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: 1. Legal and Regulatory

Activity: 1.2 Revisions of the Legislative Framework

**Name of the Experts:** Ms Sille Uusna, Ms Heli Mattisen, Ms Maiki Udam

**Dates of the Mission:** 3-7 October 2016

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

Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA)

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

As a result of activity 1.1. there was prepared a review on the Azerbaijani HE legal framework, identifying possible gaps in the legislation relevant to QA and the HE sections of the AzQF. Based on the recommendations in gap analysis and on components 2, 3 and 4 recommendations to the Azerbaijani higher education the MoE was expected to prepare a draft of the possible amendments in legislation.

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

Recently the MoE introduced a draft of the new State standard and program for higher education (State standard). The Objectives of the Mission were to review the draft, evaluate its compatibility with principles of the European higher education area and recommendations given by the STEs, and to provide concrete recommendations in order to ensure consistency between regulations.

**4. Time Schedule of the Mission**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Activities/Meetings**  BC experts met  (title and institution) | **Remarks** |
| 03.11.2016 | * Meeting of STEs * Meeting at the MoE, discussion regarding the mission programme and the MoE near future activities and plans concerning HE regulations   Participants from MoE: Vusala Gurbanova, Tofig Ahmadov, Yaqub Piriyev, Zahra Jafarova, Kamran Rasulov, Sulhaddin Gozelov, RTA team. | - |
| 04.11.2015 | * Workshop preparation * Workshop and discussion with the MoE HE experts on the themes of *HE Management and Teaching saff*   Participants: Sulhaddin Gozelov, Vusala Gurbanova  Tofig Ahmadov, Zahra Jafarova and representative of the legal department Aygün Məmmədzadə, RTA team | - |
| 05.11.2015 | * Workshop and discussion with the MoE HE experts on the themes of *uniformed* *requirements of* *HE studies and requirements for Bachelor and Master studies specifically.* * Workshop and discussion with the MoE HE experts on the themes of *learning outcomes and student assessment.*   Participants: Sulhaddin Gozelov, Vusala Gurbanova  Tofig Ahmadov, Zahra Jafarova, RTA team. | - |
| 06.11.2015 | * Workshop preparation * Workshop and discussion with the MoE HE experts on the themes of *Doctoral studies.*   Participants: Sulhaddin Gozelov, Vusala Gurbanova, Tofig Ahmadov, Zahra Jafarova; Emin Nasirov, the head of the nostrification department of the Accreditation and Nostrification Office | - |
| 07.11.2015 | * Report writing * Mission review at the MoE   Participants: Sulhaddin Gozelov, Vusala Gurbanova  Tofig Ahmadov, Elshan Nur, Tarana Mamadova | - |

**5. Achievement of the Expected Results**

The expected results of the mission were achieved. In workshops the recommendations were comprehensively discussed. Due to the active participation of MoE it was possible to critically evaluate the impact and applicability of recommendations.

**6. Unexpected Results**

During the time of the mission, the existence of a Regulation for universities was revealed. This Regulation is not available in English and has not been appeared so far during previous missions, although it is an important part of local higher education legislation and its content could most probably have had an impact to STEs recommendations.

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

There were no issues left open after the mission.

**8. Recommendations for Future Missions**

To achieve the objectives of Component 1.2, active participation of the Legal Department of the MoE in the future activities of the project is of utmost importance.

All relevant HE Regulations, e.g., the Regulation for universities as well as amended standards for Bachelor and Master studies, should be translated to English and made available to STEs. Otherwise there is not possible to provide adequate recommendations from STEs.

During the mission, several topics were raised that need further attention. For example, the full concept of recognition of prior learning and work experience (RPL) is not been introduced to regulations yet. Implementation of RPL will require intense internal discussions, supported by external know-how and best practices. There are several projects that are initiated to support development of doctoral studies (e.g., Twinning, Nizami) and lots of recommendations have been made. The next stage should focus on the implementation and in order to achieve it, a tight and constructive cooperation between different counterparts – MoE, Higher Attestation Commission and universities – is essential.

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

Considerable efforts have been made by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in adopting the principles of European higher education area. The draft of the new State standard takes into account several recommendations that STEs have made during previous missions. The proposed changes concerning HEIs government bodies, especially increased involvement of students in Scientific Board and moving towards principles of learning outcomes, are remarkable and positive developments.

However, the STEs still have some recommendations regarding the structure of higher education standards, management of higher education, requirements for higher education studies, learning outcomes and assessment of students.

***The Structure of Regulations***

1. The scope of State standard is regulated by Education Law art 6.4. Overall the draft is in accordance with the delegation provision.

However, the State standard and separate standards for Bachelor, Master and Doctoral studies are overlapping in many areas and are not completely harmonized. In order to strengthen the links and continuity between different higher education levels, it would be advisable to consider **consolidating the necessary standards of different study levels into the State standard**, instead of having them separately. This approach ensures better consistency and continuity of regulations.

We also recommend to **reduce the detailed descriptions in regulations** (e.g., length of a break between classes etc) as much as possible.

2. It would be also advisable to **add and determine** in the State standard the **definitions** which are common to all higher education levels and are essential to understand the State standard content.

For example, although all curricula should be developed according to the principles of learning outcomes (LO) and ECTS, the term “learning outcomes” have been used neither in the draft of the State standard nor in current level standards. In addition, terms like study programme, credit point, academic year, qualification framework, learning outcomes, full time and part time studies etc should be defined.

3.We also recommend to **include the HE level descriptors** (levels 6-8)from the draft of NQF in an Annex and to **refer to their correspondence with a respective level in EQF**. It gives a clear reference point to curriculum developers and supports Azeri HE to meet the objectives of the Bologna process.

4.To decrease the number of national educational standards (programmes, curricula) and to give HEIs more autonomy in curriculum development, we recommend to **aggregate study programmes into broader units – fields of study** (or: study programme groups), that are based on ISCED classification and modified according to the Azeri context and needs. It will ease the development of national educational programmes as well as future external reviews (accreditation) and will be in accordance with the trends in many (developed) countries in the world.

***Uniform requirements for all levels of higher education***

5. In the draft of State standards in Chapter 2 Content of higher education the main goals and most relevant learning outcomes are described. It is recommended to **add** to the chapter **quality requirements relevant for all study levels** of higher education (including doctoral education) and rename it accordingly.

Following proposal for the content of the chapter is derived from Standards and guidelines for quality assurance of higher education in Azerbaijan prepared by a working group consisting of representatives of universities, MoE and Twinning experts. The quality requirements set in State standard of higher education serve as a common basis for internal and external quality assurance (including licensing).

1. The higher education institution shall develop students’ ability to adapt to modern requirements and conditions, to be competitive, independent and creative individuals and responsible citizens, to live and act in information society and to build communication.
2. The institution shall support academic integrity and is vigilant against academic fraud; it supports guarding against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against the students and staff.
3. The design and development of study plans is in line with areas of activity and educational objectives of the institution, expectations of the society, labour market needs, and the latest research.
4. Objectives, intended learning outcomes, admission and graduation requirements of the programmes are clearly defined.
5. Expected student workload is defined in credit point system at all levels of higher education.
6. Qualification resulting from the programme is referred to the appropriate level of the European qualifications framework in order to assure the comparability of qualifications.
7. Academic staff with adequate qualifications ensure the achievement of the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme, as well as the quality and sustainability of teaching and learning.
8. The distribution of full-time teaching staff by age and qualifications facilitates the sustainability of studies. Providing ground to ensure that society’s need for highly-qualified and competitive staff are met.
9. Teaching and learning takes into account the educational needs of students, provides flexible learning opportunities and encourages active participation of students in creating the learning process.
10. Practical work/internship supports the achievement of the learning outcomes of the programme.
11. Student assessment is objective, consistent, transparent and supports the achievement of learning outcomes.
12. Students are provided academic, career and psychological counselling by the higher education institution. Students’ academic progress is monitored and supported; the institution has processes and tools to support special educational needs.
13. Up-to-date teaching materials, innovative, creative and interactive learning methods and educational technology are used in teaching and learning process.
14. Information technology tools for studies and research and development activities and connections to domestic and international information networks are accessible and necessary data bases are available.

6. The principles of the **student assessment** are very well described (e.g., transparency, objectivity, fairness, self-evaluation, diverse methods and tools of assessment). In addition, the main aim of assessment should also be clearly stated: to measure whether the learning outcomes have been achieved as well as to support students’ learning. **The assessment methods and criteria should be in full accordance with the learning outcome(s).**

Unfortunately the further text in the draft of the State standard describing the 100-point score assessment is in contradiction with the requirement of using different assessment tools and methods. 100-point scoring is certainly not suitable for each assignment (e.g., creative and/or project work) and does not encourage teachers to apply different assessment methods. Therefore, we recommend to **discard the specific requirement for points** and to **unify only the letter grades (A-F).**

7. Regarding the requirements for **infrastructure** (Chapter 4. Material, technical and teaching resources) it is recommended to **include quality requirements** as well, indicating the need for proper infrastructure in order to achieve the educational goals of the institution. Following examples could be considered:

* The working conditions, teaching and learning environment, and R&D conditions (library, studios, workshops, laboratories etc.) support the achievement of institutional and educational objectives.
* Activities of the higher education institution are supported by up-to-date information technology solutions, including the study information system, e-learning opportunities, and communication portals for students and teaching staff

***Specific requirements for each study level***

8. While merging the separate standards into the State standard, it would be advisable to use a **unified structure** of the regulation and provide for **each study level (BA, MA, PhD)**:

1. The main purpose of studies.
2. The nominal duration of curricula.
3. Access requirements, previous qualification.
4. Degree awarded.
5. Link to the level in the European qualification framework.
6. Rights related to the degree (access to further studies etc).

If needed, the study level specific requirements for full time or part-time studies, requirements for practical work, requirements for teaching staff (e.g., required percentage of PhD-holders) etc could be added.

***Doctoral studies***

9. **Learning outcomes of level 8** are agreed among relevant stakeholders and should be **added** to the State standards. Description of intended learning outcomes will provide basis for programme development at doctoral level and comparison with respective qualifications in other countries. There is no differentiation of learning outcomes at level 8 between PhD and Doctor of Sciences, and the compulsory credit point system is not applicable for the programme of Doctor of Sciences, therefore we recommend **not to describe the DSc programme in the State standards for higher education.**

10. As recommended during previous Twinning missions and in Nizami project, there is a need to assure the quality of doctoral education. Doctoral education should be based on **high level** **research**, thus it is recommended to **concentrate doctoral programmes in large, research intensive and well equipped universities**. State standards for higher education or some other appropriate regulation could include special requirements in this regard, for example:

* only higher education institutions which have gained the status of research university are eligible for offering PhD programmes and/or
* before granting to the institution the right to launch a doctoral programme the scope and level of research in the respective area will be assessed by an (international) expert team based on transparent criteria.

The universities should be given full autonomy in scientific matters, but there should be (internal and external) **quality assurance system** in place in order to safeguard the adequate level and comparability.

***Management of higher education***

11. As a remarkably positive development the MoE has drafted a new regulation for Scientific board to involve more students in Scientific Board activities (Scientific Board consists both appointed and elected members. At least 20% of elected members should be students). The election of head of chairs and deans are left to the faculties to increase their autonomy.

However, the main **division of responsibilities** between Rector and Scientific Board is still unclear and need to be clarified in the State standard or in some other appropriate regulation. Also it could be advisable to describe the **composition principles** of the Scientific Board and possibly the **qualification requirements** for Rector’s candidates.

12. Instead of giving the **Rector** right to approve all Scientific Board’s decisions, it would be advisable to give him/her, for example, **one-time veto right** in order to make clearer division between Rector’s and Scientific Board’s rights, obligations and responsibilities.

***Teaching staff***

13. The draft of the new State standard describes in relevant manner the basic principles of teaching staff activities.

However, it would be advisable to add to the State standard the **main qualification requirements for teaching staff**, so they, along with the study program requirements, could form a complete set of requirements which are needed to conduct higher education studies.

14. The State standard could also provide a description of the **main responsibilities of every academic position**. For example, whether a professor should participate actively in research, development or other creative activity both on national and international level; organize and conduct the teaching of his or her subject; lead research, development or other creative activity in his/her field of study; supervise students etc.

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