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: 3. Developing AzQF

Activity: 3.4 Further Implementation of the AzQF

**Name of the Expert:** Dr Olav Aarna

**Dates of the Mission:** 20-21 July 2016

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

Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA)

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

The development of Azerbaijani Qualifications Framework (AzQF) started already in 2011 supported by World Bank and European Training Foundation (ETF) projects. By 2013, the draft AzQF was developed, stipulating the main principles, institutions involved, level descriptors, placement of types of qualifications, and quality assurance of qualifications. In 2012 the draft AzQF was submitted to the Council of Europe for expertise. Recommendations proposed by the Council of Europe expert have been taken into account while designing the AzQF final draft. Seminars introducing the AzQF to stakeholders and international partners were held in 2012 and 2014. Nevertheless, the Decree is still in a draft form. A draft of the implementation plan for the AzQF has also been prepared by ETF and Azerbaijani counterparts.

In 2014, ETF prepared a comprehensive document “Analysis of existing qualification standards in Azerbaijan”, containing the descriptions of different qualifications' levels as well as concrete recommendations for further actions for 2015-2017 with division of roles and responsibilities in development, revision, approval and application of AzQF. The document was sent to the Minister of Education on November 12, 2014.

In November 2015 the Minister of Education submitted the draft AzQF document to the Cabinet of Ministers. Feedback from different ministries included several recommendations for amendments in the text.

During the last two years the Ministry of Education (MoE) staff has been renewed fundamentally. Only one person, Mr. Azad Ahundov, has been involved in the development of AzQF from the very beginning. As a result, the new staff members, incl. the heads of departments and units of the MoE have limited understanding about the AzQF purpose, objectives, guiding principles, and the way to implement it. Even more importantly, there is no clear ownership of the AzQF in the MoE.

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

The aim of the mission was to present background information about the AzQF development to the Minister of Education and leading specialist of the MoE, and discuss issues raised and problems of the AzQF implementation.

It was suggested that ETF senior specialist Mr Arjen Deij and the Twinning project expert Dr Olav Aarna, who have assisted the MoE in developing the AzQF document, make the presentation(s), particularly reflecting the Estonian experience. The initial outline for the presentation was suggested to cover the following topics:

* What are Qualifications Frameworks: an international and brief historical overview. The context of the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area and the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and why this is important for Azerbaijan. The development of the Azerbaijan Qualifications Framework 2011-2012, incl. development process, objectives, key mechanisms.
* How the AZQF can support the Education Development Strategy and diversification.
* Implementation of the AZQF - implementation plan 2016-2020.
* Which qualifications (state educational standards; possible other standards) should be part of the AZQF register and how they should change to be in line with the AZQF, including linking Vocational and Professional Qualifications and Occupational Standards.
* Impact on learning, assessment and Quality Assurance.
* Impact on HE reform, VET reform and on lifelong learning
* Career Information and Guidance.
* Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning.
* Organisation of the Qualification System, incl.

1. Legislation beyond NQF decree
2. Stakeholder engagement
3. Institutional arrangements and functions (including how to coordinate implementation)
4. Quality Assurance arrangements

* The main objectives and activities proposed by the EU project to support the development and implementation of the AzQF

**4. Time Schedule of the Mission**

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| **Date** | **Activities/Meetings**  BC experts met  (title and institution) | **Remarks** |
| 21.07.2016 | |  | | --- | | Mr. Sulhaddin Gozalov, Head of Higher and Secondary Professional Education Unit | | Mr. Yagub Piriyev, Head of Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department | | Mr.Tofig Ahmadov, RTA Counterpart | | Mr. Afgan Abdullayev, BC Component Leader IV | | Mr. Farzali Qadirov, Deputy Head of Apparatus | | Ms. Zehra Jafarova, Leading advisor Science, Higher and Secondary Education Department | | Ms. Nigar Ismayilzade, Head of Initial Professional-Vocational Education Sector | | Ms. Vusala Gurbanova, Senior Advisor of Science, Higher and Secondary Special Education Department | | Mr. Elshan Nuriyev, ANO, Leading specialist | | Presentation and discussion with MoE staff |
| 22.07.2016 | |  | | --- | | Mr. Mikayil Cabbarov, Minister of Education | | Mr. Metin Eynullayev, Head of Apparatus | | Mr. Yagub Piriyev, Deputy Head of Apparatus | | Mr. Farzali Qadirov, Deputy Head of Apparatus | | Mr. Emin Amrullayev, BC Project Leader/Head of Education Development Programs Department | | Parviz Yusifov, Deputy Head of Department | | Famil Mustafayev, Advisor to the Minister of Education | | Briefing of the Minister of Education |

**5. Achievement of the Expected Results**

Both meetings were certainly very useful for further development and implementation of the AzQF. Members of the MoE staff directly involved in potential implementation of the AzQF received deeper and more adequate understanding about the conceptual issues related. Anyhow, the Minister of Education expressed serious concerns about the risks related to potential approval of the AzQF document by the Cabinet of Ministers.

It has been decided, that:

* The MoE will not force approval of the AzQF document by the Cabinet of Ministers, while important steps towards the AzQF implementation will be started immediately, following the implementation plan 2016-2020;
* The AzQF document will be revised in the context of educational reforms envisaged, if necessary;
* A secretariat headed by one of the deputy heads of Apparatus will be established at the MoE to administer further development and implementation of the AzQF;
* A steering committee involving representatives of major stakeholders will be established to coordinate further development and implementation of the AzQF.

**6. Unexpected Results**

Refusal to go ahead with the approval of the AzQF document by the Cabinet of Ministers was somewhat unexpected result. On the other hand, the decision to start implementation of the AzQF (incl. awareness raising in society, deeper involvement of all stakeholders, etc.) prior to formal approval of the document, was unexpected but very positive result.

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

No issues left open.

**8. Recommendations for Future Missions**

It is recommended, that future missions of the Activity 3.4: Further Implementation of the AzQF, follow the progress in implementing the decisions mentioned in p.5, and offer necessary advice and support.

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

The mission has proved to be successful. Hopefully, the AzQF development and implementation process gained new momentum.

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