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: 4.3 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Azerbaijan

**Name of the Expert:** Ms Kirsi Hiltunen, Ms Helka Kekäläinen, Ms Heli Mattisen

**Dates of the Mission:** 18-22 April 2016

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

Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA)

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

Azerbaijan started to implement the Bologna Process in 2005. In *the Action Plan on the Implementation of the National Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan* (2013), the Ministry of Education (MoE) has set ambitious strategic objectives for the upcoming years. These extend from creating content of competency-based personality-oriented education to creation of a legislative framework for granting administrative, academic, financial and organizational autonomy to educational institutions in 2018-2020.

A new Accreditation and Nostrification Office (hereinafter ANO) under the Ministry of Education was established in end of the year 2015.The purpose of the body is to effectively organize the work of accreditation of education institutes and recognition of education documents of foreign countries. The department has newly appointed Director and other staff.

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

The 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 and test them with three higher education institutions. The objective of Activity 4.3 is to assist BC stakeholders with the elaboration of a concrete proposal for the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Azerbaijan. The aim of the Mission was to interview, based on the European Standards and Guidelines, MoE staff, HEI representatives, student unions and other relevant stakeholders about the possible model for QA in Azerbaijan. Another objective was to organise a workshop in which the participants start formulating criteria for the new evaluation model by applying the European Standards and Guidelines in the Azerbaijani higher education system.

**4. Time Schedule of the Mission**

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| **Date** | **Activities/Meetings**  BC experts met  (title and institution) | **Remarks** |
| 18.4.2016 | Preparatory meeting: RTA Reijo Aholainen, Language assistant Tarlan Arzumanov, STEs  Helka Kekäläinen, Heli Mattisen and Kirsi Hiltunen  Discussions on possible model for QA in Azerbaijan: Afgan Abdullayev, Tofig Ahmadov, Vusala Gurbanova, Zahra Jafarova | Preparation for the workshop and interviews, and other organisational needs |
| 19.4.2016 | Preparatory meeting: STEs Helka Kekäläinen, Heli Mattisen and Kirsi Hiltunen  Interviews of:  Emin Amrullayev, Natig Ibrahimov  From the new Accreditation and Nostrification Office: Samir Valiyev, Rovshan Abdullayev  Interview of students from the State Oil and Industry University of Azerbaijan: 3rd-year students Shukur Sadikhov, Nazim Mustafayev, Erkin Najafli, Elshan Mirzazade  From the MoE: Afgan Abdullayev, Tofig Ahmadov | Preparatory meeting for the workshop and interviews; drafting the workplan  Discussions on the possible model for QA in Azerbaijan |
| 20.4.2016 | Preparatory meeting: STEs Helka Kekäläinen, Heli Mattisen and Kirsi Hiltunen  Workshop:  - Workplan for drafting the Standards and Guidelines for QA of Higher Education in Azerbaijan  - Contents of the Standards and Guidelines for QA of Higher Education in Azerbaijan  - Drafting criteria for: design and approval of programmes; on-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes  List of workshop participants attached | Preparation for the workshop  Workshop |
| 21.4.2016 | Preparatory meeting: STEs Helka Kekäläinen, Heli Mattisen and Kirsi Hiltunen  Meeting: RTA Counterpart Tofig Ahmadov, BC PL Emin Amrullayev, RTA Reijo Aholainen, STEs Helka Kekäläinen, Heli Mattisen and Kirsi Hiltunen  Workshop:  - Drafting criteria for: student-centred learning, teaching and assessment; internationalisation  List of workshop participants attached | Preparatory meeting  Meeting with RTA Counterpart and BC PL  Workshop |
| 22.4.2016 | Meeting: STEs Helka Kekäläinen, Heli Mattisen and Kirsi Hiltunen  Mission review: RTA Counterpart Tofig Ahmadov, BC PL Emin Amrullayev, RTA Reijo Aholainen, STEs Helka Kekäläinen, Heli Mattisen and Kirsi Hiltunen  Meeting with the Minister of Education Mikayil Jabbarov | Report writing  Composition of the drafting group  Discussion on the possible model for QA in Azerbaijan |

**5. Achievement of the Expected Results**

On 18 April the introductory meeting with MoE counterparts and EHEA experts took place. Based on previous mission reports and gap analyses the most challenging ESG standards in Azerbaijani context were presented and discussed:1.2 Policy for quality assurance; 1.2 Design and approval of programmes; 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes; 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose; 2.3 Implementing processes; 2.5 Criteria for outcomes; 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance; 3.3 Independence. The process of drafting standards and guidelines for external quality assurance in Azerbaijan higher education was introduced and discussed by participants.

On 19 April the BS Project Leader and Deputy Head of the Department for Higher Education and Science were interviewed by STE-s regarding the external evaluation model and the status and tasks the newly founded agency (Accreditation and Nostrification Office, hereinafter ANO).

Two pieces of information gathered during the interviews are very relevant for the whole project:

1) The Department for Higher Education and Science has prepared a new version of the State Higher Education Standards and Programmes, which will presumably be approved in the next future. RTA office will translate the new version of state standards and make them available for all STE’s.

2) The Director of the ANO as well as the head of the accreditation unit of the office have recently been appointed by the Minister of Education. The office is founded under the MoE and it will take over the current accreditation activities, but (as to the Director of ANO) in the future the office might gain organizational independence. The Director confirmed that the goal of ANO is to meet in the future the ESG. However, the ANO was very interested in cooperation with the Twinning project and the STE’s invited their representatives to the seminars preparing the drafting process of AzSG.

The students the STE’s met had a clear understanding of areas for improvement in the higher education of Azerbaijan: level of research and student’s participation in research; update of teaching and learning methods; more practical work integrated with theory; more space for student’s individual educational needs, independent work and autonomous learning; international mobility of teachers as well as students.

On 20 and 21 April the seminars were held in order to prepare the drafting of AzSG for higher education quality assurance. The workshops were focused on defining criteria for the most challenging standards and guidelines: Design and approval of programmes; On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes; Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment. In addition two “horizontal topics” have been discussed among the participants: internationalization and research and development. The participants were asked to elaborate and discuss the minimum criteria for the standards/topics concerned as well as the evidences needed. Outcomes of the discussions will be used for the drafting of AzSG.

STE’s presented for the discussion following documents:

1. the working plan for drafting AzSG
2. the draft of Contents for the Proposal for Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Azerbaijan / Manual for the Pilot Evaluations
3. criteria and procedure for selecting experts to the drafting group.

The following Work Plan for drafting the Proposal for the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Azerbaijan & Pilot Evaluations was discussed in the workshop:

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| **Task** | **Schedule** | **Actor(s)** |
| **Appointment of the Drafting Group** | April 2016 | Ministry of Education |
| **Definition of the overall framework and objectives for evaluation** | April – June 2016 | Drafting Group and STEs |
| **Definition of the objects and criteria for evaluation** (incl. outcome of evaluation and consequences) | April – June 2016 | Drafting Group and STEs |
| **Description of the evaluation process:**  - self-evaluation and other material, evaluation team, site visit, final report and publication of results | April – June 2016 | Drafting Group and STEs |
| **Drafting the Proposal for Standards and Guidelines and Manual for the pilot evaluations**  - first draft of the Proposal (May 2016)  - discussion on the Draft Proposal (June 2016): national seminar  - Manual for the pilots (August 2016) | April – August 2016 | Drafting Group and STEs  Various stakeholders |
| **Translation of the Manual into Azerbaijani** | August 2016 | RTA office |
| **Fostering the Self-Evaluation Capacity of Pilot institutions**  - support the capacity to conduct a self-evaluation for pilots in 3 selected institutions | Autumn 2016 | Finnish and Estonian experts |
| **Pilot evaluations** | Spring 2017 | 3 evaluation teams (3-5 experts from Azerbaijan and abroad, secretary from FINEEC or EKKA) |
| **Analysis of the pilot evaluations** | Summer / autumn 2017 | Pilot institutions, external experts, FINEEC and EKKA staff, MoE representatives and other relevant stakeholders |
| **Revised proposal for the Standards and Guidelines**  **Roadmap for the future QA system in Azerbaijan** | Summer / autumn 2017 | STEs and BC experts |

The Terms of References for drafting AzSG were developed which included the criteria for selecting experts to the drafting group. On 22 April the experts were selected by Project Leader Helka Kekäläinen, BC Project Leader Emin Amrullajev and Junior Project Leader Heli Mattisen and submitted to the Minister for approval.

During the meeting with the Minister several relevant topics were discussed: status, role and main activities of the ANO; purpos and expected outcomes of the new quality assurance model; internal communication; involvement of the Department for Higher Education and Science and the ANO in the project and the division of responsibilities.

All results of the mission were achieved.

**6. Unexpected Results**

The STEs did not recognize any unexpected results.

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

No issues were left open regarding the tasks of the mission.

**8. Recommendations for Future Missions**

As the draft of new State Higher Education Standards and Programmes developed by the Department for Higher Education and Science seems to include relevant changes compared to the existing regulation, increasing the autonomy of the universities in developing the programmes, it is very important to translate the document into English and share it with STE’s in order to update their understanding about the state of affairs.

The representatives of the Accreditation and Nostrification Office should be invited to all relevant activities of the project. Special training for the ANO staff could be offered during next missions, if possible. It is essential to involve ANO staff in drafting the AzSG.

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

The seminars provided a good opportunity to discuss the working plan and table of contents as well as the criteria for selecting experts to the drafting group with a number of well trained, experienced and committed representatives of higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education. The members of the drafting group had an opportunity to start formulating criteria, discuss their relevance and applicability in Azerbaijan context. In May the drafting group will have 3 intense working days outside Baku and is expected to present the first draft of AzSG and discuss it in a seminar open for EHEA and Bologna experts, representatives of pilot institutions and all other

relevant stakeholders. After the seminar the feedback gathered will be analyzed and necessary amendments will be made. Next autumn the pilot institutions will receive training in drafting the self-evaluation and preparing for the external review.

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