**Annex to the Mission Report of Activity 2.1. (Progress Review) 2 Oct. 2015**

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Recommendations to the Ministry of Education and for future missions

These observations are based on the information the STEs acquired during the mission and the analysis provided by the EU/ENPI project *Support to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan in strengthening VET sector management and reform of quality assurance system in VET and HE (2015)*. The observations were presented to the MoE and HEI representatives during the missions and their feedback was utilized in the final editing. Topics for the MoE’s further consideration were formulated in a way that makes them achievable in two-year time (the duration of the Twinning project).

The successful areas in the Azerbaijani Bologna implementation include the adoption of the ECTS, two-cycle degree structure, external quality assurance procedures and issuing Diploma Supplement.

1. **Mobility and recognition**

* Main findings: International mobility of students is still very low (1-2%) in international comparison. Based on student interviews, they have to take academic leave in order to take part in exchange programmes and modules taken abroad are not always fully recognised. As an important step to improve the situation, the recently launched renewal process of the national educational standard involves their comparison between Azerbaijani programmes and international sample programmes.
* Recommendations for the MoE: The MoE is recommended to draft a Mobility Programme and set quantitative and qualitative objectives for student and teacher mobility. The aim should be to gradually increase the mobility numbers to the European level. Additionally, it would be essential to remove any obstacles from student mobility and to ensure that there is room for mobility in the curriculum structure.
* Recommendations for future missions: Training on European models of recognition. Supporting the working groups renewing national standard in comparison of programmes.

1. **Graduate employability and labour market relevance**

* Main findings: A substantial number of graduates are unemployed. The employer representatives indicated that there are lacks in graduates’ generic (so-called soft) skills. Teaching is theoretically oriented and practical training is still insufficient. However, there were some good practices related to tracking of graduate placement and establishment of career centres at the HEIs and employer fairs organized. The STEs welcome recently launched exchange of information between the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MoLSP) on educational standards and occupational skills.
* Recommendations for the MoE: 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.
* Recommendations for future missions: Training on working life cooperation for those responsible for developing syllabus and curriculum, such as provision of recruitment and career services, employer surveys, alumni cooperation and RDI projects. Special attention should be paid on mechanisms to establish functioning working life contacts.

1. **National qualifications framework and learning outcomes**

* Main findings: AzQF has just recently been submitted for approval of the Cabinet of Ministers. Thus, consultation/national discussion has taken place and the design of the NQF has been agreed by stakeholders. After the AzQF has been adopted formally, the next step is its effective implementation. Teaching and learning paradigm is still based on teacher-centred methods deriving from the Soviet era. Assessment of learning is emphasizing knowledge factor, not skills and competences.
* Recommendations for the MoE: On one hand, the MoE should ensure that the national standard is re-designed on the basis of the learning outcomes included in the AzQF. On the other hand, the MoE should also ensure that HEIs start to revise their curricula and define expected learning outcomes according to the AzQF. In the future, learning outcome based aspects could be added in the external accreditation/evaluation approach.
* Recommendations for future missions: Training on how to link credits to learning outcomes; dissemination of good practices on learning outcomes and student-centred teaching methods; design of courses that combine theoretical and practical aspects.

1. **National legislation and autonomy of HEIs**

* Main findings: Autonomy of HEIs is restricted by detailed regulations regarding for instance the curriculum work, frequency of collecting student feedback and establishing new programmes. The interviewed HEI representatives indicated that gradual increase of autonomy will also increase competitiveness of HEIs and quality of education.
* Recommendations for the MoE: MoE is recommended to gradually provide higher education institutions with more autonomy in areas such as definition of their mission, scope of activities, curricular and institutional arrangements, examination, establishing new degree programmes and recognition practices.
* Recommendations for future missions: Provision of concrete input into legislative drafts and support the elaboration of legislation relevant to QA. Supporting the MoE to define an optimum level autonomy taking into account the Azerbaijani higher education and social context. Possibly training on national steering of HEIs.

1. **External quality assurance**

* Main findings: At the moment, institutional accreditation is conducted by a unit within the MoE. There is a plan to create an independent QA agency within the nearest half a year. The interviewed HEIS were relatively satisfied with the current accreditation approach, but some MoE experts saw that it is too control-oriented.
* Recommendations for the MoE: To ensure that the agency fulfils the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG).
* Recommendations for future missions: Implementation of three pilot evaluations (testing possibly different approaches: programme accreditation, audit, review, thematic evaluation); development of the Standards and Guidelines Quality Assurance in Azerbaijan; training of evaluators/reviewers; inclusion of foreign experts in the pilot evaluation teams.

1. **Internal quality assurance**

* Main findings: Currently, the most developed element in the internal QA systems is the student feedback mechanism. Some HEIs but not all have established QA offices. 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 a very early stage.
* Recommendations for the MoE: To support HEIs in establishing QA offices. To provide structures for networking and dissemination of good practices.
* Recommendations for future missions: Training and provision of models on internal quality assurance system, their organisation and use in the institutional management and development.