RiHEI



Responsible and Impactful Universities as Sustainable Growth and Enterprise Catalysts in Georgia

Policy Briefings

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A. Introduction

RiHEI – Responsible and Impactful Universities as Sustainable Growth and Enterprise Catalysts in Georgia is an Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education project (2024–2026). It helps Georgian universities become engines of entrepreneurship, knowledge exchange and sustainable regional development.

This document contains the two policy briefings foreseen in the RiHEI communication and dissemination strategy. They are addressed to the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, its agencies and the higher management of Georgian universities. Each briefing is self-contained and can be circulated separately:

- **Policy briefing 1, Making higher education in Georgia more entrepreneurial** (Section B), sets out why and how Georgian universities can become engines of entrepreneurship, knowledge exchange and job creation, with recommendations for national policy and for university leadership.
- **Policy briefing 2, Demonstrating the wider impact of Georgian universities: adopting SDG metrics** (Section C), proposes a national core framework of Sustainable Development Goal indicators and a maturity path through which Georgian universities can measure and report their contribution to society.

Each briefing opens with a one-page **executive summary** of its key messages and recommendations. The executive summaries can be printed and handed to participants at the RiHEI open days and the final conference. Section D draws the two briefings together and documents how they were validated with stakeholders at the open days.

Both briefings draw on the RiHEI needs analysis, the capacity building and pilot activities carried out with Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Kutaisi International University and Gori State University, the experience of the EU partners (University of Lodz, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg and TUM International), and a review of Georgian and European policy developments up to September 2026. They were prepared under the lead of TUMINT, with MLU coordinating the policy briefing process, and are available in English, Georgian, Polish and German.

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
AASHE	Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education
CRUE	Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
DigCompEdu	European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EIT	European Institute of Innovation and Technology
EntreComp	European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
EU	European Union
GBP	Pound sterling
GDP	Gross domestic product
GEL	Georgian lari
GITA	Georgia's Innovation and Technology Agency
GreenComp	European Sustainability Competence Framework
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative

Abbreviation	Meaning
GSU	Gori State University
HEInnovate	European Commission and OECD self-assessment framework for entrepreneurial and innovative higher education institutions
I2Q	Innovation, Inclusion and Quality project (World Bank)
IP	Intellectual property
KIU	Kutaisi International University
MLU	Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg
NCEQE	National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (Georgia)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRME	Principles for Responsible Management Education
QS	Quacquarelli Symonds
RIIA	Regional Innovation Impact Assessment
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDSN	Sustainable Development Solutions Network
STARS	Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System
STEAM	Science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
THE	Times Higher Education
TSU	Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University
TUM	Technical University of Munich
TUMINT	TUM International GmbH
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UOL	University of Lodz

B. Policy briefing 1: Making higher education in Georgia more entrepreneurial

Executive summary

KEY MESSAGES

- **Georgia needs more from its universities.** About 38% of tertiary-educated workers are in semi-skilled jobs, and Georgia ranks 97th of 139 economies for business-financed research and development.
- **The policy window is open.** The 2025–2026 higher education reform and the performance-based funding model of July 2026 create, for the first time, a direct link between what universities do for the economy and society and what they receive from the state.
- **The instruments exist, the links do not.** GITA programmes, applied research grants of the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation and tax incentives for start-ups are in place, but universities lack the capacity and incentives to use them.
- **RiHEI evidence from TSU, KIU and GSU** shows that the main gaps are leadership for change, incentives for staff, entrepreneurial teaching, professional technology transfer and impact measurement.

Seven national and seven institutional measures would make entrepreneurship a mainstream function of Georgian universities by 2030.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Ministry and its agencies	For university leadership
N1 Reward entrepreneurship and knowledge exchange through defined indicators in the performance component of the funding model.	**U1** Adopt an entrepreneurship and engagement strategy with a named vice-rector.
N2 Make the third mission an explicit criterion in authorisation and accreditation, and pursue international recognition of Georgian quality assurance.	**U2** Professionalise technology transfer and adopt an institutional IP policy.
N3 Adopt a national micro-credentials framework aligned with the 2022 Council Recommendation.	**U3** Embed EntreComp-based entrepreneurial learning in every study programme.
N4 Issue national guidance and a model policy on intellectual property, revenue sharing and spin-offs.	**U4** Establish public-private impact advisory boards.
N5 Recognise knowledge exchange and entrepreneurial teaching in academic careers.	**U5** Build a student venture pathway, with targeted support for women and rural youth.
N6 Create joint instruments with GITA, the Rustaveli Foundation and Enterprise Georgia.	**U6** Offer micro-credentials and lifelong learning to employers.
N7 Build a national evidence base, using HEInnovate as a common self-assessment tool.	**U7** Measure progress every year and use the evidence in performance funding reporting.

This page can be printed as a stand-alone handout. Full briefing and translations: www.rihei.eu

1. Why this briefing, and why now

1.1. An economy that needs more from its universities

Georgia has grown quickly over the past two decades, but its higher education system has not yet become a strong engine of productivity and job creation. The World Bank's Country Economic Memorandum found three signs of this:[1]

- about 38% of tertiary-educated workers hold semi-skilled jobs;
- the wage premium for tertiary education is around 30%;
- 15% of firms name an inadequately educated workforce as their main obstacle.

Unemployment stood at 13.9% in 2025.[2] Among young people aged 15 to 29, Geostat figures reported in October 2024 put it at 26.7%.[3]

The innovation picture shows the same gap between strong institutions and weak links to the economy. In the Global Innovation Index 2026, Georgia ranks 57th of 139 economies. It performs relatively well on institutions (37th) and on university-industry research collaboration (45th). It is among the weakest performers on business-financed research and development (97th) and on graduates in science and engineering (95th).[4] Gross expenditure on research and development was 0.26% of GDP in 2024.[5] The European Commission's 2025 report on Georgia similarly notes that "spending on research and innovation remains very low".[6]

Entrepreneurial universities are one of the few levers that act on all of these problems together:

- graduates with initiative and job-relevant skills;
- research that reaches companies and society;
- new ventures that create jobs, including in the regions;
- universities that earn part of their income by solving problems for others.

1.2. A policy window created by the reform

Three developments make 2026 and 2027 the right moment to act.

The higher education reform. In October 2025 the Government presented a reform concept[7] and set up a Government Commission for Higher Education Reform.[8] Parliament adopted amendments to the Law on Higher Education in December 2025.[9] A further legislative package introduced in February 2026

[1] World Bank (2022), Georgia Country Economic Memorandum, Chapter 5, https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099325006302227479/pdf/P1754860c92fb40a090980ebf3d0d810e4.pdf.

[2] National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat), Employment and unemployment, https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/683/Employment-Unemployment, accessed 30 September 2026.

[3] Georgia Today, "National Statistics Service: 26.7% of youth are unemployed", October 2024, https://georgiatoday.ge/national-statistics-service-26-7-youth-are-unemployed/.

[4] WIPO, Global Innovation Index 2026, Georgia economy profile, https://www.wipo.int/edocs/gii-ranking/2026/ge.pdf.

[5] WIPO, Global Innovation Index 2026, Georgia economy profile, indicator on gross expenditure on R&D.

[6] European Commission, Georgia 2025 Report, 4 November 2025, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/b3089ad4-26be-4c6a-84cc-b9d680fe0a48_en?filename=georgia-report-2025.pdf.

[7] Georgia Today, "Georgia to create major university hubs in Tbilisi and Kutaisi", 17 October 2025, https://georgiatoday.ge/georgia-to-create-major-university-hubs-in-tbilisi-and-kutaisi/.

[8] Eurydice, Georgia, National reforms in higher education, updated 31 March 2026, https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/eurypedia/georgia/national-reforms-higher-education.

[9] Parliament of Georgia, news release of 10 December 2025 on amendments related to the higher education reform, https://parliament.ge/en/media/news/parlamentma-umaghlesi-ganatlebis-reformastan-dakavshirebul-sakanonmdeblo-tsvlilebebs-mkhari-dauchira.

concerns the reorganisation of state universities, a new "leading professor" post and temporary governance arrangements.[10] The admission model introduced in February 2026 gives each state university a clearer profile. TSU remains the multi-profile university in Tbilisi, Kutaisi remains a multidisciplinary hub, and universities in Gori and other regional cities concentrate on agrarian studies, tourism and teacher education.[11] Clearer profiles make it easier to build focused entrepreneurship and innovation strategies around each university's strengths.

A performance-based funding model. In July 2026 the Government approved a funding model that combines basic funding with performance funding linked to quality, labour-market relevance, research, internationalisation, regional role and access. Public funding for universities is to reach GEL 170 million in 2027. The model was developed with support from the World Bank's Innovation, Inclusion and Quality (I2Q) project.[12] For the first time, a university that works closely with employers, commercialises research or serves its region can be rewarded for it financially. The design of the performance indicators will determine whether this happens.

National strategies already point in this direction. The Unified Strategy for Education and Science 2022-2030 identifies limited cooperation between universities and the labour market and industry as a weakness.[13] The Ministry's "Vision on Strengthening and Supporting the 3rd Mission in Georgian Universities" covers three areas: knowledge and technology transfer (including patents and start-ups), lifelong learning through micro-credentials, and social engagement. It states that the third mission will be integrated into the authorisation standards.[14]

1.3. The instruments exist, but the links are weak

Georgia already has several instruments that entrepreneurial universities can use:

- **GITA** runs an Innovative Startup Acceleration Program and a four-week Regional Pre-Acceleration Program, alongside its network of technology parks, innovation centres and FabLabs.[15]
- **The Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation** funds applied research in three tiers (proof of concept, pilot and implementation), worth up to GEL 90,000, 120,000 and 180,000 per year respectively, with rising co-financing requirements. The tiers are explicitly designed around technology readiness and commercialisation.[16]
- **Tax incentives.** Since 24 September 2025, registered innovative start-ups have received tax incentives, including relief on salary income tax in their first years, through the Innovations Registry kept by GITA.[17]

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[10] Eurydice, Georgia, National reforms in higher education, updated 31 March 2026, https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/eurypedia/georgia/national-reforms-higher-education.

[11] Georgia Today, "Government introduces one city, one faculty model for state universities", February 2026, https://georgiatoday.ge/government-introduces-one-city-one-faculty-model-for-state-universities/.

[12] Georgia Today, "Government approves new university funding model", 31 July 2026, https://georgiatoday.ge/government-approves-new-university-funding-model/; OC Media, 3 August 2026, https://oc-media.org/georgia-to-make-state-university-tuition-free-with-conditions/.

[13] Unified National Strategy of Education and Science of Georgia 2022-2030, adopted by Government Decree No. 446 of 31 August 2022, https://mes.gov.ge/content.php?id=7755&lang=eng.

[14] Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, Vision on Strengthening and Supporting the 3rd Mission in Georgian Universities, https://mes.gov.ge/uploads/3M-VISION-ENG%20(1).pdf.

[15] Georgia's Innovation and Technology Agency, programmes, https://gita.gov.ge/en/programs.

[16] Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia, 2025 state grant competition for applied research, https://rustaveli.org.ge/eng/mimdinare-konkursebi/fondi-atskhadebs-gamokenebiti-kvlevebisatvis-sakhelmtsifo-sametsniero-grantebis-2025-tslis-konkurss.

[17] Commersant, 24 September 2025, https://commersant.ge/en/news/business/the-law-on-tax-incentives-for-innovative-startups-in-georgia-has-come-into-effect-today; GITA innovation status portal, https://innovationstatus.gov.ge/en.

- **European programmes.** Georgia remains associated to Horizon Europe,[18] and Georgian universities remain fully eligible for Erasmus+.[19]

Universities are not yet systematically organised to use these instruments. Few have professional technology transfer staff, clear rules on intellectual property and spin-offs, or incentives for academics to work with companies. As a result, national money for innovation and the knowledge produced in universities often do not meet.

2. What an entrepreneurial university is

An entrepreneurial university is not a university that turns academics into business people. It is a university whose leadership, staff and students use their knowledge to create value for others, in the economy, the public sector and the community. They do this through teaching, research, partnerships and new ventures. The European Commission and the OECD capture this in HEInnovate, a free self-assessment framework with eight dimensions.[20] Table 1 shows what each dimension means in practice and what national policy can do to support it.

Table 1: The eight HEInnovate dimensions and the role of national policy

Dimension	What it looks like in practice	What national policy can do
Leadership and governance	Entrepreneurship is part of the mission and strategy; a senior leader is accountable	Ask for third mission strategies in authorisation; reward results in funding
Organisational capacity, funding, people and incentives	Diversified income; staff are rewarded for knowledge exchange	Allow universities to retain and reinvest earned income; recognise knowledge exchange in careers
Entrepreneurial teaching and learning	Entrepreneurial competences in all programmes; challenge-based learning with companies	Support EntreComp-based curricula and staff development
Preparing and supporting entrepreneurs	Pre-incubation, mentoring, access to finance for students and staff	Link universities to GITA and investor networks; fund regional pre-acceleration
Digital transformation and capability	Digital tools for learning, collaboration and venture support	Support DigCompEdu staff training and shared platforms
Knowledge exchange and collaboration	Joint projects, contract research, advisory boards with industry and the public sector	Co-funding for university-industry projects; clear IP rules
The internationalised institution	International partnerships used for innovation, not only for mobility	Support participation in Horizon Europe, Erasmus+ and EIT consortia
Measuring impact	Regular evidence on outcomes and impact	Common indicators; national data on graduates and start-ups

The European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework (EntreComp) complements HEInnovate at the level of learners and staff. It defines 15 competences in three areas (ideas and opportunities,

[18] European Commission, List of participating countries in Horizon Europe, version 4.1 of 16 September 2026.

[19] European Commission, Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2026, Part A, Eligible countries, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/eligible-countries. Under the 2026 Guide, Georgian public authorities and agencies are not eligible, while universities remain eligible.

[20] HEInnovate, European Commission and OECD, https://www.heinnovate.eu/en/about/heinnovate.

resources, and into action), across eight levels of proficiency.[21] Entrepreneurial learning in this sense benefits every graduate, including future teachers, farmers, public servants and researchers, and not only future company founders.

3. Where Georgian universities stand

3.1. Evidence from RiHEI

RiHEI brings together Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (TSU), Kutaisi International University (KIU) and Gori State University (GSU) with the University of Lodz, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg and TUM International. The three Georgian partners are a large, long-established university in the capital, a new public university in Kutaisi and a regional university in Shida Kartli. Together they give a representative picture of the Georgian system. The RiHEI needs analysis combined three sources: a review of 22 public reports, HEInnovate self-assessments with management, academic and administrative staff in each university, and a structured consultation of about 15% of staff in the departments involved on their entrepreneurial and digital competences.

The HEInnovate assessments showed consistent gaps across the three universities:

- **Leadership and governance:** management needs training for change management and more flexible structures.
- **Funding, people and incentives:** universities lack ways to reward excellence, diversify income and access public-private funds.
- **Entrepreneurial teaching:** there are not enough skilled lecturers.
- **Support for entrepreneurs:** support programmes for students are weak.
- **Digital capability:** capability is limited in both administration and teaching.
- **Knowledge exchange:** industrial boards are few, and staff have limited skills in mobilising the quadruple helix.
- **Internationalisation:** international relations offices are weak.
- **Impact measurement:** university analytics are almost absent.

The staff consultation added findings on competences:

- limited entrepreneurial teaching skills and little inclusive entrepreneurship programme design;
- inexperienced technology transfer offices and limited skills in fast-tracking spin-offs;
- a slow shift in mindset towards the entrepreneurial university.

RiHEI has responded to these gaps with a programme of:

- six capacity building toolkits;
- two intensive University Transformation Weeks in Kutaisi and Gori;
- study visits to Munich, Halle and Lodz;
- public-private impact investment advisory boards;
- a micro-credential certification framework using Europass digital credentials;
- STEAM Youth Lighthouse pilots and start-up competitions for young people from rural and remote areas.

[21] Joint Research Centre (2016), EntreComp: The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework, EUR 27939 EN, https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/entrecomp-entrepreneurship-competence-framework/competence-areas-and-learning-progress_en.

The project experience suggests that change is possible when leadership commits and staff are trained, but that it will stall unless national incentives and rules support it.

3.2. Assets to build on

Georgian universities do not start from zero:

- **TSU** runs a Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Center that supports start-ups and spin-offs, operates FabLab-TSU and organises hackathons.[22]
- **KIU** established KIUInnovate in 2021 with TUM and TUM International, with the ambition of becoming Georgia's leading entrepreneurial university.[23]
- **Private universities**, such as the Business and Technology University, have built their profiles around innovation and entrepreneurship.
- **GITA's regional infrastructure and the Foundation's applied research tiers** give universities concrete routes to market.
- **The World Bank's I2Q project** has supported a performance-based funding formula, a competitive innovation fund and entrepreneurship modules in higher education.[24]

3.3. System-level barriers

Incentives. Until the 2026 reform, public funding for Georgian universities followed student numbers, mainly through state study grants, and academic careers have been judged mainly on teaching and research outputs. Knowledge exchange, work with companies and support to start-ups are therefore extra work without recognition. The new performance component can change this only if its indicators capture these activities.

Rules on intellectual property and ventures. Entrepreneurial universities need legal and procedural clarity on four questions:

- who owns results created with public funds;
- how income is shared between the university, the inventors and their units;
- whether and how a public university can hold equity in a spin-off;
- how conflicts of interest are managed.

Where such rules are unclear, staff and universities avoid commercialisation altogether.

Quality assurance. The authorisation standards of the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) require a university to contribute to the development of society and to facilitate lifelong learning.[25] However, they contain no dedicated criterion on entrepreneurship, knowledge exchange or employability outcomes. In addition, NCEQE has not been registered in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) since April 2024.[26] Registration matters for the international recognition of Georgian qualifications, including any future micro-credentials.

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[22] Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Innovation Center, https://tsu.ge/en/innovation-center/page/Innovation-Center.

[23] Kutaisi International University, news of 18 October 2023, https://kiu.edu.ge/index.php?lng=eng&m=205&news_id=317.

[24] World Bank, Georgia Innovation, Inclusion and Quality Project (P168481), Aide Memoire, April 2024, https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099051324011026988/pdf/P1684811fe6d1705198af1f95c4e6d032f.pdf.

[25] NCEQE, authorisation standard 1.2 as cited in NCEQE authorisation reports (2025), for example https://eqe.ge/media/28844/ENG_Final-Report.pdf.

[26] European Quality Assurance Register, NCEQE entry (registered 1 April 2019 to 30 April 2024), https://www.eqar.eu/register/agencies/agency/?id=59.

Capacity. Technology transfer, contract negotiation, investor relations and entrepreneurial teaching are professional skills. Most Georgian universities have very few staff with these skills, especially outside Tbilisi.

Regional disparities. Start-up support, investors and large employers are concentrated in Tbilisi. Regional universities such as GSU serve students from rural and remote areas who have most to gain from entrepreneurial education but have the weakest local ecosystems.

Evidence. Georgia lacks systematic data on graduate employment, start-ups created by students and staff, and university-industry income. Without such data, neither the Ministry nor university leaders can see what works.

3.4. The regional dimension

The 2026 admission model concentrates multidisciplinary provision in Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Batumi. It gives the state universities in Gori, Zugdidi, Akhaltsikhe and Telavi a focus on agrarian studies, tourism and teacher education.[27] This has direct consequences for entrepreneurship policy. Regional universities should not copy a technology start-up model designed for the capital. They should build entrepreneurship around their new profiles and their regional economies.

- **Agrarian studies:** entrepreneurship can centre on agri-food value chains, food processing, cooperatives, agritourism, climate adaptation and digital tools for small farms. Students and staff can work directly with farmers, processors and municipalities.
- **Tourism:** opportunities lie in small hospitality businesses, cultural and heritage services, digital marketing and sustainable destination management, which are sectors where young graduates can create their own jobs.
- **Teacher education:** this may be the most powerful lever of all. Future teachers who have learnt through EntreComp-based methods carry an entrepreneurial mindset into every school in their region. Teacher education faculties can also become test beds for education technology and school-based innovation projects.

Regional universities also serve the students who face the greatest barriers: young people from rural and mountain areas, from families with low incomes and, in some fields, young women. RiHEI's STEAM Youth Lighthouse and start-up competitions for young people from remote areas were designed for this group. National policy can support the regional dimension in three ways:

- by guaranteeing regional universities access to GITA's regional pre-acceleration programme and to Enterprise Georgia grant schemes;
- by encouraging municipalities to co-fund challenge-based projects with their local university;
- by using the RIIA framework to align each university's entrepreneurship strategy with the strengths of its region.

[27] Georgia Today, "Government introduces one city, one faculty model for state universities", February 2026, https://georgiatoday.ge/government-introduces-one-city-one-faculty-model-for-state-universities/; JAMnews, "One city, one faculty: how education reform is reshaping Georgia's university map", https://jam-news.net/one-city-one-faculty-how-education-reform-is-reshaping-georgias-university-map/.

4. Lessons from European practice

European policy has moved decisively towards universities as actors of innovation ecosystems:

- **The European Strategy for Universities** (January 2022) calls on universities to be at the heart of innovation ecosystems and stresses the institutional autonomy needed to do so.[28]
- **The New European Innovation Agenda** (July 2022) made deep tech talent one of its five flagships.[29] Under it, the EIT Deep Tech Talent Initiative reported more than one million people trained and more than 600 organisations pledging support by mid-2025.[30]
- **The EIT Higher Education Initiative** has involved 622 higher education institutions since 2021.[31] Georgian universities can join its consortia as institutions from a Horizon Europe associated country, subject to each call's rules.
- **The Council Recommendation on micro-credentials** (June 2022) gives a common European approach to short, quality-assured learning that universities can offer to adults and employers.[32]

The EU partners in RiHEI illustrate how these principles work in practice:

- **University of Lodz:** its research and innovation strategy for 2021-2030 was built on the EIT-funded RiEcoLab project, in which the partner universities, under UOL's leadership, embedded responsible research and innovation, transformed technology transfer offices to support public-private investment boards and supported the creation of start-ups.
- **Technical University of Munich:** it anchors its entrepreneurship support in a dense ecosystem that includes UnternehmerTUM, its centre for innovation and business creation, and long-term partnerships with industry.
- **Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg:** it works with companies and research institutes such as the Max Planck Society and the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft on the Weinberg Campus technology park.

Five lessons stand out for Georgia:

- **Leadership and strategy come first.** In each European case, the change was led from the top, written into the university strategy and given an accountable senior leader.
- **Professional support structures matter more than buildings.** Experienced technology transfer, venture support and industry liaison staff produce results; empty incubators do not.
- **Incentives must reach individuals.** Where academics gain career credit and a fair share of income from knowledge exchange, they engage.
- **Entrepreneurial learning must be for everyone.** Embedding it across programmes reaches far more students than optional courses for would-be founders.
- **What gets measured gets done.** Regular self-assessment and public indicators keep attention on results.

[28] European Commission, Communication on a European strategy for universities, COM(2022) 16, 18 January 2022, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52022DC0016.

[29] European Commission, A New European Innovation Agenda, COM(2022) 332, 5 July 2022.

[30] Tech.eu, "EIT Deep Tech Talent Initiative: 1 million talents trained in Europe and counting", 23 June 2025, https://tech.eu/2025/06/23/eit-deep-tech-talent-initiative-1-million-talents-trained-in-europe-and-counting/.

[31] EIT, news of 8 July 2026, https://www.eit.europa.eu/news-events/news/eit-invests-eu70-million-boost-innovation-skills-universities-and-deepen.

[32] Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/micro-credentials.

5. Recommendations for the Ministry and its agencies

N1. Reward entrepreneurship and knowledge exchange in the performance component of the funding model. The performance criteria approved in July 2026 already include labour-market relevance, research and regional role. The Ministry should translate these into a small set of measurable indicators of entrepreneurial activity. Table 2 in Section 7 proposes such a set. As an example, a defined share of the performance component, such as 10 to 15%, could be tied to these indicators and phased in over three years, with a first year of reporting only.

N2. Make the third mission an explicit quality criterion. In line with the Ministry's third mission vision, NCEQE should add criteria and guidance on entrepreneurship, knowledge exchange and graduate outcomes to authorisation and accreditation. These should be assessed on each university's profile rather than on a single model. Pursuing renewed EQAR registration of NCEQE would strengthen the international recognition of Georgian qualifications, including micro-credentials.

N3. Adopt a national micro-credentials framework. Georgia should define micro-credentials in the national qualifications framework, with ECTS credits, learning outcomes, quality assurance and stackability. This would follow the 2022 Council Recommendation and allow universities to offer recognised short programmes to employers and adults. RiHEI's certification framework, which uses Europass digital credentials, can serve as a pilot.

N4. Provide national guidance and a model policy on intellectual property and spin-offs. A model policy, developed with GITA, Sakpatenti and universities, should cover four points:

- ownership of results;
- income sharing between the university, inventors and units;
- equity participation by public universities in spin-offs;
- conflicts of interest and the use of university facilities.

Clear rules would also let university ventures use the 2025 tax incentives for innovative start-ups with confidence.

N5. Recognise entrepreneurial work in academic careers. Criteria for appointment and promotion, including for the new "leading professor" post, should give explicit credit for knowledge exchange, industry projects, entrepreneurial teaching and support to student ventures, alongside research and teaching.

N6. Create joint instruments with innovation agencies. Three instruments would link universities more closely to the existing innovation funders:

- a university proof-of-concept window with the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation;
- matching grants for university-industry projects with Enterprise Georgia and GITA;
- a guaranteed place for student teams from regional universities in GITA's regional pre-acceleration programme.

Small amounts delivered consistently are more effective than occasional large calls.

N7. Build the evidence base. The Ministry should do three things:

- invite all universities to complete HEInnovate every two years;
- publish anonymised national results;

- work with Geostat and the education management information system to track graduate employment, earnings and start-up creation.

The data would inform both performance funding and policy review.

6. Recommendations for university leadership

U1. Adopt an entrepreneurship and engagement strategy. Each university should define in its strategy what being entrepreneurial means for its profile. For TSU this could be research commercialisation and policy engagement. For KIU it could be STEM and deep tech ventures. For GSU it could be agri-food, rural tourism and education innovation. The university should appoint an accountable vice-rector or head of engagement, as recommended in RiHEI's modernisation report.

U2. Professionalise technology transfer and innovation support. Universities should:

- give their knowledge transfer or innovation centre a clear mandate, a small professional team and access to legal and IP expertise;
- adopt an institutional IP and spin-off policy;
- register eligible ventures in the GITA Innovations Registry;
- use the Foundation's applied research tiers systematically.

U3. Embed entrepreneurial learning in every programme. Universities should:

- use EntreComp to add at least one entrepreneurial learning outcome to every study programme;
- run challenge-based projects with companies and public bodies;
- train lecturers through DigCompEdu and EntreComp-based staff development.

The EIT Manufacturing Teaching Factory approach, piloted in RiHEI, brings students into company premises for part of their course.

U4. Establish public-private impact advisory boards. Boards of at least five members from industry, investors and public funders should advise on research directions, skills in programmes and investment in university ventures. RiHEI's toolkit on public-private investment in universities (CBT3) sets out how to establish them.

U5. Build a student venture pathway. Universities should connect four stages:

- competitions and pre-incubation on campus;
- mentoring by alumni and board members;
- entry into GITA acceleration;
- investor meetings.

Targeted formats such as the EIT Supernovas and Girls Go Circular programmes, and RiHEI's STEAM Youth Lighthouse, reach young women and rural youth who are otherwise under-represented.

U6. Serve employers through micro-credentials and lifelong learning. Short, recognised programmes for company staff build relationships with employers, keep curricula relevant and generate income. The RiHEI sustainability plan (D4.3) shows that such offers can be sustainable at prices adapted to Georgian purchasing power.

U7. Measure and report every year. Universities should:

- complete HEInnovate every year;

- maintain a university analytics dashboard;
- report the indicators in Table 2 in their performance funding submissions and annual reports.

7. A proposed indicator set

The indicators below are designed to be simple to collect, relevant to all university profiles and suitable for the performance component of the funding model. They should be phased in, with one year of reporting before any link to funding.

Table 2: Proposed indicators of entrepreneurial and engaged universities

Indicator	Definition	Source and use
1. Entrepreneurial learning coverage	Share of study programmes with at least one EntreComp-based learning outcome	Programme documentation; accreditation and performance funding
2. Staff trained in entrepreneurial and digital teaching	Share of teaching staff certified in EntreComp or DigCompEdu-based training	University records
3. Income from knowledge exchange	Income from contract research, consultancy, licences and lifelong learning, as a share of total income	Financial statements; performance funding
4. University-industry projects	Number of active projects with companies or public bodies, including applied research grants	University records; Foundation data
5. Invention disclosures and licences	Number of disclosures, patent applications and licence agreements	Technology transfer office; Sakpatenti
6. Student and staff ventures	New start-ups and spin-offs created, and those registered in the GITA Innovations Registry	University records; GITA registry
7. Micro-credentials delivered	Number of micro-credentials awarded to external learners	Certification records; Europass
8. Graduate outcomes	Employment and self-employment rate of graduates 12 months after graduation	Graduate tracking; Geostat linkage
9. Regional engagement	Number of regional partners and participants from rural and remote areas in university programmes	University records
10. HEInnovate self-assessment	Completion and change in average score across the eight dimensions	HEInnovate; biennial national report

8. Costs, financing and safeguards

Most of the national recommendations are low-cost measures of design, guidance and data. The more expensive measures can largely be financed by redirecting existing instruments rather than creating new budgets.

Table 3: Indicative cost level and financing of the recommendations

Recommendation	Cost level	Possible financing
N1. Indicators in the performance component	Low	Design within the Ministry; technical assistance of the kind provided under the I2Q project

Recommendation	Cost level	Possible financing
N2. Third mission criteria in quality assurance	Low	NCEQE budget
N3. National micro-credentials framework	Low to medium	Ministry budget; international technical assistance; pilots financed through Erasmus+ projects led by universities
N4. Model policy on IP and spin-offs	Low	Ministry, GITA and Sakpatenti
N5. Recognition in academic careers	Low	University regulations
N6. Joint instruments with innovation agencies	Medium to high	Dedicated windows within existing GITA, Foundation and Enterprise Georgia budgets; company co-financing
N7. Evidence base and graduate tracking	Medium	Ministry and Geostat; the education management information system
U2. Professional technology transfer staff	Medium	Performance funding; knowledge exchange income; Horizon Europe and EIT projects
U3 and U6. Entrepreneurial learning and micro-credentials	Low to medium	Erasmus+ projects; fees from employers and adult learners

Entrepreneurial universities also need safeguards so that the public mission of higher education is protected:

- **Academic freedom and the public interest.** Commercial activity must not steer research agendas away from public needs or restrict the publication of results. Clear institutional policies and the involvement of academic councils protect this balance.
- **Conflicts of interest.** Staff who hold shares in spin-offs or advise companies need transparent declaration and management rules, which the model policy in N4 should include.
- **Gaming of indicators.** Quantitative indicators should be combined with qualitative evidence in quality assurance and checked through periodic audits. Funding weights should be moderate, so that universities do not chase numbers at the expense of quality.
- **Fairness between universities.** Indicators and benchmarks should take account of each university's profile and region. Regional universities, which start from weaker ecosystems, need capacity support rather than direct comparison with the capital.
- **Students first.** Entrepreneurial learning should broaden students' options, not pressure them into founding companies. Employment, further study and public service are equally valid outcomes.

9. Implementation roadmap, 2026 to 2030

Table 4: Implementation roadmap

Period	Actions	Lead
Late 2026 to mid 2027	Agree the indicator set; issue guidance for the first reporting year; launch a working group on the IP and spin-off model policy; universities adopt entrepreneurship and engagement strategies	Ministry, universities
2027	First reporting year for the indicators; model IP policy adopted; micro-credential framework drafted; first joint proof-of-concept window	Ministry, NCEQE, GITA, Foundation
2028	Indicators linked to part of the performance component; NCEQE guidance on third mission criteria; first national HEInnovate report	Ministry, NCEQE

Period	Actions	Lead
2029 to 2030	Review of the funding weights and indicators; micro-credentials in the national qualifications framework; graduate tracking fully operational	Ministry, Geostat, universities

10. Conclusion

Georgia has put in place many of the ingredients of an innovative economy. It has innovation agencies, applied research funding, start-up tax incentives and access to European programmes. The higher education reform and the new funding model now give the state a direct lever to make universities central to this system. Using that lever well requires three things:

- indicators that reward real entrepreneurial activity;
- clear rules that let universities and their staff create value from knowledge;
- investment in the professional capacity of universities, especially in the regions.

RiHEI's partner universities have shown that Georgian universities are ready to take this step when leadership commits and support is available. The recommendations in this briefing are designed to make that step system-wide.

C. Policy briefing 2: Demonstrating the wider impact of Georgian universities: adopting SDG metrics

Executive summary

KEY MESSAGES

- **A contribution that stays invisible.** Georgian universities serve society through access for disadvantaged students, regional development, public health, green campuses and partnerships – but little of this is measured or reported.
- **The SDGs offer a common language.** Georgia has nationalised all 17 SDGs with 93 targets, and the Unified Strategy for Education and Science 2022–2030 refers to SDGs 4, 8, 9, 16 and 17. Yet universities are almost invisible in national SDG reporting.
- **Little reporting so far.** Of RiHEI's three Georgian partners, only TSU appears in the THE SDG ratings, and none publishes an SDG report. The THE ratings now cost GBP 3,500 a year for Georgian universities.
- **Management first, rankings second.** A small national core set of indicators, aligned with the nationalised SDG targets and the 2026 funding criteria, would give comparable evidence at low cost.

This briefing proposes 18 core indicators, a five-level maturity path and recommendations to be phased in between 2026 and 2030.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Ministry and its agencies	For university leadership
M1 Adopt a national core set of university SDG indicators, co-designed with universities, NCEQE, Geostat and the SDG coordination structures.	**H1** Make a vice-rector responsible for SDG reporting, supported by a small office.
M2 Use a subset in performance funding and in the third mission part of authorisation.	**H2** Select priority SDGs that fit the university's profile.
M3 Build shared data infrastructure so that data are collected once and used many times.	**H3** Complete a baseline mapping within twelve months.
M4 Involve universities in national SDG governance and the next Voluntary National Review.	**H4** Publish an annual SDG impact report based on the national core set.
M5 Issue national guidance on education for sustainable development.	**H5** Integrate SDG indicators into strategy, budgets and analytics.
M6 Support green campus investment tied to monitoring, and do not fund on ranking positions.	**H6** Engage students and staff as co-producers of the SDG agenda.
	H7 Enter international ratings selectively, after two reporting cycles.

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1. Why SDG metrics matter for Georgian universities

1.1. Making the wider contribution of universities visible

Universities affect the SDGs through four channels:

- the education they provide;
- the research they produce;
- the way they run their campuses;
- their engagement with communities, government and business.

This four-part framing was set out by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) in its guide "Getting started with the SDGs in universities" (2017).[33] Its later guide on accelerating education for the SDGs (2020) extended it to teaching and learning.[34]

Georgian universities already contribute through all four channels. A regional university that recruits students from mountain villages contributes to SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities). A research team working with farmers on water use contributes to SDGs 2 and 6. A university that cuts its heating costs contributes to SDGs 7 and 13. A university that trains civil servants contributes to SDG 16. Today, however, these contributions are rarely counted, compared or communicated. Without evidence, universities cannot show their public value, and the state cannot see what it gets for its investment.

1.2. Georgia's national SDG commitments

Georgia nationalised all 17 SDGs, adopting 93 targets and around 200 national indicators.[35] An inter-agency SDG Council, established in 2017 and coordinated by the Administration of the Government, oversees implementation through four working groups:

- social inclusion;
- economic development;
- energy and environment;
- democratic governance.[36]

Georgia has presented three Voluntary National Reviews to the United Nations, in 2016, 2020 and 2024.[37] Progress is tracked on the Government's SDG platform, sdg.gov.ge.[38] In the Sustainable Development Report 2026, Georgia ranks 61st of 169 countries with a score of 73.45.[39]

Education policy is formally linked to this agenda. The Unified National Strategy of Education and Science 2022-2030, adopted by Government Decree No. 446 of 31 August 2022, refers to the 2030

[33] SDSN Australia/New Zealand and Pacific (2017), Getting started with the SDGs in universities, https://ap-unsdsn.org/regional-initiatives/universities-sdgs/university-sdg-guide/.

[34] SDSN (2020), Accelerating Education for the SDGs in Universities, 21 September 2020, https://www.unsdsn.org/resources/accelerating-education-for-the-sdgs-in-universities-a-guide-for-universities-colleges-and-tertiary-and-higher-education-institutions/.

[35] SDG Lens, Georgia, https://www.sdg-lens.org/network/georgia/; Open Government Partnership Georgia, Monitoring the SDGs, https://ogp.gov.ge/en/monitorings/monitoring-sdgs.

[36] UNDP Georgia, "Georgia marks progress towards sustainable development", 22 January 2019, https://www.undp.org/georgia/press-releases/georgia-marks-progress-towards-sustainable-development.

[37] United Nations High-level Political Forum, Voluntary National Reviews 2024, https://hlpf.un.org/2024/vnrs.

[38] See note 34.

[39] Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Sustainable Development Report 2026, rankings, https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/rankings/.

Agenda and to SDGs 4, 8, 9, 16 and 17.[40] The link is not yet carried through to how universities plan, measure and report. Universities hold much of the country's research capacity and train the professionals who will implement the SDGs, yet they are not systematically asked to report their SDG contribution.

1.3. Accountability under the new funding model

The performance-based funding model approved by the Government in July 2026 links part of university funding to quality, labour-market relevance, research, internationalisation, regional role and access.[41] Several of these criteria are SDG themes:

- access (SDGs 4 and 10);
- regional role (SDGs 8 and 11);
- labour-market relevance (SDGs 4 and 8).

A well-designed set of SDG indicators can therefore serve a double purpose. It can provide the evidence needed for performance funding and make that evidence comparable with international practice.

1.4. International partnerships and funding

European policy expects universities to be leaders of the green and digital transitions. The European Strategy for Universities of January 2022 calls on universities to drive the green and digital transitions.[42] Partner universities in the EU increasingly report their SDG contribution:

- **University of Bologna:** published its third sustainability report based on GRI standards and linked to the SDGs in September 2025.[43]
- **Technical University of Munich (TUM):** published its second Sustainable Futures Report in 2026.[44]
- **University of Lodz:** was rated in the 801-1000 band of the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings in 2024.[45]

For Georgian universities seeking partners in Horizon Europe, Erasmus+ and bilateral programmes, credible SDG evidence is becoming part of what makes them attractive partners.

2. The landscape of SDG metrics for universities

Several frameworks now exist. They differ in purpose, cost and burden, and none is sufficient on its own. Table 1 summarises the main options.

[40] United Nations, Partnership platform entry for the Unified National Strategy of Education and Science of Georgia 2022-2030, https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/unified-national-strategy-education-and-science-georgia-2022-2030.

[41] Georgia Today, "Government approves new university funding model", 31 July 2026, https://georgiatoday.ge/government-approves-new-university-funding-model/.

[42] European Commission, Communication on a European strategy for universities, COM(2022) 16, 18 January 2022, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52022DC0016.

[43] University of Bologna, "The 2025 Sustainability Report of the University of Bologna is now online", 15 September 2025, https://magazine.unibo.it/en/articles/the-2025-sustainability-report-of-the-university-of-bologna-is-now-online.

[44] Technical University of Munich, "TUM publishes second Sustainable Futures Report", 7 August 2026, https://www.tum.de/en/news-and-events/all-news/press-releases/details/tum-publishes-second-sustainable-futures-report.

[45] Times Higher Education, University of Lodz profile, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/university-lodz.

Table 1: Main SDG metrics frameworks for universities

Framework	What it measures and how	Relevance for Georgian universities
THE Sustainability Impact Ratings (formerly THE Impact Rankings)	The 2026 edition rated 1,646 universities in 116 countries or territories. Score = SDG 17 (22%) plus the three best other SDGs (26% each). Uses research, quantitative and evidence-based metrics; research metrics make up 27% of most SDG scores[46]	Most widely recognised. From 2026, participation requires membership of a paid network: GBP 3,500 a year in upper-middle-income countries such as Georgia[47]
QS Sustainability Rankings	The 2026 edition covered 2,001 universities in 108 countries. Weights: environmental impact 45%, social impact 45%, governance 10%[48]	Only open to universities eligible for QS world, regional or subject rankings; relevant mainly for the largest Georgian universities
UI GreenMetric World University Rankings	The 2025 edition covered 1,745 universities in 105 countries. Six criteria on campus sustainability: setting and infrastructure, energy and climate change, waste, water, transport, and education and research[49]	Low-cost entry point focused on campus operations; useful for green campus plans
AASHE STARS	Comprehensive self-reporting framework for sustainability; version 3.0 launched in June 2024 with fewer documentation fields[50]	Good reference for indicator design; demanding if used in full
SDG Accord	Commitment by universities to embed the SDGs and report progress every year; more than 700 signatories, not accepting new signatories during 2026[51]	Useful model of annual reporting
UN PRME Sharing Information on Progress	Regular progress reports by business schools signed up to the Principles for Responsible Management Education; more than 800 signatories in 96 countries[52]	Relevant for business and management faculties at TSU, KIU and GSU
GRI Standards-based sustainability reports	Organisation-wide sustainability reporting, used for example by the University of Bologna[53]	Credible, widely understood format for an annual report

[46] Times Higher Education, Sustainability Impact Ratings 2026 methodology, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/impact-rankings/methodology; results page https://www.timeshighereducation.com/impactrankings, 23 June 2026.

[47] Times Higher Education, "Sustainability Impact Ratings: new framework and network for universities", updated 1 December 2025, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/sustainability-impact-ratings-new-framework-and-network-universities. Georgia is classified as an upper-middle-income economy by the World Bank.

[48] QS Quacquarelli Symonds, Sustainability Rankings 2026 launch, 18 November 2025, https://www.qs.com/insights/sustainability-rankings-launch; weights as published in the University of Saskatchewan fact sheet on the 2026 edition.

[49] UI GreenMetric, criteria and indicators, https://greenmetric.ui.ac.id/about/criteria-indicator; edition size reported by Universitat Politècnica de València, 30 January 2026.

[50] AASHE, "AASHE launches STARS version 3.0", 18 June 2024, https://www.aashe.org/news/aashe-launches-stars-version-3-0/.

[51] EAUC, SDG Accord, https://www.eauc.org.uk/about/projects-and-programmes/sdg-accord/.

[52] UN PRME, Sharing Information on Progress, https://www.unprme.org/sip-2/.

[53] See note 42.

Framework	What it measures and how	Relevance for Georgian universities
Bibliometric SDG mapping	Search queries that classify publications by SDG. Elsevier's queries are used by THE; the Aurora queries are used in the free OpenAlex SDG classifier[54]	Low-cost way to map research; results vary between methods
Competence frameworks	GreenComp, published by the EU's Joint Research Centre in January 2022, defines 12 sustainability competences in four areas[55]	Basis for sustainability learning outcomes and micro-credentials

3. Where Georgian universities stand

3.1. International visibility

A small number of Georgian universities have started to take part in international SDG ratings:

- **Tbilisi State University (TSU):** rated in the 1001-1500 band overall in the 2026 THE Sustainability Impact Ratings. It was rated 401-600 for SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), 801-1000 for SDG 17 and 1001+ for SDG 4.[56]
- **New Vision University:** rated 601-800 overall in the same edition.[57]
- **Tbilisi State Medical University:** rated 201-300 for SDG 3 in 2025.[58]

Participation remains limited compared with neighbouring systems. The 2026 edition included more than 50 universities each from Türkiye and Ukraine.[59] Kutaisi International University and Gori State University could not be identified in the 2026 results.

3.2. Reporting and institutional practice

A desk review carried out for this briefing in September 2026 found no public SDG or sustainability report and no SDG Accord signature for TSU, KIU or GSU. It also found no national quality assurance standard that refers explicitly to sustainability or the SDGs. This finding is based on searches of public sources rather than an audit, but it is consistent with what RiHEI observed in its needs analysis, which found limited university analytics and weak impact measurement in all three universities.

There are nevertheless encouraging initiatives:

- TSU hosted the SDG Caucasus Summer School in 2025, organised with Georgian Technical University and the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology with DAAD support.[60]

[54] Elsevier, SDG Research Mapping Initiative, https://www.elsevier.com/about/sustainability/sdg-research-mapping-initiative; OpenAlex SDG classifier, https://github.com/ourresearch/openalex-sdg-classifier.

[55] Joint Research Centre, GreenComp: The European sustainability competence framework, 14 January 2022, https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/jrc-publishes-new-competence-framework-support-learning-environmental-sustainability-2022-01-14_en.

[56] Times Higher Education, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University profile, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/ivane-javakhishvili-tbilisi-state-university, accessed 30 September 2026.

[57] New Vision University, "The Sustainability Impact Ratings 2026 results", 26 June 2026, https://newvision.ge/en/news/2026-06-the-sustainability-impact-ratings-2026-results-15741/.

[58] Tbilisi State Medical University, news item 6583 of 19 June 2025, https://tsmu.edu.

[59] Times Higher Education, Sustainability Impact Ratings 2026 coverage, 24 June 2026; University World News, 26 June 2026, https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20260626124419403.

[60] Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, SDG Caucasus Summer School 2025, https://www.grace.kit.edu/deutsch/2209.php.

- Since 2022, the United Nations in Georgia has opened six multifunctional SDG spaces in Tbilisi and the regions, some of them hosted by universities.[61]
- GSU is a partner in the Erasmus+ capacity building project RE-DIRECTION, which addresses the digital transformation of higher education together with inclusion and green skills.[62]

3.3. What RiHEI has built

RiHEI has created several building blocks that universities can reuse for SDG reporting:

- **University analytics indicator sets,** developed with KIU, TSU and GSU in the second University Transformation Week in Gori, covering quality, student satisfaction, financial management and environmental and social impact.
- **HEInnovate and the Regional Innovation Impact Assessment (RIIA) framework.** These measure the entrepreneurial and regional contribution of each university.
- **Strategies for inclusion and New European Bauhaus-inspired recommendations** for greening the campuses.
- **Micro-credential and competence frameworks** that can carry sustainability learning outcomes.

3.4. Barriers

- **No mandate or owner.** In most universities, no senior leader or unit is responsible for sustainability data.
- **Fragmented data.** Data on students, staff, energy, research and partnerships sit in different offices and formats, and often only on paper.
- **Cost and capacity.** International ratings require English-language evidence, dedicated staff time and, now, membership fees.
- **Lack of national guidance.** Without a common definition of indicators, results are not comparable across universities or linked to national SDG targets.
- **Risk of ranking-chasing.** Universities may be tempted to optimise for a ranking rather than to improve their actual contribution.

4. Using SDG metrics well: limitations and principles

The research literature is critical of how SDG rankings work:

- An analysis of the THE Impact Rankings found “severe inconsistencies” in the methodology. It showed that universities could be ranked with zero values on 13 SDGs, and concluded that the rankings give “a distorted view of sustainability”.[63]
- Commentators have pointed to the resource cost of participation and to the limited value of comparisons between very different higher education systems.[64]

[61] United Nations Georgia, 25 October 2023, https://georgia.un.org/en/node/266910.

[62] Caucasus University, RE-DIRECTION Erasmus+ CBHE project, https://www.cu.edu.ge/en/grant-projects/ongoing-projects/capacity-building-erasmus/re-direction-grant-project.

[63] Bautista-Puig, N., Orduña-Malea, E. and Pérez-Esparrells, C. (2022), Enhancing sustainable development goals or promoting universities? An analysis of the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings, International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education, 23(8), https://www.emerald.com/ijshe/article/23/8/211/333912/.

[64] Calderon, A. (2023), Global sustainability rankings, EAIE, 8 August 2023, https://www.eaie.org/resource/global-sustainability-rankings.html.

- The SDG classifications of research used by the three largest bibliographic databases overlap by only 1.3% to 7.2%.[65] How a university's research is "counted" therefore depends heavily on the method.
- THE itself now describes its results as ratings because the participating universities are a self-selecting group.[66]

These limitations do not argue against SDG metrics. They argue for using them carefully. This briefing proposes six principles:

- **Management before rankings.** The first purpose of SDG metrics is to help universities and the state understand and improve performance. Rankings are a possible later use.
- **Profile-based priorities.** Each university should focus on the SDGs where its profile gives it real influence, while reporting a common core.
- **Comparability through a small common core.** A limited set of nationally defined indicators is more useful than many institution-specific ones.
- **Proportionality.** Indicators should reuse existing administrative data wherever possible and add as little new burden as possible.
- **Transparency of method.** Methods, including research mapping queries, should be documented and open, so that results can be checked.
- **Honest reporting.** Reports should show weaknesses and negative trends as well as successes, to avoid selective reporting.

5. A Georgian core framework for university SDG metrics

5.1. Core indicators

This briefing proposes a core set of 18 indicators in four domains. Most rely on data universities already hold or can obtain at low cost. Each indicator is mapped to global SDG targets, which Georgia has nationalised, and to the performance criteria of the 2026 funding model. The set is intended as a starting point for national consultation, not a final list.

Table 2: Proposed core indicators for Georgian universities

No.	Indicator	SDG targets	Main data source	Funding criterion
A Learning and teaching				
1	Share of study programmes with at least one sustainability learning outcome (GreenComp)	4.7	Programme documentation	Quality
2	Enrolment and completion of students from rural and mountain areas and from social groups at risk	4.3, 4.5, 10.2	Education management information system, university records	Access
3	Graduate employment and self-employment 12 months after graduation	4.4, 8.6	Graduate tracking survey	Labour-market relevance

[65] Ottaviani, M. and Stahlschmidt, S. (2024), arXiv:2405.03007, https://arxiv.org/html/2405.03007v1.

[66] See note 46.

No.	Indicator	SDG targets	Main data source	Funding criterion
4	Adult learners and micro-credentials awarded	4.3, 4.4	Certification records	Labour-market relevance
B Research and innovation				
5	Share of publications related to the SDGs, using an open method (OpenAlex SDG classifier)	9.5	OpenAlex	Research
6	Share of publications in open access	9.5	OpenAlex	Research
7	Applied research and industry projects addressing SDG challenges	9.5, 17.17	Research office	Research
8	Start-ups and spin-offs with a social or environmental purpose	8.3, 9.3	Technology transfer office, GITA registry	Regional role
C Campus operations				
9	Energy use per square metre and share of renewable energy	7.2, 7.3	Utility bills, facilities office	Not applicable
10	Greenhouse gas emissions from energy use (scopes 1 and 2) per student and staff member	13.2	Calculated from energy data	Not applicable
11	Share of waste separated for recycling	12.5	Facilities office	Not applicable
12	Water use per student and staff member	6.4	Utility bills	Not applicable
13	Share of women in senior management and among full professors	5.5	Human resources	Access
14	Accessibility of buildings and services for persons with disabilities	4.a	Accessibility audit	Access
D Engagement and governance				
15	Community and outreach programmes and participants, including young people from rural areas	4.7, 11.3	University records	Regional role
16	Partnerships with public bodies, companies and civil society on SDG-related projects	17.17	University records	Regional role
17	International partnerships and joint projects, such as Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe	17.6, 17.9	International relations office	Internationalisation
18	Sustainability policy in place, accountable senior officer named, and annual public report published	12.6, 16.6	Policy documents	Quality

5.2. A maturity path

Universities start from different positions. A five-level maturity path, shown in Table 3, lets each university progress at its own pace while working towards a common national standard.

Table 3: Maturity levels for SDG reporting

Level	Description	Evidence
1. Commit	Sustainability policy adopted; accountable vice-rector and SDG coordinator named; priority SDGs selected	Rector decree; policy document

Level	Description	Evidence
2. Baseline	Mapping of teaching, research, operations and engagement; data collected for the core set	Internal baseline report
3. Report	Annual public SDG report in Georgian and English covering the core set and priority SDGs	Published report
4. Integrate	Targets in the strategy and budget; indicators in university analytics and performance funding reporting	Strategy, budget, dashboards
5. Assure and benchmark	Peer review or external assurance of the report; selective participation in international ratings	Assurance statement; rating results

5.3. Illustration: a first SDG report for a regional university

To show what the framework means in practice, the box below outlines a first SDG report that a regional university such as GSU could publish after its baseline year. It is an illustration of structure, not a description of existing data.

Outline of a first annual SDG report (about 20 pages, Georgian and English)

- **Foreword by the rector** and the university's sustainability policy.
- **Priority SDGs and why they were chosen,** for example SDG 2 (zero hunger) through agrarian programmes and extension work with farmers, SDG 4 (quality education) through teacher education, SDG 8 (decent work) through tourism and entrepreneurship programmes, and SDG 11 (sustainable communities) through the university's role in Shida Kartli.
- **Core indicators** from Table 2, with the first year as baseline and a short explanation of each figure.
- **Three to five case stories,** such as a joint project with a municipality, a start-up competition for rural youth or a campus energy-saving measure.
- **Gaps and next steps,** stating honestly which indicators are not yet available and what the university will do about them.
- **Method note,** listing data sources, definitions and the research mapping method used.

5.4. Costs and resources

SDG reporting does not require large budgets, but it does require dedicated time. Four cost items should be planned for:

- **Staff.** A dedicated coordinator is recommended: about one full-time post for a large university such as TSU and half a post for a smaller or regional university, supported by data contacts in faculties and administrative units.
- **Data systems.** Most indicators can come from existing student, human resources, finance and facilities records. The main new investment is a simple data template and, for campus operations, regular reading of energy and water meters.
- **Research mapping.** The OpenAlex SDG classifier is free to use, whereas commercial bibliometric tools require subscriptions.
- **International ratings.** Membership of the THE network costs GBP 3,500 a year for Georgian universities. Other ratings have their own conditions. These costs are optional and belong to the later stages of the maturity path.

Training can be provided through RiHEI's capacity building toolkits and micro-credentials and shared among universities. Joint peer review of reports among TSU, KIU and GSU would provide low-cost quality assurance before any external assurance is sought.

5.5. Linking university data to national SDG reporting

The core set is designed so that university data can also feed national reporting. Several global SDG indicators depend directly on higher education institutions, for example:

- 4.3.1, the participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training;
- 4.7.1, the extent to which education for sustainable development is mainstreamed in policies, curricula, teacher education and assessment;
- 5.5.2, the proportion of women in managerial positions;
- 9.5.1 and 9.5.2, research and development expenditure as a share of GDP and the number of researchers per million inhabitants.

Where Georgia's nationalised indicator list includes these indicators, the Administration of the Government and Geostat could draw on standardised university data rather than ad hoc requests. In return, universities would see their contribution reflected on the national SDG platform and in the next Voluntary National Review. This two-way link is what turns SDG reporting from an administrative exercise into evidence that informs national policy.

6. Recommendations for the Ministry and its agencies

M1. Adopt a national core set of university SDG indicators. The Ministry should use Table 2 as a starting point for consultation with universities, NCEQE, Geostat and the Administration of the Government, which coordinates SDG implementation. The aim is a short, stable set of indicators with clear definitions, adopted in 2027 and reviewed every three years.

M2. Use a subset in performance funding and quality assurance. Indicators on access, graduate outcomes, regional engagement and partnerships correspond directly to the criteria of the 2026 funding model and could inform its performance component. Several of these indicators, together with the existence of a sustainability policy and public report, could also be requested in the third mission part of authorisation self-evaluation. This would be consistent with the Ministry's intention to integrate the third mission into authorisation standards.[67]

M3. Build shared data infrastructure. Data should be collected once and used many times. The Ministry could:

- extend the education management information system to cover the student-related indicators;
- agree with Geostat on a graduate tracking method;
- provide universities with a common template and an open research mapping method based on OpenAlex.

A national dashboard would allow universities to compare themselves with peers.

M4. Involve universities in national SDG governance. Universities should be invited to contribute to the working groups of the SDG Council and to the preparation of the next Voluntary National Review.

[67] Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, Vision on Strengthening and Supporting the 3rd Mission in Georgian Universities, https://mes.gov.ge/uploads/3M-VISION-ENG%20(1).pdf.

University evidence on education, research and regional development would strengthen the national report, and taking part would give universities a direct reason to measure their contribution.

M5. Issue guidance on education for sustainable development. Several European systems offer models:

- **UK:** the Quality Assurance Agency and Advance HE published guidance on education for sustainable development in 2021.[68]
- **Ireland:** the Higher Education Authority launched a framework with a voluntary self-evaluation tool in July 2026.[69]
- **Spain:** the rectors' conference, CRUE, created a commission on the 2030 Agenda in 2019.[70] The 2023 university law refers to the SDGs and requires universities to adopt a climate strategy for their campuses.[71]

Georgia could adapt such guidance, with GreenComp as the competence reference.

M6. Support green campuses and avoid ranking incentives. Investment in energy efficiency and campus renovation should be conditional on monitoring energy, emissions and water use, so that results can be demonstrated. The Ministry should encourage universities to report, but should not use positions in commercial rankings as a funding criterion. The costs of participation and the methodological limitations described in Section 4 would create the wrong incentives.

7. Recommendations for university leadership

H1. Assign clear responsibility. Each university should:

- appoint a vice-rector accountable for sustainability and SDG reporting;
- create a small SDG office, of one or two people in a regional university, to coordinate data from academic, administrative and facilities units;
- adopt a sustainability policy through a rector decree.

H2. Select priority SDGs that fit the university's profile. Priorities should build on each university's specialisation under the 2026 reform. As an illustration:

- **TSU** could build on its existing ratings for SDGs 11, 16 and 17 and add SDGs 4 and 9.
- **KIU** could focus on SDGs 4, 7, 9 and 17, in line with its STEM profile.
- **GSU** could focus on SDGs 2, 4, 8 and 11, reflecting its orientation towards agrarian studies, tourism and teacher education and its regional role in Shida Kartli.

H3. Complete a baseline within twelve months. The baseline should cover four areas:

- teaching, by mapping programmes against GreenComp and the SDGs;
- research, using the open OpenAlex SDG classifier;
- campus operations, covering energy, water, waste and accessibility;
- engagement, covering outreach, partnerships and regional projects.

[68] QAA and Advance HE, Education for Sustainable Development Guidance, 29 March 2021, https://www.qaa.ac.uk/news-events/news/qaa-and-advance-he-launch-landmark-new-guidance-on-education-for-sustainable-development.

[69] Higher Education Authority, 29 July 2026, https://hea.ie/2026/07/29/hea-launches-education-for-sustainable-development-esd-framework-for-higher-education-welcomed-by-minister-lawless/.

[70] CRUE Universidades Españolas, Comisión Agenda 2030, https://www.crue.org/en/proyecto/comision-agenda-2030/.

[71] Organic Law 2/2023 of 22 March on the university system (LOSU), articles 2.3 and 18.2, https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2023-7500.

The RiHEI university analytics indicator sets provide a ready structure.

H4. Publish an annual SDG impact report. Starting with the national core set and the priority SDGs, the report should be published in Georgian and English and follow the structure of GRI-referenced reports. It should state the method and report both progress and gaps. Faculties of business and management can use the same data for UN PRME progress reports.

H5. Integrate the indicators into management. SDG indicators should be included in the university strategy, in annual budget decisions, in the university analytics dashboard and in performance funding submissions. Targets should be set for the priority SDGs.

H6. Engage students and staff. Students and staff can be co-producers of the SDG agenda through:

- SDG-labelled courses and sustainability micro-credentials;
- student green teams;
- SDG spaces and summer schools;
- citizen science projects such as RiHEI's STEAM Youth Lighthouse.

H7. Enter international ratings selectively. Universities should join a rating only after two annual reporting cycles, and should choose the rating that fits their profile:

- UI GreenMetric for campus operations;
- THE Sustainability Impact Ratings for a multi-SDG profile;
- UN PRME for business schools.

TSU, KIU and GSU can reduce the burden by peer-reviewing each other's reports and sharing tools, templates and training.

8. Implementation roadmap, 2026 to 2030

Table 4: Implementation roadmap

Period	Actions	Lead
Late 2026 to mid 2027	Consultation on the national core set; universities appoint accountable leaders and adopt sustainability policies (maturity level 1)	Ministry, universities
2027	Core set adopted; common template and research mapping method issued; universities complete baselines (level 2)	Ministry, Geostat, universities
2028	First annual SDG reports published (level 3); university contributions included in national SDG reporting	Universities, Administration of the Government
2029	Selected indicators used in performance funding reporting; national guidance on education for sustainable development issued (level 4)	Ministry, NCEQE
2030	Peer review of reports among universities; selective participation in international ratings; review of the core set (level 5)	Universities, Ministry

9. Conclusion

SDG metrics give Georgian universities a way to show what they contribute to their country beyond degrees and publications. They give the state a way to see what it gains from its investment in higher education. Georgia has already nationalised the SDGs and linked its education strategy to them, and the 2026 funding model creates a practical reason to measure contribution. What is missing is a common, proportionate framework that universities can apply and that the Ministry can use. The core set, maturity path and recommendations in this briefing offer such a framework. Applied first in the RiHEI partner universities and then across the system, they would let Georgian universities tell a credible, evidence-based story about their impact, at home and to their international partners.

D. Conclusion and next steps

The two briefings address the same underlying question from two angles: how Georgian universities can create, and show, value for the economy and society. The first focuses on entrepreneurship, knowledge exchange and job creation; the second on measuring and reporting the wider contribution of universities through the Sustainable Development Goals.

Both arrive at a common conclusion. The 2025–2026 reform and the performance-based funding model give the state a lever it has not had before. Using it well requires a small set of meaningful indicators, clear rules and guidance, and investment in professional capacity – especially in regional universities. The RiHEI partner universities show that Georgian universities are ready to take these steps when leadership commits and support is available.

Validation at the RiHEI open days

In line with the RiHEI communication and dissemination strategy, the key messages of both briefings were conveyed at the RiHEI open days. The open days were organised under the coordination of TUMINT and hosted by the Georgian partner universities together with the University Transformation Weeks. They took the form of one-day blended mini-conferences, at which participants could also test the RiHEI platform and its educational offer. The open days had two purposes for the briefings: to bring the project outputs and recommendations to policy makers and other target groups, and to invite these stakeholders to validate and co-create the recommendations.

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