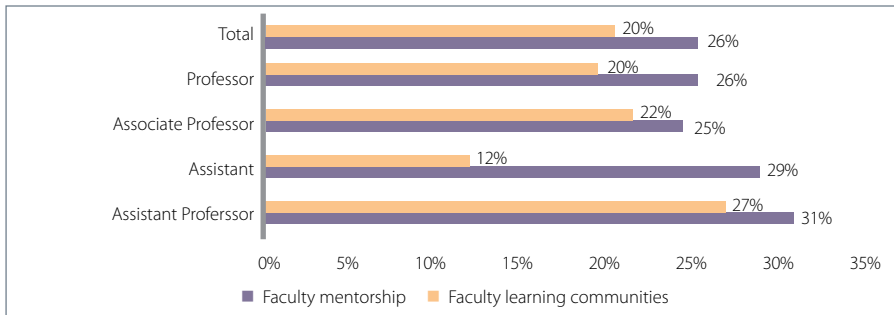
While the scholarly literature has demonstrated the effectiveness of faculty mentorship programs and faculty learning circles and has indeed called for their further intensification (Sorcinelli et al., 2011), the overall participation of faculties in such activities is quite low in Georgian HEIs. Specifically, 21% of academic staff reported having participated in faculty mentorship and 26% reported having participated in faculty learning communities. Assistant professors have the highest participation rate for both activities. Meanwhile, even though faculty mentorship is an essential component for entry-level academic staff such as assistants, they reported the lowest participation rate therein.

FACULTY SATISFACTION WITH EXISTING FPD OPPORTUNITIES

While various professional development opportunities are available in Georgian public HEIs, the satisfaction of academic staff with respect to their organization and implementation vary across institutions. To further explore whether the academic staff are satisfied with the available professional development opportunities, they were surveyed about the diversity, accessibility, relevance, quality, and coherence of FPD, and whether FPD is a priority for the given HEI's leadership.

Chart 17. Faculty satisfaction with the available FPD
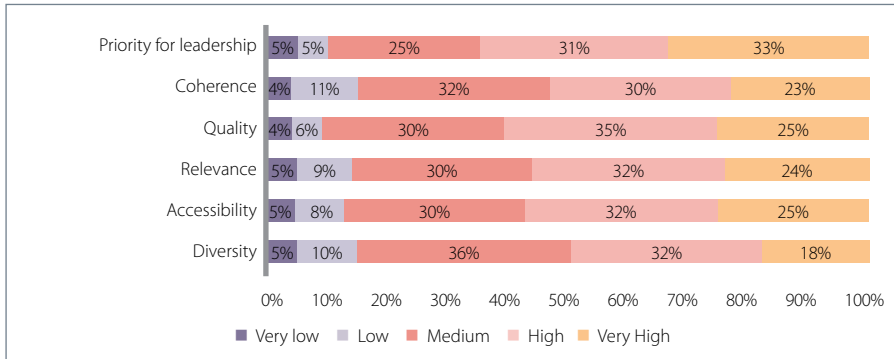
The survey results revealed that the level of satisfaction is moderate with respondents answering "high" or "very high" for between 50% and 65% of the listed criteria, which implies that, in general, the strategies and organization of FPD activities should be reviewed and improved. The surveyed academic staff displayed the lowest of satisfaction towards the diversity and coherence of the FPD activities. In particular, only 50% of academic staff said they were satisfied with the diversity of the available professional development opportunities. Thus, even if there are various forms of FPD available at each HEI, the offerings of each type of activity are still limited. The faculty survey results also reflected the results of the document analysis regarding the incoherent and scattered implementation of FPD. Pertinently, only 53% of academic staff positively rated the coherence of FPD implementation.

The data also unveiled differences in the satisfaction level with regard to the available FPD at different types of HEI (see Annex 3). In general, academic staff from the regional teaching universities and academic staff from universities with an artistic profile were least satisfied with the available professional development opportunities. For example, only 30% of academic staff from the regional teaching universities and only 33% from the universities with an artistic profile positively rated the diversity of available FPD. Moreover, only 48% of academic staff from the regional teaching universities and only 44% from universities with an artistic profile positively rated the accessibility of the available FPD, while overall, accessibility scored

higher in this respect with 57%. Academic staff from universities with an artistic profile demonstrated the least satisfaction with the relevance of FPD opportunities, as only 39% of them positively rated this aspect. The quality of FPD gleaned the lowest scores from regional teaching universities with only 41% rating this "high" or "very high," while 60% of academic staff said they were satisfied with the FPD's quality.

Thus, while the HEIs should increase and diversify the professional development opportunities for academic staff, it is also essential to learn about faculty members' professional development needs and to provide them with targeted support. Besides, the results of the survey and document analysis strongly signal to the HEIs that they should revise their FPD approaches to align them with their strategic development priorities and to ensure their coherent implementation.

NEEDS AND CHALLENGES OF FPD

In the course of conducting the survey, academic staff reflected on the changes and trends brought about by higher education reforms during recent years. Two major factors triggering the transformation of the Georgian higher education landscape were identified in the analysis: internationalization; and implementation of a QA system. These have driven changes in pedagogical approaches, making them interactive and student-oriented, and integrating information technologies into the teaching and learning process. Besides, the curriculum development process itself became a participatory project, relying on collaborative contributions from academic staff and taking into account labor market needs, QA standards, and international trends. Moreover, according to the survey results, the significance of international engagement and interdisciplinary research, as well as the development of methodological and theoretical approaches in research have also affected scholarly work. Thus, the need to acquire relevant academic skills and knowledge in response to emerging trends should be addressed through relevant professional development strategies.

NEEDS FOR FPD

Considering the development trends in higher education mentioned above and the goals academic staff intend to achieve through professional development support, the study has identified particular FPD needs.

To achieve teaching goals, which mainly encompasses the improvement of pedagogical approaches and the development of new courses and programs, academic staff desire training in contemporary teaching and learning methods, and the use of information technologies in teaching. They also need support in curriculum design and the alignment thereof with QA standards. For this purpose, they wish to receive expert consultations in curriculum design and training to enhance their

capacity in this area. They also intend to participate in international mobility programs to learn from international experience, and gain access to new disciplinary knowledge and practices.

To enhance research performance and to engage in the international scholarly community, academic staff seek the following support: (i) training and workshops to advance academic writing and research skills; (ii) the opportunity to learn more advanced research methods; and (iii) training on application of data analysis software. Besides, to enhance research performance, academic staff desire better access to the scholarly and scientific literature and, most importantly, relevant financial support (i.e. increased faculty salaries and research grants). Several academic staff responses highlighted that they have to take on additional work from other sources to compensate for their low salaries, leaving insufficient time for research work. Assistants and professors also emphasized their lack of time for research activities because of being overloaded with teaching hours. To carry out research activities, academic staff generally consider participation in international mobility and exchange programs as a short-term solution to secure funding, and get access to international scientific library databases. However, the accessibility of such programs is limited.

Furthermore, academic staff seek support in both finding research funding and in writing competitive research grant proposals. Moreover, while academic staff desire participation in international research projects, they generally struggle to find international partners to carry out joint research projects. They also need support in reaching out to different businesses and organizations as clients to commercialize their research activities. Academic staff also need financial support to fund the publication of articles in international peer-reviewed journals, as well as the publication of books, textbooks, and monographs.

Academic staff also highlighted the institutional changes that they think would help to improve their motivation and performance overall. In this regard, they marked the need to develop clear requirements and expectations for academic staff performance, to establish a performance evaluation and reward system, and to develop a unified scientific database.

CHALLENGES OF EXISTING FPD PRACTICES

Based on the document analysis and the results of the surveys with HEI leadership and academic staff, the study identified the challenges in existing FPD approaches and practices. HEI administrators emphasized the need for a more structural approach towards the planning and implementation of FPD activities. In addition, the administrators emphasized the weakness of the system for faculty evaluation and for the assessment of their professional development needs. Besides, most administrators also mentioned that institutions struggled with limited financial resources and could not allocate sufficient budget to meet FPD needs.

The surveyed academic staff also put an emphasis on the incoherent implementation of FPD activities and the scarcity of financial resources. They further specified the need for better communication between the administration and academic staff to plan and implement relevant professional development activities. Moreover, they noted that HEI leaderships undermine the significance of FPD. Moreover, academic staff expressed concern regarding the provision of information about all available professional development possibilities, related procedures, and their transparency. Furthermore, the poor qualification level of the administrative staff responsible for supporting and consulting academic staff regarding participation in international mobility programs, as well as in finding and applying the research grant projects was underscored. Thus, while the opinion of HEI leadership representatives about the challenges of FPD tended to focus on financial and structural issues, academic staff provided more detailed feedback about the shortcomings of FPD provisions and related procedures.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION OF STUDY RESULTS

Higher education reforms carried out in Georgia during the last two decades have not yet addressed FPD as a reform priority supported by relevant institutional or financial mechanisms. The study has revealed several trends in Georgian higher education system generated by reforms in recent years, rendering the updating of academic staff competencies a necessity. Notable trends here include the transition from the inherited Soviet system to a European higher education structure, the implementation of a QA system, and the internationalization of the higher education space. These have extended and diversified the roles and responsibilities of academic staff, have prompted a change in the nature of teaching and learning in the country, and have increased expectations with regard to the quality and productivity of scholarly work. This section summarizes the main findings regarding FPD practices in Georgian public HEIs and discusses the gaps and alignments among the existing FPD goals, strategies, structures, and practices, as well as the professional development needs of the academic staff.

The study explored the goals of HEIs and academic staff, which they intend to achieve through FPD. While the scholarly literature highlights FPD as the mechanism for achieving academic, individual, and institutional goals (Debowski, 2011; Sorcinelli et al., 2006), institutional policies and strategies put an emphasis on the achievement of academic goals. Specifically, FPD activities are presented as a means of improving teaching and learning practices. In particular, FPD activities oriented toward the improvement of teaching and learning most frequently include themes on the alignment of educational programs with QA standards and the national qualifications framework, teaching and learning methods, and the use of technologies in remote teaching. Thus, FPD activities in Georgian HEIs address the narrow scope of instructional development, while the scholarly literature highlights achieving teaching excellence and fostering pedagogical innovations as the main goals of FPD (Sorcinelli et al., 2006). The study also revealed that, in Georgian HEIs, FPD activities oriented toward achieving the academic goals mainly focus on instructional development and FPD related to the development of research skills is very limited.

The content covering FPD in the reviewed institutional documents does not mention the goal of responding to faculty members' individual professional development goals. In the case of academic staff, the academic and individual goals they aim to achieve through professional development support are intertwined. While the academic staff generally view the FPD as a means to improve pedagogical skills approaches and to develop new courses and programs, they put a stronger emphasis on the enhancement of research performance and productivity. Thus, the analysis here revealed a gap between the provision of FPD by HEIs and the actual professional development goals of academic staff.

Neither the HEI representatives nor academic staff characterized FPD as a tool for fostering the academic culture and institutional development, which resonates with the results of HEI surveys and document analysis. Therefore, the potential of FPD to foster institutional and academic transformation and build a collegial academic culture (Sorcinelli et al., 2006) is overlooked and underused by Georgian HEIs.

Thus, the HEI leaderships should reimagine FPD as a tool for embarking upon teaching and research excellence, and achieving institutional transformation through engaging academic staff and departments in reconciling goals and planning more comprehensive and relevant FPD strategies.

The analysis of institutional approaches and structures of FPD outline the scattered FPD approaches in Georgian HEIs. None of the HEIs participating in the study have a structure or person in place leading FPD activities; thus, the institutions lack a holistic view of their existing practices and their potential improvement (Robertson, 2010). The study has also found that internal QA departments are the main units when it comes to implementing FPD activities. However, the literature underlines that academic staff usually resist initiatives carried out by QA units as they are associated with performance monitoring functions (Quinn, 2012; Newton, 2000), while the faculty-led professional development initiatives organized by a specific unit with a FPD mission foster the engagement of academic staff in the FPD (Robertson, 2010; Sorcinelli et al., 2006). Thus, HEIs should consider redistribution of FPD tasks between different units to make them fitter for purpose. Consequently, the study invites HEI leaders to rethink FPD as a strategic priority and develop a coordinated system for its implementation.

The reviewed institutional documents and strategic plans do not describe the whole spectrum of FPD practices available at the given HEIs. The fragmented implementation of FPD hinders its efficiency as well as its responsiveness to the challenges of academic staff and HEIs in general. Hence, mapping the existing professional development activities and reviewing their relevance with respect to the institutional, academic, and individual professional development goals would help the HEIs to gain a comprehensive understanding of the state of their FPD and thus inform the improvement thereof.

The surveys revealed a broad spectrum of professional development activities available for academic staff, including seminars, workshops and training, international mobility programs for academic staff, participation in conferences, provision of English-language courses, funding for research projects, and sabbatical leaves.

The training and workshops related to teaching and learning matters have the highest participation rate and were also rated the most effective professional development activity by the surveyed academic staff. Meanwhile, sabbatical leave, international mobility programs, and faculty mentorship and learning circles have the lowest participation rates (all below 30%). In addition, sabbatical leave and research mobility

programs were also rated as the least effective sort of FPD. While the reasons behind these results need further exploration, from these data we can nevertheless observe that FPD is more accessible for academic staff due to fewer participation barriers, such as, less competition, simple or no application process, no language barrier, or more diverse opportunities, are rated as more effective.

Moreover, the scholarly literature has picked out sabbatical leave as one of the longest-running and most effective FPD practices (McKee, 2013; Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013). However, the study showed that only 15% of academic staff had used sabbatical leave and they rated it as a less effective form of FPD compared to other activities. The study revealed some of the main reasons behind the low utilization of sabbatical leave. The analysis showed that sabbatical leave was most often not taken due to a lack of awareness of such a possibility, or an assumption that the university or faculty administration would not allow academic staff to use sabbatical leave. Thus, HEIs should promote sabbatical leave as a means of renewing and realizing the individual academic and scholarly capacity of academic staff.

Furthermore, the analysis showed that faculty mentorship and faculty learning circles are rarely practiced in Georgian HEIs, while some studies have underlined their effectiveness and called for their intensification (Sorcinelli et al., 2011). Moreover, those practices are mainly built on the collegial faculty culture and informal commitments among the academic staff. Although faculty mentorship and learning circles do not require extensive financial resources, the HEI administration's provision of incentives fosters the cultivation of such practices.

The results of the survey on the satisfaction of academic staff with available FPD showed that academic staff from regional teaching universities and academic staff from universities with an artistic profile were least satisfied with the available professional development opportunities. Academic staff from artistic universities rated the diversity, accessibility, and relevance of FPD lowest. While the academic staff from regional teaching universities also share this opinion, they additionally expressed their unsatisfactory opinion about the quality of FPD activities and they were least satisfied with the university leadership's approach towards prioritizing FPD. Besides, the analysis has showed that regional HEIs rely more on the institutional budget, while universities in Tbilisi have more diversified funding sources for FPD. Thus, policymakers should look for ways to support regional HEIs to improve the internal capacity of FPD to enable more diversified, relevant, and high-quality FPD activities and to make use of external funding opportunities.

Furthermore, the study revealed general challenges in FPD from the perspectives of HEI leadership representatives and academic staff. While HEI leadership representatives focused on the challenges of FPD related to financial and structural issues, academic staff provided more detailed feedback about the shortcomings of FPD provision. Specifically, academic staff emphasized the need for better communication, the provision of information about available FPD opportunities, related procedures,

and the transparency of their implementation. Furthermore, the poor competencies of the administrative staff responsible for supporting and consulting the academic staff regarding participation in international mobility programs, as well as in finding and applying for research grant projects was underscored. Thus, HEIs should work toward the improvement and simplification of procedures related to participation in FPD, ensuring their transparent implementation and capacity development of staff responsible for FPD.

The analysis, once again, highlights the issue of low faculty salaries, the fragmentation of academic work at different HEIs, and a lack of time to carry out scholarly activities and to participate in FPD activities. Thus, if policymakers address this concern, it would represent a fundamental step in transforming academic jobs and supporting academic staff's professional development. Furthermore, academic staff emphasized that developing clear requirements and expectations for academic staff performance, as well as establishing performance evaluation and reward system, could improve the motivation of academic staff to engage in FPD and enhance their academic performance.

PROPOSALS FOR REIMAGINING FPD IN GEORGIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SPACE

FOR HEIs

Higher education leaders should reimagine the role of FPD as a transformative tool to achieve excellence in teaching, to advance scientific performance, and to build an organizational culture.

HEIs should establish a coordinated system for the efficient implementation of FPD. The coordinated system does not necessarily mean centralization of the system but stresses the flexible structure coordinated between the central administration, support units and academic departments in defining the needs, priorities, strategies, and approaches regarding FPD and their implementation.

It is essential that the FPD system engages faculty members in defining FPD priorities, and planning and implementing FPD activities. Along with defining FPD priorities and activities, HEIs should allocate an appropriate budget, and intensify cooperation with various donors to supplement financial effort regarding FPD.

HEIs should consider establishing the practice of faculty developers. For this purpose, they should first train staff for the faculty developer position and equip them with relevant competencies (see Wehlburg, 2010).

HEIs should enhance the capacity of staff responsible for supporting academic staff's professional development in areas such as cooperation with potential donor organizations, grant writing, application procedures, etc.. Considering the academic staff survey results, special attention should be paid to the capacity development of research and development units.

HEIs should, in general, improve the support system for academic staff through:

- *Increasing awareness about the available professional development opportunities inside and outside of the given HEI. In particular, HEIs should ensure that the academic staff are aware of the professional development opportunities provided by the HEI and about the procedures to apply for them.*

- *HEIs should improve the procedures to engage academic staff in FPD and ensure their transparent implementation, especially in professional development programs where faculty participation is based on competition.*

- *HEIs should support academic staff in finding relevant professional development opportunities and guide them to make their professional development experience more beneficial.*

- HEIs should take into account the time needed for professional development and allow academic staff to engage in such activities, including engagement in long-term professional development activities, such as sabbatical leave and international mobility programs.

- HEIs should consider establishing and/or improving mentorship and learning community practices, as they are considered effective practices for enhancing the performance of academic staff, increasing the sense of collegiality, and supporting collaboration among academic staff.

- HEIs should work towards diversifying professional development opportunities for academic staff based on a faculty needs assessment and the institutional and academic priorities of HEIs, thus increasing their relevance and accessibility.

To respond to academic staff's needs regarding support in curriculum design, HEIs should establish f the curriculum developer's practice. Curriculum developers work with faculty members and consult them on curriculum design. Ensuring that curriculum developers have the relevant expertise here is essential. Moreover, academic staff and students from the education department/faculty could be used to develop the internal capacity of the curriculum development service.

To support academic staff in enhancing research competencies and performance, HEIs should intensify training in research methods. Some effective practices for adult learners in research methods include the organization of intensive summer/winter schools, the provision of online courses, as well as the provision of relevant methodological and theoretical resources and their translation in the Georgian language. HEIs should also provide access to international scientific library databases and provide relevant instructions for their use.

HEIs should review the academic staff workload and remuneration policies to provide a stable and development-oriented working environment, which promotes the engagement of academic staff in FPD and the enhancement of academic performance.

HEIs should develop clear requirements and expectations with respect to academic staff performance, establish an academic staff performance evaluation and reward system, and develop a unified scientific database.

FOR POLICYMAKERS

The regulations related to the roles and responsibilities of academic staff should be revised to describe the complexity of academic work (see "Functions of effective academic work" in Debowski, 2011, p. 310-312). This can create a foundation upon which to review the actual workload in a given academic job, map the professional development needs, and create a performance assessment and reward system.

Policymakers should prioritize FPD as a tool for the implementation of higher education reforms fostering the qualitative transformation of the system. Making FPD a priority should entail specific actions and suitable allocation of financial resources.

For example:

- Address the issue of the fragmentation of academic work at different HEIs through regulatory and financial measures;

- Improve the research and scientific infrastructure, and support HEIs to provide access to international scientific library databases;

- Develop FPD programs providing financial and organizational support for the professional development activities of academic staff.

Policymakers should also look for ways to support regional HEIs to improve the internal capacity of FPD to enable more diversified, relevant, and high-quality FPD activities, and make use of external funding opportunities.

Policymakers should consider making relevant provisions in the regulatory or policy documents to encourage the expansion and implementation of FPD in HEIs.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1. RESPONSIBILITIES AND QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN GEORGIA

Degree requirement	Years of experience	Conditions for indefinite appointment	Additional conditions
Professor - administers studies and supervises the scientific research work of students.			
Doctor's or an equivalent academic degree	At least 6 years of scientific-pedagogical experience In the field of arts - at least 8 years of experience in the field	Special professional achievements and/or scientific achievements (for instance, has scientific publications in leading local and international journals and other editions, has participated in national and international scientific research projects, etc.); In the field of arts, if the professor has been elected for three consecutive terms. Attestation in every 5 years	Additional conditions established by the HEI.
Associate Professor - participates in the study process and supervises educational, scientific research activities carried out by students.			
Doctor's or an equivalent academic degree	At least 3 years of scientific-pedagogical experience In the field of arts - at least 4 years of experience in the field	N/A	Additional conditions established by the HEI.

Assistant Professor- participates in the educational, scientific research processes within her/his authority.			
Doctor's or an equivalent academic degree. In the field of arts - Master's or an equivalent academic degree	No experience required	N/A	
Assistant -conducts seminars and performs research activities under the supervision of a professor, an associate professor or an assistant professor during studies at main educational units.			
Doctoral student/ candidate for 3-4 years In the field of arts - Master's student for 2-3	No experience required	N/A	
A person who has attained the age of 65 may not be elected to an academic position at a state higher education institution established, and a person occupying an academic position, who has attained the age of 65 shall be dismissed after the expiration of the term of her/his office. However, exceptions can be allowed by the statute of a given HEI.			

Source: Law on Higher Education (Parliament of Georgia, 2004)

ANNEX 2. TYPE OF SUPPORT HEIS PROVIDE FOR FACULTY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

HEI funded participation in the professional development activity

Teaching universities (Tbilisi)	59%
Teaching universities (regions)	52%
Universities (Tbilisi)	33%
Universities (regions)	67%
Total	45%

Participated in the professional development activity organized by the HEI

Teaching universities (Tbilisi)	84%
Teaching universities (regions)	66%
Universities (Tbilisi)	58%
Universities (regions)	83%
Total	67%

Received information about the internally available FPD

Teaching universities (Tbilisi)	88%
Teaching universities (regions)	68%
Universities (Tbilisi)	77%
Universities (regions)	90%
Total	80%

Received information about the externally available professional development opportunities

Teaching universities (Tbilisi)	81%
Teaching universities (regions)	73%
Universities (Tbilisi)	60%
Universities (regions)	83%
Total	68%

Assistance in finding or applying for mobility, research grant or other programs

Teaching universities (Tbilisi)	41%
Teaching universities (regions)	32%
Universities (Tbilisi)	27%
Universities (regions)	55%
Total	35%

Other

Teaching universities (Tbilisi)	34%
Teaching universities (regions)	18%
Universities (Tbilisi)	15%
Universities (regions)	30%
Total	21%

Have not received any assistance

Teaching universities (Tbilisi)	9%
Teaching universities (regions)	16%
Universities (Tbilisi)	16%
Universities (regions)	7%
Total	14%

ANNEX 3. SATISFACTION OF ACADEMIC STAFF BY HEI TYPE

Diversity

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
Teaching universities (Tbilisi)	7%	3%	47%	33%	10%
Teaching universities (regions)	5%	17%	43%	29%	7%
Universities (Tbilisi)	6%	11%	34%	31%	18%
Universities (regions)	3%	6%	31%	35%	25%
Total	**5%**	**10%**	**36%**	**32%**	**18%**

Accessibility

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
Teaching universities (Tbilisi)	3%	6%	32%	42%	16%
Teaching universities (regions)	5%	12%	33%	29%	21%
Universities (Tbilisi)	6%	10%	28%	33%	23%
Universities (regions)	4%	1%	33%	27%	35%
Total	**5%**	**8%**	**30%**	**32%**	**25%**

Relevance

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
Teaching universities (Tbilisi)	3%	3%	30%	43%	20%
Teaching universities (regions)	5%	10%	38%	26%	21%
Universities (Tbilisi)	6%	13%	29%	32%	21%
Universities (regions)	3%	4%	28%	30%	36%
Total	**5%**	**9%**	**30%**	**32%**	**24%**

Quality

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
Teaching universities (Tbilisi)	3%	3%	26%	48%	19%
Teaching universities (regions)	5%	16%	35%	30%	14%
Universities (Tbilisi)	4%	7%	32%	34%	24%
Universities (regions)	3%	1%	26%	35%	35%
Total	**4%**	**6%**	**30%**	**35%**	**25%**

Coherence

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
Teaching universities (Tbilisi)	3%	6%	26%	39%	26%
Teaching universities (regions)	5%	12%	39%	29%	15%
Universities (Tbilisi)	5%	13%	34%	30%	19%
Universities (regions)	2%	7%	28%	27%	35%
Total	**4%**	**11%**	**32%**	**30%**	**23%**

Priority for leadership

	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
Teaching universities (Tbilisi)	6%	3%	23%	42%	26%
Teaching universities (regions)	7%	10%	31%	33%	19%
Universities (Tbilisi)	6%	5%	28%	27%	33%
Universities (regions)	2%	4%	15%	35%	44%
Total	**5%**	**5%**	**25%**	**31%**	**33%**

ANNEX 4: PARTICIPATION OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Chart 18. Participation in teaching and research mobility by academic position
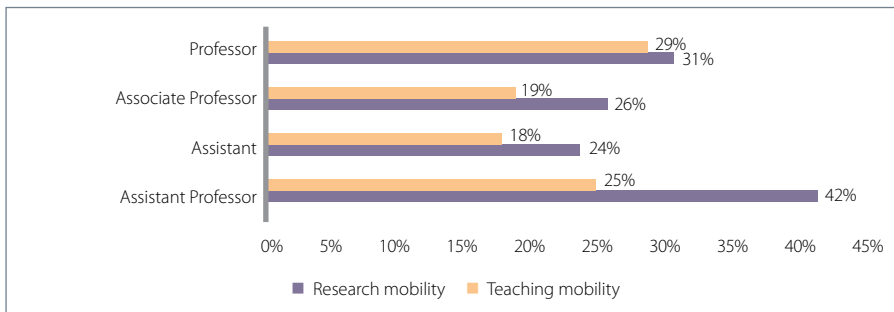
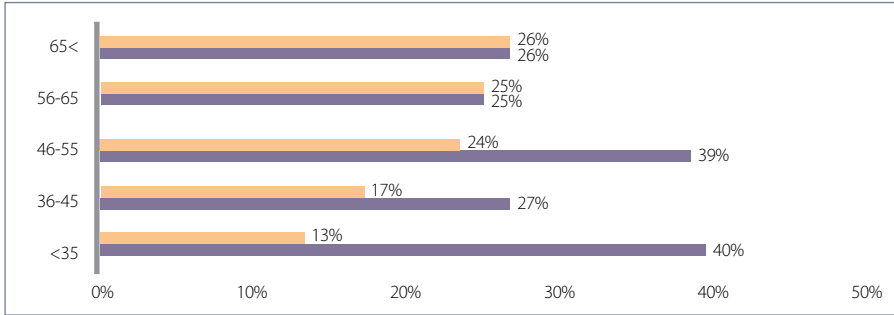**Chart 19.** Participation in teaching and research mobility by age

Chart 20. Academic staff that received the grants for research projects

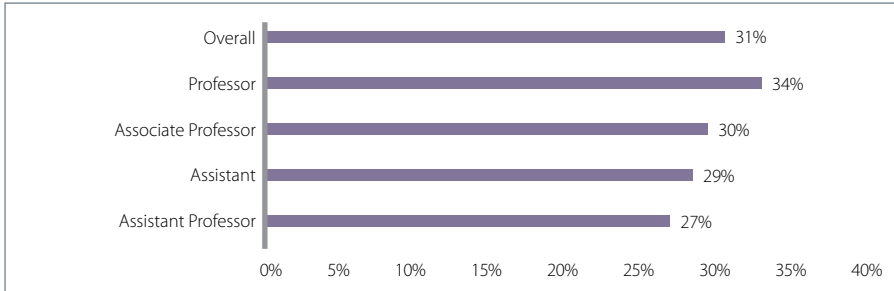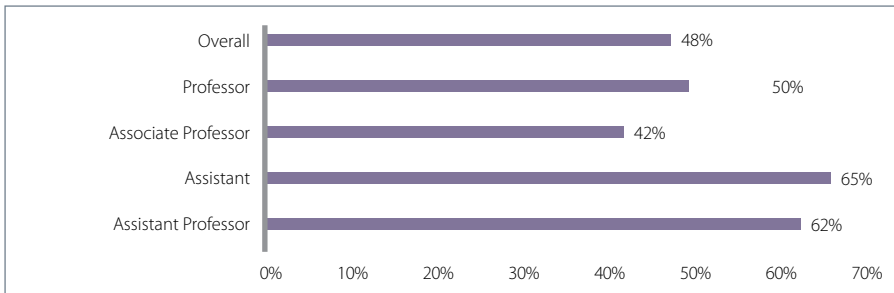**Chart 21.** Academic staff participating in the joint research projects by academic position