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: 4.1a Update on Bologna Context

**Name of the Experts:** Ms Helka Kekäläinen, Head of Unit, FINEEC

Ms Heli Mattisen, Director of EKKA

**Dates of the Mission:** 25-29 January 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. The interviews with the MoE representatives indicated that there is also a plan to establish a new, independent evaluation agency within the next half a year. A draft has already been prepared and submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers.

Despite of some good examples, the interviews in the earlier missions have shown that general understanding of the fundamentals of internal QA systems and how it can serve HEIs institutional management is still at a very early stage in Azerbaijani higher education institutions.

On 15-16 December 2015, the first 2-day training of the Activity 4.1a was organised at Baku State University by STEs Kirsi Hiltunen and Helka Kekäläinen. The training consisted of introductory presentations and consequent discussions as well as a workshop. In the workshop, the participants conducted a self-evaluation on the ESG Standard 1.2 (Design and approval of programmes) and on the Standard 1.7 (Information management). In addition, these themes were discussed in small groups and good practices were shared.

**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 objective of the Activity 4.1a is to train and update BC experts on the EHEA context, the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) as well as on EHEA trends and practice.

The second training of Activity 4.1a was targeted again for future QA experts, university staff and MoE staff. The aim was to give examples of good practice from Estonia, to share challenges that the Estonian system had faced and overcome, and to have a workshop in which the participants would apply the ESG Standards 1.3 (Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment) and 1.5 (Teaching Staff) into Azerbaijani higher education.

**4. Time Schedule of the Mission**

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| **Date** | **Activities/Meetings**  BC experts met  (title and institution) | **Remarks** |
| 25.1.2016 | Project Partners’ meeting: Helka Kekäläinen and Heli Mattisen  Preparatory meeting: RTA Reijo Aholainen, RTA assistant Saltanat Mammadova, Language assistant Tarlan Arzumanov, STEs  Helka Kekäläinen and Heli Mattisen | Preparation for the training and other organisational issues |
| 26.1.2016 | **Training at the Azerbaijan University of Languages**  - Introduction to the training  - Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Estonia: Programme Approach  - Discussion  - Workshop: Applying the ESG Part 1 in the Azerbaijani higher education system and disseminating good practices. ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment  List of participants attached |  |
| 27.1.2016 | **Training at the Azerbaijan University of Languages**  - Workshop: Applying the ESG Part 1 in the Azerbaijani higher education system and disseminating good practices. ESG 1.5 Teaching Staff  - What is high quality education made of? Centres of Excellence in University Education in Finland  - Discussion  - Discussion for the Written Assignment: Which would be more beneficial to Azerbaijani higher education programme or institutional approach based on ESG?  List of participants attached |  |
| 28.1.2016 | **Workshop with the MoE staff**  - Estonian experience in establishing external QA agency  - Discussion  Participants: MoE representatives: Ilham Humbatov, Afgan Abdullayev, Tofig Ahmadov, RTA Reijo Aholainen, Language assistant Tarlan Arzumanov, STEs Helka Kekäläinen and Heli Mattisen |  |
| 29.1.2016 | Meeting: STEs Helka Kekäläinen, Heli Mattisen  Mission review: RTA Counterpart Ilham Humbatov, BC PL Emin Amrullayev, RTA Reijo Aholainen, STEs Helka Kekäläinen and Heli Mattisen | Report writing |

**5. Achievement of the Expected Results**

On 26-27 January, a 2-day training was organised in the form of introductory presentations by STEs and consequent discussions as well as a workshop at the Azerbaijani Language University. Consecutive interpretation was organised by the RTA’s office. The training and the workshop offered participants an opportunity to share experiences and good practices, too. Introductory presentations included “Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Estonia: Programme Approach” and “What is high quality education made of? Centres of Excellence in University Education in Finland”.

In the workshop, the participants conducted a self-evaluation on the ESG Standard 1.3 (Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment) and on the Standard 1.5 (Teaching Staff). In addition, these themes were discussed in small groups and good practices were shared. Discussions of the workshop were lively and intensive. The participants were given a written assignment with three questions to be answered: What are the benefits of programme accreditation based on ESG in Azerbaijani context? What are the benefits of institutional accreditation based on ESG in Azerbaijani context? What is your preference at the moment and why? The assignment is expected to be send by e-mail to RTA Reijo Aholainen by 1 February 5 PM.

The training gathered approximately 35 participants from several universities and MoE. Participants represented various actors of universities: university management, professors, teachers, administrative staff and staff responsible for quality assurance in their institutions.

On 28 January, a workshop on Estonian experience in establishing external QA agency was organised at the Ministry of Education. The discussion on Azerbaijani challenges was lively. STEs provided examples from the Estonian and Finnish QA system.

**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**

Completion of the written assignment could be used as an entrance requirement for the last part of the training to be held in 23-24 February 2016.

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

The number of the participants and their commitment to the training has been a very positive sign of the potential to develop the Azerbaijani higher education. Training provided a good platform for sharing experiences and disseminating good practices. However, there is still a need for the support in gaining deeper understanding and practical implementation of QA systems in Azerbaijani higher education institutions as well as in understanding the importance of involving students and external stakeholders in the quality work.

**(Date and place) (Signature of Expert)**

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