**Component and Activity:**

Component: 2. Coordination and Networking

Activity 2.7: Communication Strategy

STE: Ms Liia Lauri

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**Communication Strategy**

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## Introduction

The objective of the Twinning project is to support the Ministry of Education (MoE) of the Republic of Azerbaijan to further develop Azerbaijan’s higher education system through integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and strengthening the Bologna Process started in 2005 in the country. The objective is to increase the institutional capacities of the Ministry of Education and other key institutions for the development of Bologna related policies and the implementation of the EHEA objectives and reference tools. The purpose of the project is to promote European Higher Education Area and European cooperation in the field of Higher Education as a way of improving the competence of graduates as well as quality of research and innovation to ensure competitiveness and social welfare.

The objective of the Project in Component 2 Networking and Coordination, Activity 2.7 Communication Strategy is to assist the Ministry of Education in preparing a public awareness and communication strategy for the issues pertinent to EHEA and Bologna. The purpose is to support MoE in establishing internal and inter-institutional coordination and networking mechanisms leading to improved capacity and awareness of issues pertinent to EHEA and Bologna Process. The Bologna Process is a collective effort of public authorities, universities, teachers, and students, together with stakeholder associations, employers, quality assurance agencies, international organisations, and institutions, including the European Commission, where effective coordination, communication and networking is crucial for successful implementation.

The Communication Strategy is developed in the project involving two international expert missions. During the first mission the Communication Strategy was drafted in cooperation with MoE and stakeholders in meetings and a collaborative workshop, involving capacity building of best practices. The second mission refined and prioritized the key messages of communication as well as the information and communication tools, channels and activities according to each particular stakeholder group. The time schedule of Strategy implementation and evaluation of the Strategy implementation was outlined and discussed with MoE and stakeholders that participated in the meetings. The target groups, communication tools and activities as well as the evaluation are presented in the Annex of this Strategy.

## Problem of Communication

Although Azerbaijan signed Bologna agreement already in 2005, there is weak awareness of benefits of EHEA related issues among wider audience in the country. The knowledge on the recent developments of higher education system in Azerbaijan remains vague. The communication and networking concerning EHEA issues is rather fragmented among different departments in the MoE and various stakeholders. The people involved in the MoE and in the universities are very committed but the activities related to EHEA communication require better coordination and networking in order not to overburden people involved in implementing it. Furthermore, there is a lack of easily readable well-illustrated user-friendly information materials in Azerbaijani language that could facilitate the understanding of the EHEA developments in Azerbaijan.

Recommendations

* The level of priority for EHEA issues in the MoE could be raised in creating coordination group to regularly share information among different departments and for networking with various stakeholders`groups,
* The creation of information materials concerning EHEA could be done in cooperation with European and International organizations and the projects sharing similar objectives in the educational area. For instance, the Twinning project’s web-page [www.ehea.edu.az](http://www.ehea.edu.az/) can be used as the general platform for information sharing.

## Objective

The objective of the Communication Strategy is **to enhance the coordination and networking** of MoE with the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and facilitate closer cooperation of HEIs with the stakeholders to ensure that **stakeholder groups** **are informed** about developments in the EHEA and in the higher education in Azerbaijan.

In the following chapters The Strategy present key messages of the communication, main target groups together with communication channels and tools to reach the target groups. The appropriate evaluation approaches are proposed.

**Specific objectives**

The specific objectives of the Communication Strategy are:

* To prepare a public awareness and communication strategy on EHEA and Bologna issues and their implementation
* To review the current communication methods and practices reflecting the best practices in the twinning partner countries
* Determine main communication channels and activities
* To plan the implementation timetable and evaluation practices for communication

The overall targets for success of EHEA and Bologna objectives are outlined in the project agreement. In terms of coordination, communication and networking, the enhanced communication can contribute to achievement of following goals:

* Positive assessment made by external independent institutions on progress made in Azerbaijan’s implementation of the Bologna Process
* Positive progress as attested by the regular Azerbaijan country report as of 2016
* Increased mobility of students and teachers
* Established internal and inter-institutional coordination and networking mechanisms on EHEA and Bologna Communication
* Improved awareness and capacity on EHEA objectives and Bologna Process
* Trainings to universities for the members to familiarize and experience EHEA/Bologna
* Successful institution and programme accreditation

## Target groups

There were five main target groups identified according to the information needs and preferences of EHEA and Bologna related issues: policy-makers, universities, employers, wider public audience and European and international organizations.

These groups are categorised to identify more specified target groups as follows:

Policy-makers

* The Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan
* The Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Economy and Industry, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Youth and Sport, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Communication and Information Technologies
* Ministries with authority over the management of specialised public universities (military, naval, security, tourism, agriculture, etc.),
* State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan
* Parliament Education Committee
* Academy of Science
* Public authorities and agencies
* State Students Admission Commission

Universities and other HEIs

* Management and academic staff
* Students, student organizations
* Quality Agencies, Career Centres, Tutors

Employers

* Employers (organizations), Business and industry representatives, SMEs, Pofessional Associations,Trade Unions

Wider audience

* (mainly through) Media

European and international organisations

* The European Commission, the Delegation of the EU
* Higher Education Reform Experts Network;
* National Erasmus+ Office
* EU-Azerbaijan Twinning projects in Higher Education

All the target groups were identified according to the possibility to be involved in the communication network as a (possible) partner or primarily as the users of the information provided. This information is **presented** in the Appendix **of this Strategy**.

## Key messages

The purpose of the project is to promote European Higher Education Area and European cooperation in the field of Higher Education as a way of improving the competence of graduates as well as quality of research and innovation to ensure competitiveness and social welfare. The purpose of the coordination, communication and networking is to steer the audience and target groups towards our objectives in EHEA and Bologna related issues. The information and content of communication conveys the key messages to achieve our objectives and motivate and mobilise the audience and target groups. The following list of key messages on EHEA and Bologna Process in Azerbaijan are developed based on the Project documentation and the feedback received in the meetings and the workshop with BC partners.

Key messages:

1. To inform (target groups) and to promote EHEA and Bologna developments and tools
2. To inform (target groups) and to promote EHEA developments and projects in Azebaijan

This includes information on:

* The introduction of the three cycle system (bachelor/master/doctorate)
* ECTS, grading system, outcome based learning (learning outcomes), Diploma Supplement
* Mobility possibilities for students and teachers
* Qualifications Framework
* Recognition of qualifications and studies abroad
* Quality Assurance system, information on assessment results
* Competencies or graduates, employability
* Quality of research and innovation
* Competitiveness and social welfare

Developments in Azerbaijan:

* Steering towards goals
* Assessment on progress to meet the requirements of the Bologna Process
* Projects and developments in HE related to EHEA issues

These key messages are recommended to utilise in using different kinds of communication channels and tools which are presented in the Appendix of this Strategy.

## Communication channels and tools

The Communication Strategy recommends the use of diverse channels and tools - or combinations of them - to communicate effectively to the different categories of target audience groups. It is noted that MoE has a PR department, which can effectively support in the design and implementation of the communication activities on EHEA and Bologna Process. For example the discussions with BC partners have indicated that the use of social media as well as information through Career Centres are estimated successful when communicating with the HE students. The initial list of communication channels and tools was collected from the BC partners in the meetings and the workshop during the first mission and refined during the second one. The communication channels and tools are proposed as follows:

Direct communication

Seminars, meetings, roundtable discussions, trainings

Various events of employers and universities

Press conferences

Direct communication involves university management, academic staff, tutors, Career Centres, Quality Agencies, students, employers, European and international organizations and media representatives to reach wider public.

This is recommended to use regular formal meetings with stakeholder groups with appointed representatives to facilitate the information sharing within universities and other institutions after the event.

Online communication

The EHEA web-page [www.ehea.edu.az](http://www.ehea.edu.az/) can serve as the general communication channel of EHEA and Bologna for the public audience and will be later maintained by the BC country.

In order to make target groups aware of the available information the MoE web-page and Universities web-pages could be linked to the EHEA web-page.

The **fact sheets**, **relevant infographics and videos** could be created to provide concise and user-friendly information on each EHEA tool and developments in Azerbaijan. Materials could be downloadable from EHEA web-page.

Social media pages of MoE and universities could benefit from cross-sharing of relevant information to reach students and student organizations.

School TV, TV

Press releases

Student e-journals

Videos, Infographics

Offline communication/printed materials

Booklets, Leaflets to be spread in the direct communication occasions

**Critical timing**

The critical timing to communicate and provide information to different stakeholders was pointed out during the discussions with MoE and stakeholders. It was concluded that regarding the Communication, some critical timings over the academic year may provide key windows and opportunities for communication to the target audiences. The meetings and workshop yielded the following notions on critical timing of communication on EHEA and Bolgona related issues:

* Statistics should be available every year (presented electronically at web-pages)
* Wider audience is possible to reach through TV at the start and end of academic year
* Students are possible to reach at summer and winter schools, festivals, competitions, libraries

The different timings should take into consideration the needs of the different target audiences.

**Visual image and brand design**

During the implementation phase of the Project, European visual guidelines need to be applied. In addition, the project should consider the visual image to be applied coherently and consistently across the diverse communication media and tools. The visual image and the brand need to be developed with regard the long-term perspective and sustainability. Visual elements that could be developed for promotion of the EHEA information should first of all show that this is the result of worldwide experience.

## Evaluation

The Communication Strategy and its implementation need evaluation and feedback for continuous improvement of coordination, networking and communication. The evaluation should assess e.g. to what extent the MoE, university and stakeholder relationships, in terms of coordination and networking are established, maintained and developed. The evaluation could also assess the degree of engagement and commitment of university staff and students and other stakeholders to Bologna development. The following methodologies of evaluation are suggested by the BC partners:

* Reports
* Media monitoring, web-sites statistics
* Surveys and focus groups
* E-surveys, monitoring and reporting on results
* Social network surveys
* Feedback seminars of stakeholder groups
* Feedback after meetings, seminars, trainings

The Project will support the MoE is the design of appropriate evaluation methodologies and tools to assess the results of the Communication Strategy and implementation activities regarding EHEA and Bologna in Azerbaijan.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The objective of the Project in Component 2 Networking and Coordination, Activity 2.7 Communication Strategy is to assist the Ministry of Education in preparing a public awareness and communication strategy for the issues pertinent to EHEA and Bologna. The Communication Strategy provides the key steps for action to implement effective communication on EHEA and Bologna process to the different target audience groups. The framework for Strategy implementation is presented in the Appendix of the Strategy. The communication tools and activities are given in the context of each target group. The next step is to continue the implementation of the activities in MoE and in cooperation with relevant stakeholders.

Recommendations

* This is recommended to raise the level of priority of EHEA issues in the MoE in creating a coordination group to regularly share information among different departments and for networking with stakeholders. It is also recommended to collaborate closely with the MoE PR Department to enhance the communication.
* The creation of information materials concerning EHEA could be done in cooperation with European and International organizations and the projects sharing similar objectives in the higher educational area. For instance, the Twinning project’s web-page [www.ehea.edu.az](http://www.ehea.edu.az/) can be used as the general platform for information sharing.