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**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)**

**Annex to the Mission Report of Activity 2.5. (Training Needs Analysis) 4 Dec. 2015**

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Recommendations to the Ministry of Education and for future missions

Based on the interviews of students, university staff (tutors, administrators and QA centres) and representatives from MoE, we recommend that the training sessions in the project should be concentrated in following themes:

1. **Improving awareness of Bologna process**

Along the Action Plan the project’s main purpose is: “To increase the institutional capacities of the Ministry of Education and other key institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan for the development of Bologna related policies and the implementation of the EHEA objectives and reference tools.”

Although Azerbaijan has belonged about ten years to Bologna process, the awareness of the meaning of Bologna process is low among universities’ staff, students and stakeholders. The representatives of all five universities we interviewed understood in different way what is the meaning and the purpose of Bologna process and how it should be used to improve e.g. quality assurance processes and practices. E.g. the students didn’t know what Bologna process means for higher education qualification in EHEA framework, quality assurance of universities, students’ mobility and learning outcomes assessment and recognition. Interviewed stakeholders know something about Bologna process but not enough. They want to learn more how it should influence in universities in Azerbaijan.

AzQF has just recently been submitted for approval of the Cabinet of Ministers. At university level the role and use of AzQF is not well known. Thus, it creates big demand for training. After AzQF has been adopted formally, the next step is its effective implementation. Assessment of learning is emphasizing knowledge factor, not skills and competences. It is important that with help of training HEIs start to revise their curricula and define expected learning outcomes according to the AzQF.

**Training needs**: It is important to increase the number of key BC experts who have been trained to advise and consult the further implementation Bologna process of the EHEA in Azerbaijan. It also necessary to improve awareness of universities’ staff (first of all tutors), students and stakeholders of the meaning of Bologna process and to help the implementation of Bologna process in universities. Training should give European examples how students and stakeholders are involved in the administration of universities and their quality assurance processes.

**Target groups**: Representatives of MoE, administrative and pedagogical staff of universities (tutors) and QA-offices, students and stakeholders.

**2. Internal quality assurance**

Along ESG: “Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders**.”**

Currently, the most developed element in the internal QA systems is the student feedback mechanism. Some HEIs but not all have established QA offices. Anyway networking and dissemination of good practices between HEIs is lacking. The understanding of internal QA systems and how they can serve HEIs institutional management at their best is still at an early stage.

All universities should be familiar with quality systems of HEIs, with the components of quality in higher education as well as various methods of assessing quality of teaching. They ought to understand feedback systems and how the results can be used. They ought to be able to assess the quality of their institute from the departmental, faculty and university perspectives. They should understand how national and international guidelines affect the curriculum and quality assurance.

* **Training needs**: To support HEIs in establishing and developing internal quality system. To provide structures for networking and dissemination of good practices from other universities in Azerbaijan and abroad. Training and provision of models on internal quality assurance system, their organization and use in the institutional management and development.
* **Target groups:** Administrative and pedagogical staff of universities and QA offices, people who responsible to develop curriculums.

**3. Improving students’ and stakeholders’ role in the administration of universities**

ESG recommends that students and stakeholders should be involved in design internal and external evaluations and continuous improvement. The students we interviewed had more pessimistic view

of their possibilities to take part in university administration than the university law says or how the staff of the universities described the situation. Students felt that they don’t have any significant

role in the administration of universities even student organizations have possibility to name some members into university/academic councils. On the department or faculty level students don’t have

possibility to take part in administration. In some cases, deans sometimes discuss with students about problems which they have in their studies.

In all universities students said also that they have no possibility to take part in developing study programs or to give feedback from quality of study programs, textbooks or teachers’/professors. The staff of universities told at same time that students have many kinds of possibilities to give feedback from their studies.

Stakeholders co-operate at the moment with career centres. They don’t have possibility to take part in administration of universities. Neither they have any possibility to comment on the content of study programs. They have a lot of information, what kind of qualifications are needed on modern labour markets and in modern business. They are willing to give this information to universities e.g. in planning learning outcomes and effective teaching methods.

Stakeholders want to take part in the administration of universities and they want to know, how stakeholder’s participation is organized in European countries.

* + **Training needs:** Students and stakeholders as well as key persons in universities should know how students and stakeholders can take part effectively in the administration of universities and in internal quality assurance process in different European countries.
  + **Target groups**: Staff of career centres, chairs of boards, students and stakeholders.

**4. Modernization of university teaching and the role of learning outcomes**

In all universities we visited the students and the representatives of the staff told, that it is essential to develop teaching and learning methods. Teaching was described as traditional teacher centred approach. More active ways of teaching, more effective use of learning outcomes, more use of modern technology and ICT, use of research-based teaching etc. were proposed as focus of development. Also along ESG institutions should develop student-centred learning, teaching and assessment: “Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.”

University pedagogy should emphasize critical thinking and interdisciplinary dialogue to promote teaching and learning at the university as well as experimental and developmental approach to promote research-teaching nexus.

Along ESG learning outcomes have important role in developing programmes: “Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and

refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.”

During mapping curriculum, it is important to take into consideration subjects such as communication skills, problem solving, presentation skills, critical thinking and other soft skills, because stakeholders are not satisfied with these skills of graduates while interviewing them to hire them for a work.

According earlier documents of missions 1.1. and 2.1 the HE institutions appear to have limited academic freedom regarding the design and content of the study programs and teaching process, which are largely covered by centralized regulations. Autonomy of HEIs is restricted by detailed

regulations regarding for instance the curriculum work, frequency of collecting student feedback and establishing new programs. If the institutes are allowed gradually with more autonomy in areas such as curricular, examination, establishing new degree programs and recognition practices, it is easier to develop teaching at institutional level.

Teachers should be able to design and support flexible learning activities in versatile learning environments. They ought to be familiar with the central theoretical questions of university teaching and learning and they ought to identify and overcome personal and institutional challenges in developing pedagogical expertise and practice. They should learn also, how to link credits to learning outcomes.

Teachers ought also to acquire the knowledge and skills needed for curriculum design, implementation and development. They should be familiar with the latest research on learning and teaching in higher education and be able to apply the results of such research in examining teaching and learning in their field.

And still they should analyse and compare how various teaching and assessment methods are connected with learning and teaching and they should analyse their own assessment practices. They ought to be able to assess the assessment and feedback practices of their own subject or faculty. They should recognize how leadership and assessment practices are connected with the quality of higher education.

The meaning of learning outcomes is not clear at the moment in the most of universities where we visited. There is need for training which includes following content areas:

* what are learning outcomes
* how learning outcomes can be used to improve quality of education
* who are planning learning outcomes including role of students and stakeholders
* learning outcomes and critical thinking
* learning outcome and assessment.
* **Training needs**: Training for university teachers is needed. University pedagogy stands for education, research and development of teaching and learning in the academic community. By the term university pedagogy*,* we do not refer just to individual, but also to collegial pedagogical competency that is promoted, sustained and fostered within the university community. Pedagogical competency results in excellent curriculum, learning environments and processes, and high quality learning outcomes.
* **Target groups**: Pedagogical staff of universities, QA centres’ staff, and people who are responsible to develop curriculums

**5. Labour market and business cooperation**

A substantial number of graduates are unemployed. There is lack in graduates’ generic (so-called soft) skills. In addition to knowledge factor, attention should be paid on skills and competences when revising the national standard. It is vitally important that employer and business representatives are involved in this process.

Teaching is theoretically oriented and practical training is still insufficient. However, there are some good practices related to tracking of graduate placement and establishment of career centres at the HEIs and employer fairs organized.

* **Training needs**: Training on working life cooperation. Special attention should be paid on mechanisms to establish functioning working life contacts. Good practices can be divided from other European countries.
* **Target groups:** Administrative staff of universities, career centres and stakeholders

1. **Internationalization of universities**

International mobility of students and staff of universities is still very low level in Azerbaijan. Some of the interviewed universities belong to Erasmus program. Improving mobility of students and staff is one of the main goals in Bologna process. Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students’ progress in their studies, while promoting mobility.

One reason for students’ low international mobility in Azerbaijan is the fact that students’ studies abroad are not fully recognized in their own universities. For this reason, students are not motivated to study in other universities.

Appropriate recognition procedures rely on institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country.

* **Training needs:** To improve awareness of universities’ staff and students of possibilities and advantages of international mobility programs in EU countries (Erasmus etc.)
* **Target groups**: Staff of MoE and universities (tutors), students.

The two last two topics below were proposed by the MoE HE experts also as training needs.

1. **Improvement of doctoral studies**

## ECTS system was not implemented in PhD degree in HE system of Azerbaijan yet. By the law teacher who want to become a professor has to go through 2 levels after gaining master degree: doctor of philosophy and doctor of science, which is stayed from Post-Soviet HE system. But in AzQF that is on approving stage the number of levels are 8, but not 9 anymore. Now MoE is struggling to implement ECTS system at this level.

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1. **Awareness of modern management system of the HEIs**

One of the key points of the National Strategy Plan of Azerbaijan is to help HEIs to develop modern management system at the universities. For gaining this goal, representatives of MoE propose to held one-day training of the best practices for the rectors and vice-rectors of the HEIs.

**Proposals for methods for training sessions:** The training should consist of intensive contact sessions. In addition, there will be online seminars and study circles in virtual learning environment. Students carry out a pedagogical project and take part in a teaching practice session, when it is possible. Dissemination of good practices on learning outcomes and student-centred teaching methods; design of courses that combine theoretical and practical aspects.