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: 3.1 EHEA and QF EHEA Training

**Name of the Experts:** Mr Touko Apajalahti,Ms Eve Eisenschmidt, Mr Tauno Otto, Ms Kristiina Tõnnisson, Ms Maiki Udam

**Dates of the Mission:** 28 March – 1 April 2016

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

Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA)

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

The **Azerbaijani Qualifications Framework** (AzQF) is a tool to systematise, classify and manage Azerbaijani qualifications. Decree is still officially in a draft form and stipulates the main principles, institutions involved, level descriptions, placement of types of qualifications, and quality assurance of qualifications. More on the relevant state of affairs regarding the AzQF can be found from the mission report of the preceding mission of the Activity 3.1.

**National educational standards** are developed for each level of the degrees (Sub-Bachelor’s, Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral), as well as for each specialtyby expert groups formed of heads of departments of a given field of study, and are formally approved by the Ministry. The national educational standards describe essentially the programme level learning outcomes for given study fields. As the AzQF is still to be approved, it has not been taken into account in the drafting of the national educational standards and it is not completely clear what the relationship between the AzQF and the educational standards is planned to be in the future.

In practice, it can be said that the national educational standards act as field-specific qualifications frameworks. However, in contrast to qualifications frameworks, the educational standards include also very detailed instructions regarding things such as course design, instruction and assessment methods. This leads to the autonomy of higher education institutions being limited mainly to the development of syllabi, following the national educational standards. In addition, higher education institutions or departments can instruct tight forms for implementation of courses, narrowing the scope for individual, learning-outcomes-based planning of the syllabi by teachers or teacher groups.

The main responsibility of individual teachers is the **syllabi design**, based on the national educational standards and institutional and departmental guidelines. The heads of departments play an important role, in essence by their own motivation either supporting or suppressing innovativeness of teachers, which can be seen for example in how limiting individual teachers experience the national educational standards. Use of information collected through feedback from e.g. students or external stakeholders for the syllabi design and renewal is not systematic.

The **assessment of students** is also highly regulated: every subject must include a final exam, which has to account for 50 % of the final mark; the other 50 % must be formed by 10 % based on presence, 10 % paper/project (or similar exercise suitable for the given field) and 30 % activity during the course. The possibilities of individual teachers to design their teaching in this regard can in many cases be further limited by institutions’ own regulations that stipulate same or similar approaches to be used for all courses in the institution or in a given department. Simply put, the teacher’s choice when designing a course is not whether or not there will be a final exam, whether or not its weight will be 50 % but only, what questions to ask in the exam.

Nevertheless, the firm formal settings for the development of the educational provision within the higher education institutions do allow introduction of diverse pedagogical methods following a learning-outcomes based approach. This is especially a possibility for teachers who have developed a sufficient understanding of the methodology, in order to be able to justify the use of novel approaches to colleagues and superiors that might not yet be that keen on changing away from the traditional ways.

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

Objectives of the mission were:

* To train university staff on writing learning outcomes in relation to AzQF in teacher training, technology and business education
* To update experts on the QF EHEA, outcome based learning and assessment

Methods used to fulfill the task of the mission were 2-day trainings for university staff in the mentioned three sectors and meetings with the MoE.

**4. Time Schedule of the Mission**

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| **Date** | **Activities/Meetings**  BC experts met  (title and institution) | **Remarks** |
| 28.3.2016 | Meeting with RTA, assistants and MoE representatives: Mr Azad Akhundov – BC CL III, Science and Higher Education Department senior Advisor;  Mr Afgan Abdullayev, BC CL IV; Mr Tofig Ahmadov - Senior Adviser, the Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department, RTA  Counterpart  Preparation of the mission and trainings |  |
| 29.3.2016 | Training at Baku State University: Overview of EHEA QF; study program development; outcome based learning and assessment | list of participants and study materials in annexes |
| 30.3.2016 | Training at Azerbaijan Technical University: Overview of EHEA QF; study program development; outcome based learning and assessment | parallel training with the one in the next row; list of participants and study materials in annexes |
| 30.3.2016 | Training at Azerbaijan State Economic  University: Overview of EHEA QF; study program development; outcome based learning and assessment | parallel training with the one in the previous row; list of participants and study materials in annexes |
| 31.3.2016 | Training at Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University: Overview of EHEA QF; study program development; outcome based learning and assessment | list of participants and study materials in annexes |
| 1.4.2016 | Report writing  Mission review and planning of next mission with RTA and MoE representatives:  Mr Azad Akhundov – BC CL III, Science and Higher Education Department senior Advisor;  Ms Zahra Jafarova, - Leading Adviser, Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department;  Mr Tofig Ahmadov - Senior Adviser, the Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department, RTA  Counterpart |  |

**5. Achievement of the Expected Results**

During the mission, three 2-day practical trainings concerning writing learning outcomes in relation to the AzQF were delivered for Azerbaijani public and private university staff (20-22 participants per training). During the trainings, methods and processes for assessing a student’s levels of knowledge, skills and competencies (formal and informal exams, classroom participation, assignments, self-evaluation, peer evaluation etc.) and linking ECTS to different modules were outlined by the experts. The experts provided also future reference materials to participants, see presentations in annexes.

All expected results were achieved.

The seminar programmes, study materials and the lists of participants are provided in annexes.

**6. Unexpected Results**

No unexpected results occurred.

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

No issues regarding the mission were left open.

**8. Recommendations for Future Missions**

As the Heads of Departments/Deans are an important group for enabling change, some trainings could be specially targeted to this group. Also the management teams in general both on institutes’, faculties’ and universities’ levels could be targeted if possible.

In the workshops with teachers, the most sought after information appeared to be real-life examples of course descriptions: learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment. Future workshops could be prepared with even more concrete examples, while at the same time stressing that there are no right answers to be copied. More concrete examples could be offered from various countries and from various disciplines targeted specifically to certain disciplinary target groups.

Additionally it would be wise to contact schools/premises before the meetings to check the availability of different learning aids (white boards or any kind of boards at all, availability to move chairs etc.) to be aware of room support abilities for active learning, as well as enabling wireless internet connection for course participants to share materials electronically and to analyse the visibility of syllabus and learning outcomes on different universities.

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

Our conclusions are based on the observations made during the four trainings, and on the discussions conducted with the representatives of the MoE.

As an overall conclusion we see that the roles of and the relationship between the AzQF and the national educational standards are currently not clear, and should be defined, for example by stating the AzQF is the top document, and the national educational standards are then formulated based on the AzQF. Furthermore, more coherent and defined use of terminology both in Azerbaijani and English language, what concerns educational standards, curriculum, study programme and syllabus, would make it easier for the ordinary teachers to absorb the new way of thinking. Concerning the project, a clear definition of terms used and their hierarchy would also make the preparation and implementation of workshops more efficient.

Regarding learning outcomes, there seems to be a great amount of variation in the knowledge of teachers: some have attended many similar trainings and are very familiar with the approaches, while some have difficulties in grasping the basic concepts. This was reflected also in the willingness of participants to think about how to develop the teaching and assessment methods. When it comes to the details of subject implementation, the participants’ understanding about how limiting the national educational standards truly are, varies essentially. Development of a systematic in-service training system would be useful for coherent knowledge building of teachers.

In the workshops it was also clear that the tight state regulation in many cases restrains the development of a true learning outcomes based approach. This is especially the case when it comes to the assessment methods: if the methods are highly regulated, it is evident that they cannot be suitable for all different kinds of learning outcomes. It would be good to touch in the future all three aspects of the learning circle together: learning outcomes - assessment methods - teaching methods.

**9.1. Conclusions regarding economics education**

In the workshop in economics education limited independence of teachers was often raised. Based on that both learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment methods were appreciated as “theoretical possibilities” but not so much as something they can start to use right away. Additionally there was expectation that there are certain “right” learning outcomes suitable for all. In the future it would be wise to address the points that are more under teachers’ control and at the same time to raise additionally their awareness about possibilities to use different approaches within given framework. More attention should be paid to connect AzQF, national educational standards and syllabi.

**9.2. Conclusions regarding engineering education**

In the workshop in engineering education it seemed that the most commonly shared areas in need of further development were the systematic inclusion of students and industry stakeholders to the planning of education, the analysis of learning outcomes of taught subjects in relation to the national educational standards or AzQF, and the use of a variety of assessment methods. Also the question of limited independence was discussed from multiple points of views.

Another topic of interest concerns development and support to individual study path of students, what is important for international student exchange (e.g., in terms of Erasmus Plus programme) but also national student mobility.

**9.3. Conclusions regarding teacher training**

In the workshop of teacher education the participants appreciated the integrated theory-practice model where students start to fulfil the practical tasks in the real classroom environment from the very beginning of their studies. It enables to extend the variety of teaching and assessment methods, supports to achieve the learning outcomes as well as increases the quality of future teachers. *This model could also be recommended to Azeri teacher education.*

The participants found the competences in the Estonian teacher professional standard more relevant for teacher’s work than respective national educational standards in Azerbaijan. Although some participants, especially from the private HEI-s use various assessment methods, the majority felt to be restricted by the national regulations for assessment. Both assessment methods and criteria require more attention and should be reflected in further trainings.

**In conclusion**, the STE-s appreciated the thorough preparation by the RTA team and MoE representatives concerning the organisation of the seminars, including translation of the materials and interpretation, as well as explaining the situation in Azeri higher education to the STE-s. The interest and active engagement by the seminar participants were highly valued by all STE-s. The STE-s recognise the full support of all four HEI-s who were kindly providing their facilities for trainings.

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