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 Expert:**

Ms Kirsi Hiltunen, Counsellor of Evaluation, FINEEC

Ms Helka Kekäläinen, Head of Unit, FINEEC

**Dates of the Mission:** 14-18 December 2015

**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. It seems that the following standards and guidelines mentioned in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015) are still not covered in the internal QA systems: policy for quality assurance, student-centred learning, teaching and assessment, information management for the effective management of their programmes and other activities and public information about their activities to society.

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

The 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 and test them with three higher education institutions. The objective of the Mission (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 training was targeted for future QA experts, university staff, students, working life representatives and MoE staff. The aim was to give examples of good practice from Finland, to share challenges that the Finnish system had faced and overcome, and to include a workshop in which the participants would apply the ESG into Azerbaijani higher education,

**4. Time Schedule of the Mission**

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| **Date** | **Activities/Meetings**  BC experts met  (title and institution) | **Remarks** |
| 14.12.2015 | Preparatory meeting: RTA Reijo Aholainen, Language assistant Tarlan Arzumanov, STEs  Helka Kekäläinen and Kirsi Hiltunen | Preparation for the training and other organisational needs |
| 15.12.2015 | Preparatory meeting: STEs Helka Kekäläinen and Kirsi Hiltunen  Training  - Introduction to the project  - Bologna process and European Higher Education Area  - Discussion  - Enhancing the quality of Finnish higher education: Examples and good practices from Finland  - Discussion  - Introduction to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG)  - Discussion  List of participants attached | Preparatory meeting for the training |
| 16.12.2015 | Training  - ESG Part 1: Standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance  - Workshop: Applying the ESG Part 1 in the Azerbaijani higher education system and disseminating good practices  - Student and stakeholder participation in QA of education: Examples and good practices from Finland  - Discussion  List of participants attached |  |
| 17.12.2015 | Workshop with the MoE  - First discussion on the ESG adaptation in the Azerbaijani higher education and on a roadmap for Institutional Arrangements  Participants: MoE representatives, RTA Reijo Aholainen, Language assistant Tarlan Arzumanov, STEs Helka Kekäläinen and Kirsi Hiltunen  Mission review: RTA Counterpart Ilham Humbatov, BC PL Emin Amrullayev, RTA Reijo Aholainen, STEs Helka Kekäläinen and Kirsi Hiltunen |  |
| 18.12.2015 | Meeting: STEs Helka Kekäläinen, Kirsi Hiltunen  Observation on an accreditation process at the Baku State University  Participants: STEs Helka Kekäläinen and Kirsi Hiltunen | Report writing |

**5. Achievement of the Expected Results**

On 15-16 December, a 2-day training was organised in the form of introductory presentations by STEs and consequent discussions as well as a workshop at Baku State 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 an introduction to the project and to the Bologna process and the European Higher Education Area, examples and good practices from Finland in enhancing the quality of education, an introduction to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG), as well as an introduction to student and stakeholder participation in QA of education.

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. Discussions of the workshop were lively and intensive.

The training gathered approximately 40 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. During the training, it became evident that institutions do not have autonomy in the design and establishment of study programmes. Furthermore, students and other stakeholders do not seem to be involved in the design of programmes. It was also brought up by some participants that ECTS are not implemented in a systematic way and that understanding and implementation of learning outcomes in the curriculum design is at a very early phase. However, some institutions do cooperation with international world-class universities and use these institutions as benchmarks. In general, there still seems to be need for improvement regarding the collection and utilization of key performance indicators, utilization of information regarding students’ satisfaction with their programmes and collection and utilization of information regarding career paths of graduates.

During the training, benefits and experiences of accreditation conducted in Azerbaijan were also discussed. Participants seemed to be satisfied with accreditations and recommendations they provide to the institutions.

On 17 December, a workshop on ESG adaptation in Azerbaijani higher education and on a roadmap for Institutional Arrangements was organised at the Ministry of Education. The discussion on the new ESG and especially Parts 2 and 3 was lively. STEs provided examples from the 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**

There is a need for hands-on exercise in general concepts and implementation of QA. Participants also expressed a wish for hands-on exercise in formulating learning outcomes at different levels in relation to learning, teaching and assessment. It would also be important to involve BC students and other stakeholders in the further missions and trainings of the project.

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

There is a great potential in Azerbaijani higher education institutions for implementing the ESG. However, there seems to be great differences with regard to the level of understanding of QA at higher education institutions. Training provided a good platform for sharing experiences and disseminating good practices. There is 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.

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

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