TWINNING AZERBAIJAN

Support to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan for Further Adherence of the Higher Education System to the European Higher Education Area (AZ-ad-EHEA)

**AZ/14/ENP/OT/31**

**EU Short Term Expert Mission Report**

**1. Basic Information**

**Component and Activity:**

Component: 4. Standards and Guidelines for QA in HE

Activity: 4.6 Analysis of the Pilots

**Name of the Expert:** Ms Helka Kekäläinen, Ms Maiki Udam, Mr Kauko Hämäläinen

**Dates of the Mission:** 20 – 21 June 2017

**Contractor:** Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) /

Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA)

**2. Relevant Background Information/State of Affairs**

The objective of Activity 4.6 was to coordinate a trial/test run of the Azerbaijani Standards and Guidelines for QA of higher education (AzSG) at three higher education institutions in Azerbaijan. The main aims of the pilot evaluations was to support the strategic management of institutions, provide external feedback to the institutions’ own internal quality assurance procedures, as well as inform the internal and external stakeholders of the compliance of the institutions’ quality assurance with the ESG.

In April 2016 a Drafting Group was appointed by the Ministry of Education to work on a proposal for AzSG. A draft manual for the pilot evaluations was discussed with the Advisory Group in a seminar in June 2016. The draft was published on the Twinning project’s website in order to get feedback on the assessment areas and criteria. Amendments were made to the manual based on the feedback. The capacity of the three pilot universities (Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University, Azerbaijan State Economic University and Azerbaijan Technical University) to conduct a self-evaluation was supported through trainings and events in several previous missions.

The pilot institutions submitted their self-evaluation reports in January – February, 2017. The site visits of the pilot universities took place in April, 2017 and the assessment reports were finalized in May – June, 2017. Feedback seminar was organised in each university 5-6 June. International and local experts in cooperation with university representatives and ANO staff analysed the results of the pilot evaluations and prepared recommendations for the future activities of the Accreditation and Nostrification Office (ANO) in Azerbaijan in 7-9 June.

The pilot evaluations had an institutional approach with the focus on teaching and learning. The evaluation reports provide the pilot institutions with information regarding their strengths and good practices, as well as recommendations for the institutions’ further development and suggestions to the MoE regarding the regulations governing higher education in Azerbaijan.

**3. Objectives and Tasks of the Mission**

The overall aim of the Component 4 is to develop Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Azerbaijan, in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) and test them with three higher education institutions.

The special objective of the last missions in Activity 4.6 was to disseminate the experiences of the pilot evaluations and the Twinning project achievements to the larger higher education community.

**4. Time Schedule of the Mission**

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| **Date** | **Activities/Meetings**  BC experts met  (title and institution) | **Remarks** |
| 20 June | CONFERENCE ON ENHANCING HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY IN AZERBAIJAN  List of participants Annexed | Azerbaijan State Economic University |
| 21 June | Planning the Closing Conference, Reporting | RTA office, Hotel Austin |

**5. Achievement of the Expected Results**

The Opening words of the conference were given by Mr. Jeyhun Bayramov, the Deputy Minister of Education, H.E. Ambassador Malena Mård, Head of Delegation of the European Union and Mr. Indrek Kiverik, Charge d’Affaires, Estonia. The MS project leaders gave a joint presentation. The mandatory results were reported and the main outcomes of the project were identified as mapping the situation in HE in a comprehensive way, realistic and applicable recommendations widely discussed with stakeholders, supporting collaborative learning in the HE community of Azerbaijan

and supporting some changes in mind-set regarding the autonomy of HEI-s combined with a rigorous, meaningful and improvement led approach in quality assurance. BC Project Leader Emin Amrullayev reflected the success of the project.

Each of the component leaders or their substitutes with their beneficiary counterparts presented the results of each component.

**Component 1 Legislation** by Heli Mattisen and Sülhaddin Gözalov.

The main partners in the component have been Department of Higher Education and Research and Accreditation and Nostrification Office (ANO) as well as Legal Department of the MoE, Universities, Academy of Sciences and the leaders of other components.

STE-s have given concrete recommendations given regarding

1. Overall structure and coherence of the legal framework
2. Amendments to the Statute for Higher Education Institutions – governance structure, autonomy in designing management structure clear division of responsibilities, student involvement etc.
3. New State Standard and Programme for Higher Education – learning outcomes, student assessment, doctoral education etc.
4. New Accreditation Standards
5. New Accreditation Rules and Procedures

Most of the recommendations of the STE’s have been taken into account, some documents (like State Standard and Programme for Higher Education) is still under development.

Sülhaddin Gözalov provided some examples of new documents developed based on the recommendations of Twinning experts – like new Statutes for the Engineering University and the University on Languages have giving more autonomy to the universities in building up the management system, developing the programmes, involving students and external stakeholders in the government of the university. The new regulation on credit system will give more freedom to the university and the teachers to design the learning and teaching process.

On the whole, it has been an useful learning process - „formative assessment“ regarding compliance with Bologna and ESG has been offered by European experts, but the main drafting work has been done by local experts.

**Component 2 - Co-ordinating and communication** by Kauko Hämäläinen and Vusala Gurbanova

The main objectives and recommendations of seven different activities were reflected and also, how these recommendations are used. Main objectives of this component were the following:

* Coordination and networking capacity of the MoE and relevant stakeholders is enhanced on the basis of good practice examples in the EHEA.
* Assess progress and the current status of EHEA/Bologna reforms in Az.
* Assess the institutional set up within the MoE with best practices and improvements for the overall institutional architecture.
* Developing communication and networking between universities, stakeholders and MoE based on the experiences from Finland and Estonia.
* Conducting a training needs analysis and train experts.
* Create communication strategy.

The main recommendations from different activities were the following:

- Systematizing doctoral education.

- Redesigning national standards.

- Establishing networking between Az HEIs.

- Developing more lifelong learning services.

- Drafting a mobility program and removing obstacles for student mobility.

- Division of work and sharing responsibilities between the ministry, universities and external stakeholders.

- Prioritizing areas for the Ministry.

- Developing quality practices of the internal QA process.

- Establish rector´s conferences.

- Analyse needs and options to join international associations in HE.

- A newsletter as a medium of communication.

- Increase students´ and stakeholders involvement in internal QA process and administration of HEIs.

- Improve pedagogical training for university teachers.

- Ensuring coordination of EHEA related trainings.

Many of these recommendations have been implemented or started planning how to proceed. E.g. study visits and training has been organised to increase the capacity of people in central positions. The main results in practice of component 2 are according the summary by Vusala Gurbanova the following:

1.MoE is realizing Nizami project parallel with the Twinning project where they are planning to restructure doctoral education in Az in line with requirements of EHEA. On respect of these 2 projects recommendations regulations about doctoral studies are going to be improved. The main changes that they are going to implement are the following: PhD will be the last level of HE. At the same time, doctor of science will be open for everybody who would like to continue his/her research. The third one is implementation of ECTS at PhD level.

2. MoE started to draft new standards of HE, where learning outcomes of all levels of HE will be reflected. Additionally, descriptors of all levels of HE will be included to this document. We are planning to combine 5 regulations in one and draft the general standards for HE. 12 recommendations out of 14 have been taken into consideration in the new draft.

3. The main achievement in the framework of component 2 was increasing cooperation of the representatives of different HEs. This project helped HEIs´ representatives to come and work together, to learn from each other, involve students to the decision making processes of universities and to cooperate with different stakeholders.

4. In the framework of the Twinning project the participants had an opportunity to meet with different rectors and to learn their opinions regarding to the establishment of a Rector´s conference. Their reflection were positive and supportive. MoE understand the importance of the Rector´s conference and they already drafted its statute.

**Component 3 - Developing AzQF** by Maiki Udam and Azad Akhunov

1.Trainings on QF-EHEA

The awareness among academic staff about the basics of QF-EHEA, including constructive alignment between learning outcomes, student assessment and teaching methods, vary notably.

Recommendation: At the national level, a more systematic approach to trainings of academic staff on various topics (learning outcomes, student assessment, teaching methods, e-learning, recognition of prior learning (RPL) etc) is needed.

2. Analysing the correspondence between EQF and AzQF

Although the draft of AzQF has some minor contradictions both concerning content and formulations, the document is ready to be approved and implemented.

3. Aligning HE Qualifications and Curricula (in Doctoral Studies)

It has been the most challenging area in Component 3 as the organisation of doctoral studies in Azerbaijan differs from the model used in most other European countries.

There are several issues that need to be solved:

* the outcomes of 2-level doctoral studies (PhD and Doctor of Science) and their position in the AzQF;
* cooperation between universities and research institutes of the Academy of Science;
* funding of research at the universities;
* international cooperation and visibility;
* quality assurance of research and doctoral studies.

4. Enhancing Practices and Procedures of Academic Recognition

It is commendable that the Accreditation and Nostrification Office (ANO) has been created and manned with dedicated staff.

The main recommendation is to move from nostrification (looking for equivalence of (mainly) quantitative indicators) to the recognition (looking at general correspondence of learning outcomes).

It is also advisable not to regulate the recognition issues too strictly on the national level but to give HEI-s more autonomy to decide about cases related to academic mobility and its recognition.

5. Further Implementation of the AzQF

*The Draft Action Plan on Implementation of National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning* as well as *The Draft Concept of Establishment of National Commission and Secretariat for Implementation of AzQF* have been developed.

Recommendations:

* the future projects and national activities should focus more on RPL and respective trainings of academic staff;
* development of databases/IT system(s) for managing the information about students, staff, study progress, admission, graduation etc would support implementation of NQF and QA.

**Component 4 – Pilot evaluations** by Helka Kekäläinen and Tofig Ahmadov

The main acitivites of the component were reflected: Trainings for the EHEA context, ESG and EHEA trends and practices, Drafting the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Azerbaijan, Fostering the Self-Evaluation Capacity in 3 Pilot institutions and The test run of the Standards and Guidelines with 3 universities in Azerbaijan.

The common strengths of the 3 pilot institutions were identified as

* The roles and focuses of the universities – pedagogy, economy, technology – are clear and well justified,
* Willingness to improve, awareness of the need for change
* Orientation towards improving the management structure and create conditions for the senior management staff to take more responsibility and ownership in fulfilling their role
* Awareness of the need to improve management and leadership competences.

The recommendations for Strategic Planning and Study Programmes and their development were explained.

Tofig Ahmadov introduced in detail the new approach to external quality assurance that ANO will carry out in future.

**6. Unexpected Results**

The experts did not come across to any unexpected results.

**7. Issues Left Open After the Mission**

No issues were left open after the mission.

**8. Recommendations for Future Missions**

The last PSC will take place 28 August and the Closing Conference 29 August 2017. RTA office will look for a venue that would combine the event and catering in a satisfactory way.

**9. Conclusions and General Remarks Concerning the Project**

The Project has achieved all the mandatory results and more.

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