EVALUATION REPORT FOR INSTITUTIONAL PILOT EVALUATION

University: Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University

Evaluation group:

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Evaluation group sent the preliminary report to the university: 24.05.2017

Evaluation group received the comments from the university subject to evaluation: No comments were submitted

Report approved by the Twinning Project Leaders

Date: 02.06.2017

Description of the evaluation process

International cooperation in quality assurance has been an essential element of the Bologna process aiming to create a European Higher Education Area. A central tool in this work has been the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (also known as the ESG). The Twinning project "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)", which was launched in 2015, offers an opportunity to apply the ESG in Azerbaijani higher education. One of the mandatory results of the project was to develop Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Azerbaijan (AzSG) in line with the ESG and to test them with three higher education institutions, one of them being the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University (ASPU).

In April 2016 a Drafting Group was appointed by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan to work on a proposal for AzSG. A draft manual for the pilot evaluations was discussed with the Advisory Group in a seminar in June 2016. The draft was published on the Twinning project's website in order to get feedback on the assessment areas and criteria. Amendments were made to the manual based on the feedback. The pilot institutions were supported to conduct a self-evaluation through several trainings, which took place starting in September 2016. The self-evaluation report by ASPU was presented to the evaluation group in February 2017. In February 2017 informative visits were conducted to all three higher education institutions participating in the pilot. Practical details of the upcoming site visits were discussed during these visits.

The main aims of the pilot evaluation have been set as follows: supporting the strategic management of institutions, providing external feedback to the institution's own internal quality assurance procedures as well as informing the internal and external stakeholders of the compliance of the institution's quality assurance with the ESG. The pilot evaluation will have an institutional approach with the focus on teaching and learning.

Thus, the expert team was asked to assess Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Azerbaijan on the basis of 7 assessment areas: Strategic Planning; Management; Human Resources; Study Programmes and Their Development; Students; Research Activities; Teaching and Learning Resources and Support Services.

The team consisted of 5 members, including international as well as local experts from Azerbaijan, and was supported by the Project Manager.

After the preparation phase, the work of the team in Baku started on Monday, April 10, 2017, with an introduction to the higher education system of Azerbaijan at the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The introductory meeting was followed by team meeting where the team members agreed the overall questions and issues to discuss during the site visit to the university, which was carried out during 11-13 April 2017. During those three days of the site visit meetings were held with the management, academic and research staff, representatives of various support services, students, alumni and external stakeholders of the institution. On the last day of the visit feedback on preliminary conclusions of the team were presented to the rectorate of ASPU.

On Friday, April 14, the team held an all-day meeting, during which both the structure of the final report was agreed and findings of the team were compiled in a first draft of the evaluation report. This work was executed in a cooperative way and the members of the team extensively discussed their individual views on all the seven assessment areas.

The evaluation has been conducted on the basis of the Self-Evaluation Report of Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University and its compulsory appendices. At the request of the team, additional information was made available during the site visit. The team members had a tour of the premises, thus obtaining an impression of the lecture rooms, library and other facilities. The present evaluation report will provide both the institution and external stakeholders with information about the university's strengths and good practices as well as recommendations for the institution's further development.

I Description of the university

Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University, which was established on 26 August 1921, is the first pedagogical higher education institution as well as one of the oldest higher education institutions in Azerbaijan. It is also one of the biggest education, science and cultural centres of pedagogical education in the country. The university's role is defined in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Law on Education, existing regulatory acts in the area of education legislation, "Concept and Strategy on continuous pedagogical education and teacher training in the Republic of Azerbaijan" approved by the order #102 dated 25 June 2007 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan and relevant regulatory documents of the Ministry of Education on the development of education in higher education institutions. ASPU has a rich history of development. The university has trained over 160,000 teachers and scientific specialists up to date not only for the Republic of Azerbaijan, but also for the republics of Transcaucasia, Central Asia, Bulgaria and other countries, and it has become a centre for scientific pedagogical training for numerous specialties.

The present university structure consists of 8 Faculties, 39 Chairs and a number of Departments, its supreme governance body being the Scientific Council (*hereinafter also referred to as SC*). ASPU has 4 campuses in the capital city of Baku and 7 affiliates (branches) in different regions of the country, incl. Azerbaijan State Pedagogical College and ASPU basic school.

The student body consists total of 8,558 students (2015/2016) and there is 685 full-time teaching staff in the academic year 2016/2017.

Currently, the university provides studies at Bachelor level (22 study programmes), Master level (18 programmes) and Doctoral level (25 programmes). In continuing education 4 study programmes are offered.

More detailed information about the university can be found on its website www.adpu.edu.az.

III Summary of the evaluation (mark with 'X'):

	Fully conforms to requirements	Mostly conforms to requirements	Partially conforms to requirements	Does not conform to requirements
1. Strategic planning			X	
2. Management			X	
3. Human resources			X	
4. Study programmes and their development			X	
5. Students			X	
6. Research activities				X
7. Teaching and learning resources and support services			X	

Comments

The expert team would like to thank the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University (hereinafter ASPU) management for their hospitality and good arrangement of the visit. The team appreciates that discussions with various groups during the site visit were held in an open and trustful atmosphere that allowed the team members to collect additional evidence and information for compiling their final report.

The Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University has an extremely important role in society in terms of preparing future teachers and doing research on the field of pedagogy. This role is taken very seriously and the expert team felt during all meetings with different groups starting from top management and ending with external partners.

In its Self-Evaluation Report (hereinafter SER) the University has mentioned many areas of improvement, but less good practices. It must be stated that the SER was highly self-critical. In the opinion of the team, the outcome of this self-reflection, in fact, corresponds to reality and highlights the most critical issues the institution is facing. The SER provides some facts but gives less information on how processes are regulated and managed and the self-critical evaluation is not based on analysis.

However, the expert team also found many good initiatives, which already take place, and one of them - being definitely the most important one - is that the University management has a good vision, several positive initiatives have already been launched, which can be elaborated further, and the members of the institution have many ideas how to improve the present practices.

In the opinion of the team, the majority of the assessment areas partially conform to requirements meaning that some good initiatives have already been launched.

ASPU is in the transition period. At the moment, the priorities of the University are not reflected in the Strategic Development Plan. The approved development plan does not emphasize the present situation and the rectorate is planning to elaborate a new strategic plan. A clearer focus on educational sciences and teacher education should be emphasised in strategic plans. To manage with limited human and financial resource means that very clear priorities should be set and resources should be channelled towards these priority areas.

The current management structures of the University do not meet modern education management requirements. The University has recognized areas of improvement in its management system, its structure and procedures, and set its targets for their development.

The governance of ASPU is regulated by law and other regulations, which should be reconsidered by the Ministry of Education within the process of review and renewal of the legal and normative framework of the Higher Education Institutions.

Human resources is certainly the most critical issue at the University and needs immediate attention by the management. It is positive to note that the person responsible for human resources development has been appointed recently and concrete steps forward are already being taken. The English language skills of the staff need attention to advance the internationalization of the institution.

According to the SER, study programmes are designed in line with the national standards, expectations of the society and economy and labour market needs. It is emphasized in the SER that the learning process at ASPU is organized in accordance with the regulatory documents of the state, orders and instructions of the Ministry of Education. However, during the interviews it became evident that on the one hand, the overall programme design is too much regulated by the Ministry, and on the other hand teaching materials and methodologies in ASPU are outdated.

Involvement of the students into the academic life of ASPU is in transition phase, new management consider student body as an important partner. There are two Student Organizations, each of these organizations are offering students a variety of options, and clubs which provides students with wide range of opportunities, incentives and activities. Students are not very well aware of the aims, structure and assessment of the learning process. Also, students are not involved in the discussions or reviews of the Study programmes, learning outcomes etc. Flexible learning opportunities could not be provided de facto, the over-regulated curriculum limits students learning flexibility. There is limited participation in mobility programmes.

Research activities are fragmented and need to be more focused on educational sciences. Research themes should be discussed with external partners, agreed upon among academic staff members, fixed in the development plan and taken into consideration during allocating the existing limited resources. Doctoral studies should be reorganised based on the Bologna system. New generation of the doctoral students is one option to raise the quality of research to a higher level, including becoming more visible internationally. The team finds that the research area does not conform to the requirements of this evaluation yet.

According to the SER, the University offers appropriate teaching and learning infrastructure (classrooms, laboratories, library workshops rooms etc.), although there is an apparent need to audit and modernize the infrastructure, including ICT, which was mentioned during all the interviews. There is a need for special laboratories, rooms for workshops, etc. The University management is aware of the need to modernise the campus and has already started taking steps in this process.

Strengths

- Top management with **strong leadership** dedicated to accomplishing an ambitious vision.

- Acknowledging that the university's structure is at present time not optimal to support teaching, learning and research activities in the institution. There is a clear **orientation towards improving the structure as well as the management of the University**, and create conditions for the senior management staff to take more responsibility and ownership in fulfilling their role.

- **Awareness of the need to improve management and leadership competences** on the part of staff members in managerial positions.

- **New human resource development strategy** for recruitment of highly motivated and academic staff of new generation, and recognition of the need for continuous optimization of the size of both academic and non-academic staff.

- **Implementation of a student feedback system** regarding teaching and learning process, which is planned be launched in June 2017.

- **Well-established Student Youth Organization and Student Trade Union Committee** that are aware of the needs of students and provide for them different kinds of support and social activities.

- Grounds have been laid for **more open communication between the top management and students**, including access to the Rector, and new initiatives are appreciated by the students.

- **Changes in teacher education** offered by the university are acknowledged by external partners (e.g., leaders of secondary schools), who are willing to contribute towards further improving teacher training in ASPU.

Recommendations

- The **mission statement** as a pedagogical university should be elaborated and strengthened together with all members of the university including students, academic and non-academic staff and shared widely with external stakeholders.

- The **targets** described in the Development Plan should be realistic, measurable and monitored annually.

- Based on the core problems in the main areas (e.g., research, teaching, staff) **priorities must be urgently set** and concrete realistic action plan (short- and midterm) together with clear indicators should be developed and executed. The already existing resources – both human and financial – should be re-assessed and channelled towards these priority areas.

- In order to monitor the progress as well possible regress in the priority areas, **systematic data collection and analyses s**hould be established (e.g., the number of scientific publications and the amount of external funding per academic staff member; the employment of graduates; feedback from different parties within and outside the university about processes and management at the university, etc.).

- The **role of the Scientific Council**, being the highest decision-making body in the university, has to be clarified. At the moment the tasks of the Council are too diverse, as it needs to address issues that are both administrative and academic in nature. In order to have a more efficient decision-making process, these two responsibilities could be separated and two different bodies established: one dealing with administrative issues and the other with academic ones. Both bodies could be composed of fewer number of members, which would allow a more active participation of every member of these bodies. The university could take an active role in proposing changes that need to be considered by the Ministry of Education within the process of review and renewal of the legal and normative framework of the Higher Education Institutions.

- With regard to **human resources**, the University should have a recruitment plan for employment of new staff based on priority areas. At the same time, the University urgently needs to reconsider the retirement age for its staff members and make changes in relevant regulations in order to attract and fulfil the positions with highly qualified, motivated younger generation of teaching staff. In the light of these considerations, there may also be a need to focus the university's activities (e.g., terminating the activity in some areas that are not directly connected with pedagogical education), which inevitably leads to downsizing the current number of staff members.

- **A holistic internal feedback system of academic staff** needs to be urgently developed with the aim to support changes in teaching and learning approach, i.e., this involves collecting feedback from students, academic staff, alumni, internship supervisors as well as academic staff members observing each other's classes and sharing innovative teaching practices. It is recommended that based on such a holistic feedback system a recognition and motivation system for staff be also created.

- **Teaching/learning process** is in the heart of this University and needs to be taken seriously as it was mentioned during all the discussions. According to the interviews, programme design is still over-regulated at the state level. Universities should have more autonomy to elaborate their study programmes based on recent research results and needs of the labour market.

Academic staff members do not feel the ownership and take responsibility for the renewal of the programmes regularly because of understanding of limited possibilities to make changes in the programmes.

- Content of the **study programmes as well as teaching materials s**hould be revised and modernised based on results of recent research and trends in teacher education, and persistently benchmarked with international documents, e.g., Supporting Teacher Competence Development
(see http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/school/doc/teachercomp_en.pdf) and with another universities worldwide which offer teacher education.

- **Students involvement** in the community of the University should be increased, starting from governance (e.g., Scientific Council) and ending with designing their own learning process (responsibility and ownership of the studies).

- There is an utmost need for **international collaboration** in all areas starting from students' mobility, staff mobility, collaborative programme development and ending with joint research projects. To support internationalisation there is a need to create support means starting from the development of language skills – offering English courses (for academic staff and for students,) creating access to English study materials, etc.

- **Research** is too fragmented between faculties and research/scientific labs, and it is also fragmented in terms of different research topics. Scientific labs and faculties should be merged, bigger research groups could be formed including doctoral and master students. Research has to support teaching and research topics should be carefully considered and chosen to focus mainly on educational sciences and pedagogy including experiments in real learning situations in order to test new teaching/learning methods that should support changes in teaching practices. More cooperation with other universities at national and international level in the field of education should be established.

- **Collaboration with alumni** is essential to collect feedback on the quality of education provided by the University. An alumni organisation could be established to involve graduates into the development of the study programmes.

- **Learning resources** need more attention and careful consideration. There is too much attention paid on becoming better equipped with modern ICT, while for example a smartboard has not been proved to be as beneficial as expected according to experiences in other countries. More attention should be paid on access to internet, databases in library, and electronic platforms. Also, the ICT skills of academic staff need to be improved. In order to benefit from the vast possibilities of the free access to databases and learning resources offered via internet, English language skills should be improved thoroughly.

Recommendations addressed to the Ministry of Education of the Republic Azerbaijan

- Universities should have more autonomy to elaborate study programmes based on recent research results and needs of the labour market. The Azerbaijani Qualifications Framework, which has already been drafted, should be approved and implemented as soon as possible, and on the basis of the AzQF the standard of higher education adopted, so that study programme development at HEIs would be accelerated. Every academic institution should elaborate their programme structure and courses based on the national framework.
- The legal and normative framework which regulates governance of higher education institutions should be reconsidered by the Ministry of Education to allow universities to implement a more effective management system, e.g., have two different governing bodies – academic council and operational management body.

- For internationalisation of higher education and in order to become part of international research community, the English language competences should be raised already at the level secondary education. National curriculum should be reconsidered having stronger emphasis on acquiring English language skills.

- Doctoral studies should be reorganised based on the Bologna system, as such a long period of study is demotivating and may cause losing the interest of young generation to start their academic career.

IV Results by assessment areas

1 STRATEGIC PLANNING									
Assessment	Fully conforms to requirements		Mostly conforms to requirements		Partially conforms to requirements	x	Does not conform to requirements	

Requirements:
- *Role (mission and vision) of the institution in the context of national education system is well defined and supported by relevant (internal and external) stakeholders.*
- *The development strategy approved by the Scientific Council of the institution is compliant with the mission statement and objectives of the institutions. Short and/or mid-term plans for its realization are in place.*
- *Development strategy of the institution is line with its resources (finances, staff, infrastructure), capacity of attracting additional resources, changes in labour market and needs of the society.*
- *Relevant stakeholders (teaching staff, students and employers) are involved in the strategic development process of the institution.*
- *Processes to evaluate the achievement of the objectives set in the strategy are in place, short and/or mid-term plans are followed and the implementation monitored.*
- *Information about higher education institution's mission, vision and objectives is publicly available (website, media, other channels).*

Comments/reflections, evidence

The mission of the University and its role is defined in accordance with the regulations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, e.g., "Concept and Strategy on continuous pedagogical education and teacher training in the Republic of Azerbaijan". It seems that the mission and vision as a pedagogical university is explicitly addressed by the government but not so clearly taken into account in the activity of the university. For example, there are 39 Chairs under 8 Faculties and 7 research labs (SRL) which are not directly connected with pedagogical issues (e.g., physics of rare soil metal materials); only approximately 20% of research is done in the field of education.

The Strategic Development Plan 2015-2020 sets strategic objectives such as 1) meeting the demand of the developing republic for educated pedagogical and scientific-pedagogical specialists, and 2) turning ASPU into a centre for training, retraining and re–qualifying pedagogical, scientific-pedagogical specialists meeting international standards, and ensuring its efficient activity. However, during the site visit the expert team got the impression that not all staff members were aware of the on-going activities and followed those aims. The SER presents 10 areas for strategic planning which are different compared to the approved Strategic Development Plan.

ASPU is in the period of transition. At the moment, the priorities of the University identified recently are not reflected in the Strategic Development Plan. The approved development plan does not emphasise the present situation and the rectorate is planning to elaborate a new strategic plan. The present Strategic Development Plan is not very clear, there are too many objectives which are vague and not measureable. When compiling a new strategic plan it is recommended to prioritise main targets and rather plan less but set realistic goals.

From the perspective of changes in the labour market and the needs of the society, the Development Strategy of the University needs to be elaborated. During the site visit social partners mentioned that ASPU should focus more on developing new teaching methodology and carrying out experiments in real school context. Clearer focus on educational sciences and teacher education should be emphasised in strategic plans.

In general, the mission of the University as the largest pedagogical university in the country is not strongly elaborated and recognised by staff members. The mission statement as a pedagogical university should be strengthened together with all members of the University including students, academic and non-academic staff, and shared widely with external stakeholders.

There are no short and mid-term action plans which the expert team was aware of, although during the site visit the Human Resource Manager mentioned an action plan concerning personnel. Based on the core problems in the main areas (e.g., research, teaching, staff) priorities must be urgently set and a concrete realistic action plan (short- and mid-term) together with clear indicators should be developed and executed and monitored annually. As internationalisation is a precondition for the development of the university, it would be beneficial to have a separate action plan (for at least 3-5 years) for internationalisation and proper resources allocated for its realisation. There should also be clear roles and responsibilities for persons in charge of implementing concrete activities.

All university members without exception mentioned limited or sometimes scarce financial resources, which hinders a proper development of the institution. For example, when deducting all the maintenance costs from the budget, 97% of the remaining budget is spent on salaries, which means there are no finances left for any development activities. There is certainly a disbalance in the allocation of financial resources, which may be analysed by professionals.

Beside financial resources human resources have vital importance in the development process. There is a high average age of academic staff members (based on the SER it is 65 years) and there is a lack of professionals in some areas directly connected with teacher education. The expert team welcomes the initiative of the management to implement a new recruitment process and open the floor for outside candidates to have competent academic staff with experience from abroad and at schools as a teacher.

From the SER it becomes evident that the University does not have enough resources for renewing infrastructure, but the Development Strategy also does not reflect anything about how the university is going to attract those resources. For modern teacher education proper laboratories, library, access to databases, etc. are essential and the needs to develop infrastructure for that should be addressed and prioritised in Development Strategy.

During the site visit the support for project management to apply external resources was mentioned. There is also a great opportunity for receiving state funds to support the university development, which could be directly invested into research going on in the University, or funds could be gained as grants from the Science Foundation. The management of limited resources with the already existing resources – both human and financial – should be re-assessed and channelled towards priority areas.

During the meetings with teaching staff, students and employers the expert team got the impression that participation in strategic planning was very limited. Although the Development Strategy was approved by the Scientific Council (SC), during the site visit it became clear that some members are not aware about it, and it has only been formally approved without members taking part in the development of the strategy itself. Nevertheless, students mentioned that current management of the University is open and supportive, and they believe that the biggest changes are yet to come.

The institution has been very self-critical when stating that engagement of external stakeholders is very low and needs to be improved. During the site visit the top management mentioned that principals of secondary schools are important partners to set targets and raise the quality of teacher education in Azerbaijan. First discussions with external stakeholders have been held and appreciated by both sides - by the University leaders as well its partners. Although many external partners mentioned that they

are invited to different events organised by ASPU, no active participation, discussions or feedback were required from them yet. External partners (school leaders) mentioned that they experience changes concerning their involvement by the management of the University. They have been asked to join roundtables, different discussions for example about how to improve teacher education, e.g., to give feedback about students' preparation for the job during their internship, etc.

At the moment, rapid and quite big changes are taking place. There is an utmost need to create an open atmosphere and to involve all stakeholders. Different forums, discussions, conferences, newsletters should be used to keep people informed and engaged.

There are no procedures on how to monitor the processes. During the site visit different groups were not able to explain how they evaluate their success. Also, there are no concrete indicators in the Development Strategy. In order to monitor the progress as well as possible regress in the priority areas, systematic data collection and analyses should be established (e.g., the number of scientific publications and the amount of external funding per academic staff member; the employment of graduates; feedback from different parties within and outside the University about processes and management at the University, etc.).

The mission, vision and objectives of ASPU are not very explicitly communicated outside of the University either. There is no media coverage on the various issues. After renewing the mission and the Development Strategy the external communication plan should be established and implemented. It seems that the renewed strategy forces the re-branding of the University (logo, website, moto, brand book etc.).

Strengths/good practices

- The top management has a strong ambition and orientation towards changes in both management and programme issues.
- Creating a culture of open discussions and involvement is already in its development stage, there are some good practices to involve students, staff members and external partners.

Recommendations

- The mission statement as a pedagogical university should be elaborated and strengthened together with all members of the University including students, academic and non-academic staff, and shared widely with external stakeholders.

- The targets described in the Development Plan should be realistic, measurable and monitored annually.
- Based on the core problems in the main areas (e.g., research, teaching, staff) priorities must be urgently set and concrete realistic action plan (short- and midterm) together with clear indicators should be developed and executed. The already existing resources – both human and financial – should be re-assessed and channelled towards these priority areas.
- In order to monitor the progress as well possible regress in the priority areas, systematic data collection and analyses should be established (e.g., the number of scientific publications and the amount of external funding per academic staff member; the employment of graduates; feedback from different parties within and outside the University about processes and management at the university, etc.).
- The University may consider clarifying the ownership of different aspects in planning, decision making processes, implementing, and monitoring.
- External communication measures should be established and implemented to create an open and inclusive atmosphere for all members of the University (students, academic and non-academic staff members).
- Re-branding of the university (logo, website, moto, brand book etc.) should be implemented.

2	MANAGEMENT							

Assessment	Fully conforms to requirements		Mostly conforms to requirements		Partially conforms to requirements	x	Does not conform to requirements	

Requirements:
- *The management structure of the institution supports the achievement of institutional objectives set in the development strategy.*
- *Rights and responsibilities of structural units (Scientific Council, faculty, chair and others) are clearly defined and the implementation of decisions taken is effective.*
- *Staff members filling managerial positions have relevant qualifications, their rights and responsibilities are clearly defined; institution supports the development of their managerial skills and competences.*
- *The allocation of financial resources inside the institution supports the implementation of the development strategy (including short and/or mid-term plans) of the institution.*

- *Structural units of higher education institution have mutual and functional relations (internal collaboration) and they cooperate with other institutions and organizations (external collaboration).*
- *The internal (formal and informal) communication between different levels of the management staff, teaching staff and students is purposeful and effective.*
- *Internal quality assurance system (monitoring, analysis, assessment and forecasting) is supporting the strategic management of the institution.*

Comments/reflections, evidence

The SER of ASPU is very open in describing problems and challenges concerning the University management, and it is also highly self-critical. Thus, this part of the evaluation report by the expert team discusses more or less the same issues which have already been touched upon in the SER. The University has recognized many areas that should be improved and most of them have been listed in the SER as well.

According to the SER and interviews, the management structures in the University do not meet modern education management requirements. The institution has recognized areas of improvement in its management system, its structure and procedures, and set its targets for their development. The University is fully aware that its structure is not yet optimal to fulfil today's demands concerning both education and research.

The role of the Scientific Council has to be clarified. It has 48 members and it is the highest decision-making body in ASPU. It is too large to be an efficient and responsible decision-making body both in administrative and academic issues, its tasks are too diverse and its assembly is not optimal for all of its tasks. The governance of ASPU is regulated by law and regulations, which should be reconsidered by the Ministry of Education within the process of review and renewal of the legal and normative framework of the Higher Education Institutions.

At the moment the SC needs to address issues that are both administrative and academic in nature. These two responsibilities could be separated and two different bodies established: one dealing with administrative issues and the other with academic ones. Both bodies could be composed of fewer number of members, which would allow a more active participation of every member of these bodies. The University could take an active role in proposing changes that need to be considered by the Ministry of Education. For instance, the SC has approved the Strategic Development Plan, but according to interviews, members of the SC

seem not to be fully aware of the Council's (or their own) role in ensuring that plans are realistic, how they are implemented and how they are going to be monitored. No responsibilities are addressed for development issues in the Development Plan.

The structure of the University is fragmented and its management system, especially in financial issues, is centralized. Leadership in managerial and financial matters are centralized in such a way that it may weaken the ownership of staff members in managerial issues. Heads of units (chairs and deans) have no managerial responsibilities. According to the SER and interviews, there is almost no management training for staff members either. The fragmented structure of the institution together with the lack of managerial skills and lack of appropriate managerial qualifications of the persons in charge would not support decentralization in the current situation. The University needs structural and managerial reforms and clear definitions of rights and responsibilities in management issues. However, the current state of legal and normative framework does not support renewals. During the site visit the rector mentioned that there is a need to give more responsibility to managers in order to support their development and boost their own initiatives.

According to the SER, allocation of financial resources within the ASPU does not sufficiently support the institution's development strategy. The University has already set objectives for improvement in financing and resource allocation, including optimization of its staff.

According to the SER and interviews, internal cooperation and division of work is weak. There are too many units and the means for drafting and designing, planning and implementation, ensuring and monitoring do not correspond with actual resources. Involvement rate of staff and students is poor. The ownerships to development issues on the departmental level (faculties, laboratories) cannot be strong due to lack of possibilities to achieve results. However, students appreciated the recent improvement made with regard to the possibility to make direct contact with the rector and his team.

According to the SER, ASPU has already launched measures for quality assurance in education. Important developments have been initiated and the Department for Examination, Monitoring and Assessment has been founded. The Department devises and implements a new action plan for quality assurance and measures its implementation. However, the overall quality culture is not yet well developed in terms of commitment, involvement and the overall consistency.

<u>*Strengths/good practices*</u>

- The University is fully aware that its structure is not yet optimal to fulfil today's demands concerning both education and research. Shortcomings of the overall structure and management system has been recognized, and there is a clear orientation towards changes in the University structure and management, and support for new ideas among senior management staff.

- The Self-Evaluation Report of ASPU is very open in describing problems and challenges, and it is also highly self-critical. The University has recognized many areas in its management structure and procedures that should be improved and most of them have been listed in the SER too.

<u>*Recommendations*</u>

- The university should reconsider the roles and number of its units and design the structure of the University to integrate teaching and research.

- The role of the Scientific Council should be clarified. There may be different bodies for managerial and for educational and research issues.

- Staff in managerial positions should develop their management competences through, for example, training courses, work shadowing in other institutions, etc.

- Continuous monitoring and feedback system should be elaborated and annual action plans should be compiled based on the results of the previous year.

3 HUMAN RESOURCES							
Assessment	**Fully conforms to requirements**		**Mostly conforms to requirements**		**Partially conforms to requirements**	**x**	**Does not conform to requirements**	

Requirements:
- *Rights and responsibilities of staff members as well as the qualification required are defined according to the purpose of their position (e.g. in job descriptions). Recruitment process is transparent.*
- *The number (proportion) of full-time teaching staff members is in accordance with national requirements.*
- *The distribution of full-time teaching staff by age and qualifications facilitates the sustainability of studies in a certain study area.*
- *Existence of monitoring and assessment mechanism of the teaching activity of teaching staff (quality and professionalism) in higher education institution.*
- *Relevance of teaching support staff to regulatory requirements (number, major etc.) in higher education institution.*
- *The institution monitors, supports and encourages the professional and teaching-skills development of the academic staff on a regular basis.*
- *Academic staff members participate in international exchange programmes, projects and conferences.*
- *The institution has a HR development (including motivation) system in place. Assessment of the work of the teaching staff takes into account the quality of their teaching as well as of their research, including development of their teaching and research skills, and their international mobility.*

Comments/reflections, evidence

The recruitment regulations of HEI are based on state regulations. According to the SER, the rights and responsibilities of staff members as well as the required qualification are defined according to the purpose of their position. Job descriptions are prepared by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and these are quite formal for staff members. The SER states that there is a need to develop new recruitment mechanisms and it is important to devise special criteria for the selection of academic staff. During the site visit the new recruitment system was introduced. After getting applicants' documents, these are evaluated according to formal requirements. To ensure that applicants are competent to use modern teaching methods, they are asked to give open/demo lessons. After that an interview takes place. This system allows finding new staff members who are motivated

and able to implement new teaching and learning paradigm. The expert team welcomes this new initiative to find new academic staff by evaluating their teaching competences.

The SER states that although the distribution of full-time teaching staff by qualifications facilitates the sustainability of studies in certain study areas, there are discrepancies in employment of teaching staff with regard to specialties. During the site visit the rector mentioned that after the merger of two institutions the staff number increased up to approximately 1,600. The strategic plan is to optimize the staff number and already this year there will be approximately 200 staff members less. After approval of the renewed strategic plan the continuation of optimizing the staff number should take place, keeping also in mind that there is a need to focus more on certain areas (e.g., to improve the competence in educational sciences) and in these areas the recruitment of new staff is still needed.

The SER informs that the majority of teaching staff is above 65 years of age. This challenge was highlighted during the site visit several times by students, alumni and senior management. The rector recognized the problem they face and because of that new recruitment system has been implemented to have a new generation of academic staff. Another challenging aspect concerning teaching staff is their teaching competences, i.e., using activating teaching methods, ICT and their research capacity to carry out experiments in real classroom context in order to support adopting student-centred methods in the whole educational system in Azerbaijan. Also, the English language skills/knowledge of teaching staff should be improved.

According to the SER, lectures of teaching staff are regularly monitored, but these lectures are at a low level according to criteria on organizing modern learning principles and assessment. The SER also states that a new rating system of the staff will be applied in the future to support internal quality assurance and staff development. The team welcomes the initiative because this mechanism will support the establishment of a transparent learning environment in the faculty. Internal feedback system of academic staff (such as observing each other's courses, e.g., peer-observation, feedback, etc.) may be used for improving the development of academic staff. Additional resources for internship programmes abroad for the academic staff could be an effective solution to support changes in teaching approach.

According to the SER, the monitoring of continuous development of professional and teaching skills of the academic staff as one of the improvement area was highlighted. During the meeting with representatives of study support services it was stated that a new feedback system was introduced to students. Students are going to provide feedback at the end of every semester. This is a very important initiative and contributes to the changes in the teaching process, motivating teaching staff to develop their

teaching competences. At the moment, the feedback system is paper-based. We recommend that an electronic system for collecting feedback be developed and that open discussions based on feedback results take place.

Besides rating, a motivation system should be adopted. During the site visit the team understood that there is lack of recognition by leaders and other colleagues. It is encouraged to establish a motivation system that includes differentiation in salary rates, praise, giving opportunities to participate in external exchange programmes, electing the most innovative teacher of the year, and so on. Also, in order to support the motivation of the staff and create a collaborative atmosphere, close cooperation methods should be used, for example, visiting each other's courses, sharing international experiences and conducting research seminars where everyone can introduce his/her research work. Discussing openly about one's own teaching competences (work generally) motivates staff to improve their teaching methods and inspires further development.

According to the SER, the number and qualification of teaching support staff do not meet the requirements and a new mechanism is being devised. There is normally one tutor per 300 students. All tutors have passed a special training which introduces how to work with students and advise them. At the moment, communication between a tutor and students is mainly happening face-to-face. Students mentioned that electronical communication should be established as soon as possible (for disseminating materials, information, etc). The tutors' work should also be monitored and students' feedback system could include questions about support services concerning tutors' support. Concerning scientific labs and support staff in the labs, the revision and creation of optimal structure and functions should be created and reorganised.

According to the SER, regular monitoring of the lectures of teaching staff takes place and there are also courses available to raise the level of teaching competences. During the site visit the need to improve the teaching competences of the academic staff was mentioned several times. The university is drafting an action plan in this connection. Doctoral students and master students as young specialists should be more involved into teaching to support the academic staff of older age groups and develop their teaching competences. Young colleagues are usually more used to implementing modern methods, including ICT in teaching-learning process, they have better English language skills and are ready to use electronic teaching materials.

According to the SER, staff members participate in international programmes and projects, but there are only a few such examples, and readiness to participate in international networks largely depends on age groups. Participation in international networks could be one criteria in the rating system or motivation system and staff members who take more active role in internationalization should be recognised (praised).

At the moment, the Strategic Development Plan envisages very ambitious aims in the area of internationalization, e.g., joint academic programmes, international scientific projects, increasing student and staff mobility. Yet, there are no proper resources and support measures for internationalisation and plans are not realistic. Setting up concrete targets and allocating resources motivates staff members to take responsibility concerning internationalisation and international cooperation.

During the site visit, the idea of supporting project writing was introduced by the top management. The team welcomes this idea and suggests that priorities be set (in areas that need urgent improvement concerning teacher education) and resources to improve this specific area allocated. The manager for HR development, who was appointed recently, stated that concrete steps have already been taken. During the site visit the manager for HR development mentioned that a plan exists for HR development, but no further information was provided, although the team asked to see the plan.

Strengths/good practices

- Clear vision at the top management level to attract the new generation of academic staff

- Many good initiatives, such as creating a feedback system from students, implementing a new recruitment system and a rating system, are in the developmental phase

- Plans are in place for optimizing staff and recruiting a new generation of staff

- Professional training courses are available

Recommendations

- Continuing the optimization of the staff number should take place, keeping also in mind that there is a need to focus more on certain areas and in these areas the recruitment of new staff is still needed (e.g., in pedagogy).

- Internal feedback system of academic staff (e.g., observing each other's courses, giving feedback, etc.) may be used for enhancing the development of academic staff.

- Additional resources for internship programmes abroad for academic staff could prove an effective solution to support

changes in teaching approach.

- It is encouraged to establish a motivation system that includes differentiation in salary rates, praise, giving opportunities to participate in external exchange programmes, electing the most innovative teacher of the year, etc.

- The work of tutors should be monitored and students' feedback system could include questions about support services concerning tutors' support.

- Concerning scientific labs and support staff in the labs, revision and creation of optimal structure and functions should be created and reorganised.

- As younger generation is more competent in using ICT and the English language and is active in participating in international networks, it is advisable to involve doctoral students, master students and young specialists to support the academic staff of older age groups in order to help develop their teaching competences. Such collaboration also supports the new generation entering more smoothly to the labour market.

- Concrete targets for internationalisation should be set, as this helps to measure success in this area and also motivates staff members to contribute towards the internationalisation of the University.

- It is strongly recommended that priorities be identified in areas which need urgent improvement concerning teacher education and resources to improve these specific areas allocated.

4 STUDY PROGRAMMES								
Assessment	**Fully conforms to requirements**		**Mostly conforms to requirements**		**Partially conforms to requirements**	**x**	**Does not conform to requirements**	

Requirements:
- *Programmes are designed with objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy, national standards for higher education, expectations of the society and economy, and labour market needs.*

- *The content of the study programme is updated in the light of the latest research in the given discipline.*
- *Objectives, intended learning outcomes, admission and graduation requirements of the programmes are clearly defined; qualification resulting from the programme is clearly specified, communicated and referred to the appropriate level of the national qualifications framework.*
- *Expected student workload is defined in ECTS.*
- *Practical work/internship supports the achievement of the learning outcomes of the programme.*
- *Up-to-date teaching materials, innovative, creative and interactive learning methods and educational technology are used in teaching and learning process.*
- *Study programmes are monitored and reviewed regularly; relevant stakeholders (incl. students) are involved in these processes.*
- *Graduate satisfaction with the quality of study programmes are surveyed and analysed; the results are considered in the development of study programmes.*

Comments/reflections, evidence

According to the SER, study programmes are designed in line with the national standards, expectations of the society and economy, and labour market needs. Programmes are defined in ECTS as well. It is emphasized in the SER that the learning process at ASPU is organized in accordance with the regulatory documents of the state, and orders and instructions of the Ministry of Education. However, during the interviews it became clear that the overall programme design is too much regulated by the Ministry. Teaching staff and chairs who were interviewed gave the impression that changes at curriculum level are not possible. There was not much enthusiasm for the reformation of the content of the programmes either. Needs with regard to the resources and the physical learning environment were much more the issue than the need for changes in orientation concerning learning, teaching, and research paradigms. However, the need for younger staff members with fresh ideas was mentioned several times during the interviews.

According to the interview with school principals, ASPU graduates as well as interns do not possess sufficient knowledge and skills. Generally, representatives of employers were not satisfied with the professional level of graduates. The principals also mentioned that the content of the programmes are outdated and there is a discrepancy between curricula of the secondary schools and those of the University. Schools are often more modern than the University when it comes to pedagogical issues. This view was also supported by statements made in the SER saying that study programmes consist of outdated traditional topics, do not provide real-life skills and competences and do not take into account the educational reforms carried out in the country.

Objectives, intended learning outcomes, admission and graduation requirements of the programmes are not clearly defined either.

It became evident for the expert team that the study programmes are over-regulated by the state which weakens the ownership and commitment to improve teaching and learning processes within the university. At the same time, the University is well aware of the fact that in order to enhance the curriculum design and development, ASPU must improve its internal quality assurance system, e.g., study programmes should be monitored on a regular basis. Concerning programme content and teaching, very much could be improved even in current state of affairs. The expert team got the impression that what is really needed in ASPU in educational matters is the common quality culture, which should be based on shared values and mutual trust and understanding.

Over-regulation may make the academic staff members and students passive in efforts to improve both the overall design of the study programmes as well as teaching and learning process. Thus, the University should have more autonomy and responsibility concerning programme content and syllabi, which definitely should go hand in hand with improvement of quality assurance processes within the institution. Internal Quality Assurance System of ASPU has just been put in place and there is no clear-cut guidelines how to go on with building this system. The building of the system should start with a development plan and mutual understanding of what quality means for the entire staff of the University and then preparing a thorough action plan for implementing it. Quality assurance is not always about controlling (be it by the state or by the university management), but paving the way for developing quality by providing trainings, development, and support for each and single staff member. As part of enhancement of its overall quality culture, the University may consider arranging gatherings and forums for wider discussion concerning current changes and trends in education both on primary and secondary schools and at the higher education level.

Teaching materials and methodologies in ASPU are outdated according to interviews with students and employers. Only few teachers are using up-to-date materials and textbooks. According to the interviews, these issues are due to the overaged teaching staff and the lack of development and training programmes for the academic staff. According to students, the pedagogical studies are mostly highly theoretical. Recent trends in teacher education highlight the need to integrate theoretical courses and practical activities in the real working context, including student reflections (e.g., individual aims of developing teacher's competences, keeping practice portfolios, possibilities for supervision from schools and from the University, etc.).

Study programmes are not regularly monitored and stakeholders are not involved in the process of curriculum development. Over-regulated process limits the participation of the university community in the process as well. There is no survey designed to

review graduate satisfaction, although members of the University mentioned that, in near future, an anonymous survey will be developed and conducted among the students.

Senior management staff as well as students and teaching staff shared the idea that internship should be built into the programme earlier than in the 3rd and 4th year of the study. Internship could be more distributed during the study period, starting from the first weeks of the studies with observation tasks and ending up with longer period of independent teaching. Action research components could be integrated into studies where students do small-scale experiments to try out new teaching methods/materials and evaluate the effectiveness/usability of new approaches. The length of the internship also needs revising, and it should be longer than one month only. Interns should be taken seriously by the organization where they fulfil their obligations as a full member of the teaching staff rather than just a technical person. Students prefer to have a more active role in their practice.

To improve and update its programme contents, ASPU may consider to start conducting workshops and seminars on different topics (revision of study programmes, quality assurance, setting criteria for quality, defining quality, and many others), so that this turns out to be a culture of collaboration.

According to the SER, exchange programmes with other higher education institutions, creation of infrastructure in line with European standards, and use of transparent and efficient methods in specialist training are at a low level. To widen its view on international developments, ASPU may consider arranging seminars and study visits of staff and students to other universities in order to learn from other's experiences. ASPU would benefit from benchmarking with best universities in its field.

According to the SER and interviews, the academic mobility of teachers and students is at a low level. ASPU has few active international partners, and both teacher and student exchange activity is limited to a rather few countries and few partner universities. Internationalization needs funding and the University may consider extending collaborations with Funds and Organizations to attract financial means for the University development. Funds for research, capacity building, and mobility of students, staff and academicians are available with European Commission's projects like ERASMUS+ and Horizon 2020. Other funds are available at the World Bank, UNICEF, and different embassies operating in the country. To be able to apply for all these grants, the University should start training its people (staff members to coordinate the process of application, as well as academic staff members) in writing proposals and applications.

Strengths/good practices

- Stakeholders of the University who participated in the interviews were well aware of current trends and changes in teacher education, and they were interested in participating in discussions related to pedagogical education.

- ASPU has recognised many problems concerning the content of its study programmes, teaching methods and outdated teaching materials.

- ASPU has launched first measures for quality assurance of education (feedback from students) in the institution.

Recommendations

- There is a clear need to loosen the regulation-oriented system of programme design, which prevents higher education institutions from developing their educational content autonomously. The study programmes should be reflecting learning outcomes. Clearly stating and communicating the qualification is another requirement for the content of study programme. The qualification should refer to the correct level of National Qualification Framework as well as to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. The University should not base its programmes primarily on regulations but on research and academic standards and careful study of the educational needs.

- The University should have more autonomy and responsibility concerning programme contents and syllabi, which should go hand in hand with quality assurance processes within the institution. Alongside with this autonomy and responsibility, the academic staff should be trained in the development of syllabi and study programmes.

- Internship arrangements and periodization may be reconsidered, theoretical courses and practice should be integrated and practical tasks in the real working contexts should start already from the beginning of teacher education.

- ASPU may consider starting to conduct cooperative seminars and workshops on different topics (revision of study programmes, quality assurance, quality enhancement, etc.), so that this turns out to be a culture of collaboration where academics work together and have a shared understanding.

- ASPU could arrange gatherings and forums for wider discussion concerning current changes and trends in education both on primary and secondary schools and at the higher education level in order to receive timely and accurate feedback from

the stakeholders.

● There is need to develop new teaching materials, including ordering books from international databases and making them available online.

● ASPU may consider arranging study visits to other universities abroad in its field and benchmark with best universities to learn from their experiences.

● ASPU may consider extending collaborations with funds and organizations to attract financial means for the University's development.

5 STUDENTS							
Assessment	Fully conforms to requirements		Mostly conforms to requirements		Partially conforms to requirements	x	Does not conform to requirements	

Requirements:
- *Students' rights and responsibilities are clearly defined; procedures to process complaints and proposals of students, and appeals mechanism regarding examination outcomes are in place.*
- *The system for the detection and prevention of academic fraud (including anti-plagiarism mechanisms) is in place.*
- *Students participate in decision-making bodies as well as in elections of student unions.*
- *Student assessment is objective, consistent, transparent and supports the achievement of learning outcomes.*
- *Flexible learning opportunities are provided for the students. Recognition of prior higher education qualifications, periods of study in abroad and prior learning are in place.*
- *The higher education institution supports the international mobility of students, and the students' participation in international mobility is increasing.*
- *The institution has mechanisms to support the internationalisation of the student body.*
- *Graduates are competitive in the labour market in their specialty area and the institution monitors the employment of its*

graduates.

Comments/reflections, evidence

According to the information in the SER, students' rights and responsibilities are clearly defined at ASPU; procedures to process complaints and proposals of students and appeals mechanism regarding examination outcomes are in place. The SER also states that "Appeals commission is established at ASPU to look into and resolve the issues with the exam results that students may have during session. In case the student is not pleased with the grade, he may file a substantiated application to the chair of appeals commission. The chairperson sees to rechecking of student's response sheet. There is a need to work out new procedures in this field." Students are aware of the process of complaints and suggestions. They may turn to the Dean of the faculty and the faculty council directly or to the rector in case of any issues. For example, recently the students were able to change the examination system (from multiple-choice question to open-ended questions form).

The SER includes information about new anti-plagiarism programme purchased by University, whereas students are not fully aware of such a system and, in general, students had a vague understanding of the term "plagiarism". Nevertheless, four PhD theses were rejected by Higher Attestation Committee. Therefore, the issue of plagiarism should be tackled.

Two students are members of the university's Scientific Council. Additionally, every faculty has its own council in which students are represented. It was expressed during the interview with the members of the Scientific Council that more students should be involved in the Scientific Council and the voice of the students should be listened to. It was suggested that there could even be a separate Student Scientific Council.

There are two Student Organizations – Student Trade Union and Student Youth Organization - each of these organizations offering students a variety of options, and clubs which provide students with a wide range of opportunities, incentives and activities. Although the representatives of these two organizations tried to explain their roles and responsibilities, it later became clear that many students are not aware of the activities of these two organizations. Student Trade Union accepts the appeals of students anonymously. The election system at both organizations are not properly set - the suitable candidates for the Organizations' leadership are appointed by the nomination of the Dean, and later students nominated need to prove their suitability by completing one month of trial period. During this month they need to lead various social activities and fulfil other responsibilities of the chairman of the organization.

The students interviewed were not aware of the learning outcomes of the course or the major they are studying. They were not

able to describe what a syllabus is and what it consists of, of which the team may conclude that teaching staff do not have proper syllabi or, more importantly, they are not shared with students. The study programme was also a weak point in terms of students not being able to name the subjects they were going to study semester by semester. The team may conclude that there is no university catalogue or any published material that describes the study programme for each separate major and that students are not involved in the discussions or reviews of the study programmes, learning outcomes, etc.

Flexible learning opportunities could not be provided de facto, the over-regulated curriculum limits students' learning flexibility. There are few student mobility opportunities within the University, since they have signed only a couple of contracts within ERASMUS + KA 1 quite recently. Most of the students are not aware of the existing mobility opportunities. One of the bachelor degree programme students who attended an exchange programme in Turkey mentioned that the credits which she received there were recognized at ASPU.

The University administration understands that internationalization is vital for the international visibility of the University as well for the general development of the institution. The University has a number of international students, although many administrators admitted that this number is not enough to support the strategic internationalization target. 2 out of 5 students interviewed were from Turkey studying full-time at ASPU. International students should have full access to teaching and learning materials published in English.

The main employers of the graduates are secondary schools and after the meeting with them it became clear that knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) gained at the University poorly meet the needs and requirements of the job market. Graduates' skills in delivering the material and class management as well as application of ICT in education are weak. One of the school principals mentioned that sometimes school pupils help the University interns or graduates to deal with their ICT problem. The principals also mentioned that many subjects taught at the University are outdated and need to be changed content wise. The University has just set up an Alumni Office who has the responsibility of collecting information about the graduates of the last 5 years.

Strengths/good practices

- The University has two student organizations which provide opportunities for students to have a rich social life.

- Deans, chairs and the University rector are very open for student complaints, suggestions, and other issues.

- Many positive changes have occurred since the assignment of a new rector, e.g., an Alumni Office is being set up, Teachers' Evaluation System is going to be launched.

- The University has a large international student body which would provide more development opportunities if managed properly.

Recommendations

- Students' involvement into community of the University should be increased, starting from the governance (e.g., Scientific Council) and ending with designing their own learning process (responsibility and ownership of the studies).

- Learning outcomes for every study programme as well as for each subject need to be identified and they should be introduced to the students.

- Consider ways to involve stakeholders including students into the process of development and renewal of the study programmes.

- In order to develop the internationalization of its student body, the University should be able to provide the following opportunities for its students:
    - opportunities to learn English;
    - large number of mobility contracts signed with universities in different parts of the world (more realistic ones are within ERASMUS+ and Mevlana Programmes);
    - access to textbooks, materials, articles published in English as well as to databases like EBSCO, JStor, and others;
    - international events, such as conferences and seminars, should be conducted in a planned manner and with more students' involvement;
    - up-to-date library, ICT to support student development and to satisfy students' needs.

- Learning about the needs and requirements of the employers to be able to equip the students with the necessary KSAs and, thus, to contribute to their employability.

- It is necessary to familiarise the entire University with the Knowledge, Skills, Abilities and Values they want their graduates to leave the university with in order to become better citizens of the country and of the world.

- The University is encouraged to develop a student feedback system which provides transparency and offers students an opportunity to give feedback on their studies anonymously. When students provide feedback and it is a reality and needs to be changed, it should be changed; otherwise they will lose the trust in the system and will never provide fair feedback again.

- It is important to communicate changes and innovations to students as well as to other stakeholders.

- More attention should be given to the training of staff members on communication skills for treating students with respect, dignity and as a main partner in the education process.

6 RESEARCH ACTIVITIES							
Assessment	Fully conforms to requirements		Mostly conforms to requirements		Partially conforms to requirements		Does not conform to requirements	x

Requirements:
- *The objectives for scientific and research activity are defined in the mission, strategy and development plan of the institution. The institution monitors the needs of society and the economy, and takes them into account in planning its research activities.*
- *The achievement of the objectives and the impact research activities are regularly measured and analysed (scientific and educational publications, doctoral students, patents, etc.).*
- *The institution promotes and upholds high quality academic and ethical standards of research; procedures for dealing with allegations of research misconduct are defined and followed.*
- *Institution has an effective system to encourage and support the research and scientific activities of academic staff members (e.g., incentives for conducting research, counselling related to intellectual property, support for publishing in international journals, motivating the cooperation with employers).*
- *Students are involved in research and development activities; the supervision of students' research papers (seminar papers, applied projects, final thesis) is well organised.*
- *The institution participates in different regional and international scientific and research networks in their areas of academic activities.*
- *The institution has financial resources needed for scientific and research activities and a strategy that supports their acquisition in order to be competitive at international level.*

Comments/reflections, evidence

The SER states that research activities are defined in the strategy and mission of the University. However, the society has benefited little from the scientific research works of ASPU in the last 3 years. It is also mentioned that work will be intensified to attract additional finances to university through scientific research in laboratories. The team welcomes the self-critical approach and suggests to analyse the need of educational system in the country to set up research priorities based on the needs of real life. Social partners, namely school principals, mentioned that there is a need to improve research methodology first, for instance to experiment more in real learning situations, to test new teaching/learning methods, and to support changes in teaching practices. The team welcomes the efforts of the institution to integrate research and education in a sustainable way, i.e., strengthening research in the field on teacher education. It was also mentioned during the meetings that research topics of doctoral students are out of date, not innovative and relevant for international audience. The team suggests to have discussions among researchers including external experts (possibly international experts) to identify the most relevant topics for doctoral research. Doctoral students could work together with senior researchers as members of the research group.

Considering that resources for research are limited and there is an urgent need to support changes in learning and teaching paradigm towards student-centred approach to improve educational system in the country, very well argumented and focused research themes should be agreed upon and fixed in the development plan, and these themes should be kept in mind when allocating resources.

Based on the SER, there is data about publications (scientific level of the publications) and doctoral defences. For example, the number of the articles published in impact factor journals is increasing constantly (4 in 2012 and 41 in 2016) and additionally there are many textbooks and articles, including ASPU's journal *News of Pedagogical University*. However, the SER does not convince that data is collected regularly and analysed and measures have been taken based on regular monitoring. There are no criteria or objectives the University is targeting annually and how the improvement is measured and communicated among the research community. During the site visit it was mentioned that only approximately 20% of publications are in the field of pedagogy. The team got the impression that there is a clear understanding on management level that research area needs to be improved and high standards should be set. The need to be acknowledged internationally and to publish in impact factor journals was strongly emphasised. To improve the research culture the team recommends setting up clear indicators to measure the improvement of research capacity and to devise a recognition system for researchers who are active in enhancing research in the educational field.

There are shortcomings in promoting high-quality academic and ethical standards of research; no procedures for dealing with ethical issues are in place. The rector mentioned that 4 doctoral theses were rejected by the national Higher Attestation Committee because of plagiarism. The need to improve high quality was also mentioned by social partners and doctoral students during the site visit. The team recommends that measures are taken to improve academic and ethical standards, e.g., describing the procedures improving research projects from the perspective of ethical issues, dealing with plagiarism, establishing a committee of research ethics, etc.

It is stated in the SER that there is no effective system in place yet to encourage and support the academic staff. Scientific staff mentioned that there is lack of resources, such as up-to-date literature, access to other e-libraries, equipment to make experiments. The main concern was about low salary and a very long period to become fully recognized by the academic community (3 years Doctor of Philosophy and 4 years Doctor of Science). This means that Bologna system is not applied on doctoral level of studies. The team strongly recommends that changes be carried out at doctoral level studies, as such a long period is demotivating and may cause losing the interest of young generation to start their academic career. Also, this seems to be one of the reasons why there is lack of young academic staff.

An influential factor for research results is the current organisational structure. At the moment, research is fragmented among research institutes and faculties. ASPU is aiming towards forming strong scientific schools which means having less research units and clearer focus. The team recommends that teaching and research be integrated and that a structure be designed where research is part of the faculties.

During the visit the team was informed that the support structure for preparing and applying projects is already in place. The top management and staff members responsible for research activities demonstrated the willingness to create support systems, e.g,. resources for international cooperation, setting up recognition/appraisal system for researchers.

The team welcomes a self-critical view of ASPU concerning the involvement of students in research and development activities. Although during the site visit students themselves mentioned that they would be interested in taking part in action research and work with experiments at schools, the team got the impression that supervision and student involvement is not really appreciated. Supervision should be part of teacher's work load and compensated. The team encourages implementing measures to improve supervision of master students, including the research work of PhD students, and also support students to be active in international networks and publish in international journals.

According to the SER, ASPU participates in different regional and international scientific and research networks in the areas of their academic activities. ASPU has signed cooperation agreements with 21 leading and prominent universities around the world. The list of partner universities and joint activities show that main partnership is with Turkey and Russia. Cooperation with other universities/ research institutions concerning research projects was not mentioned, but nowadays research is very international and based on research groups. The team encourages to broaden the scope of cooperation by finding partner universities from Western Europe as well as other post-soviet countries in Eastern Europe. International cooperation is particularly important for doctoral students who should create their own international scientific network for future. Doctoral students should participate in exchange programmes for minimum of 6 months and work in international research teams. International summer schools/camps together with international partners could be organised using the geographical–historical context, which may be considered attractive for doctoral students abroad.

According to the SER, ASPU has not had financial resources that are necessary for scientific and research activities in the last 5 years. However, currently a strategy is being developed to attract funding and make the University more competitive internationally. The team agrees that external resources are needed and it is important to find social partners who also may contribute financially. But in order to be more attractive and transparent for external partners much more emphasis should be put on educational research and applicability in schools. Support services for project management and preparing applications should be established. International experts could be used more to apply for EU projects.

Strengths/good practices

- Efforts to focus on research areas and forming strong research schools

- Creating a support system for submitting research applications

Recommendations

- Very well argued and focused research priorities in the field of education should be agreed upon among academic staff and external partners, priorities should be fixed in the development plan and these themes should be followed when allocating the existing limited resources.

- It is encouraged to create discussions among research groups to identify most needed topics for doctoral research themes, and doctoral students could work together with senior researchers as members of research group.

- Recognize the researchers who are active and effective in the field of education.

- The team strongly recommends that studies at doctoral level be re-structured according to Bologna system, as such a long period of study is demotivating and may cause losing the interest of young generation to start their academic career. Also, this seems to be one of the reasons why there is lack of young academic staff.

- It is necessary to broaden the international cooperation by finding partner universities from Western Europe as well as other post-soviet countries in Eastern Europe, and form international research groups for joint research activities.

- The University should consider integrating teaching and research and to design the structure where research is part of the faculties; scientific labs and faculties could be merged and all teaching should be research based.

- Based on educational research themes, it is advisable to find social partners who may also contribute financially.

- If possible the University may try to find ways to support doctoral students to participate in exchange programmes for minimum of 6 months and work in international research teams.

- International summer schools/camps together with international partners could be organised using the geographical–historical context which may be considered attractive for doctoral students abroad.

7 TEACHING AND LEARNING RESOURCES AND SUPPORT SERVICES							
Assessment	Fully conforms to requirements		Mostly conforms to requirements		Partially conforms to requirements	x	Does not conform to requirements	

Requirements:
- *Appropriate teaching and learning and research infrastructure (classrooms, laboratories, library, workshop rooms etc.) including up-to-date ICT solutions (including e-learning opportunities and electronic databases) is available both for staff and students.*
- *Up-to-date learning materials are used in the process of teaching and learning.*
- *Tutoring service provided by the institutions corresponds to the needs of the student body and takes into account special needs of individual students.*
- *The institution is providing internship opportunities, employment and career development services for students (career centre, alumni coordination system etc.)*
- *The institution recognises equal treatment of students regardless of their nationality, language, sex, social status, position and religion.*
- *The institution supports students' learning by providing different kinds of additional support services (dormitory, canteen, medical care, sport facilities, financial assistance etc.)*

Comments/reflections, evidence

According to the SER, the University offers appropriate teaching and learning infrastructure (classrooms, laboratories, library, workshops rooms etc.), although there is an apparent need to audit and modernize the infrastructure, including ICT, which was mentioned during all the interviews. There is a need for special laboratories (phonology and biology rooms with appropriate equipment), rooms for workshops etc. The University management is aware of the need to modernise the campus and has already started taking steps in this process (plans are in place to have a new building, etc.).

According to interviews, the learning materials available in the library do not meet the expectations and needs of the students. The number and quality of books provided is not sufficient. Some of the books are in former Cyrillic alphabet, which creates difficulties for international students. Although the SER referred to the establishment of e-library in 2012, neither teachers nor

students expressed their awareness about it. Learning materials are not updated and teaching process is mainly done via traditional methods such as lectures and seminars. Only few of the teachers are referring to interactive approaches. No electronic databases were mentioned by any of the students; also, there was no mention about e-learning possibilities. Students claimed that teachers are using outdated books, sometimes even dictate their materials instead of providing handouts.

According to the SER, tutoring service provided by the institution partially corresponds to the needs of the student body and barely takes into account the special needs of individual students. It is highlighted that it is very important to have online communication between tutors and students, and this process is basically not ensured.

According to the SER, foreign language skills are not at a desirable level for e-learning. There are vast possibilities for e-learning in the internet including free databases, teaching and learning materials, etc. However without appropriate skills in English (in addition to appropriate ICT infrastructure), most of the free resources available via internet do not benefit teachers and students in teaching and learning processes at ASPU.

ASPU provides internship in schools; yet, it was mentioned that internship possibilities do not meet students' needs. For example, in the field of correctional pedagogy, it is important to observe the behaviour of pupils during different periods, which is impossible in current internship circumstances.

At present time there is no career centre in ASPU, and the University recognises that services related to employment and career development of students are currently at a low level and need to be further developed. The team considers it important to have a career centre for providing support to the graduates as well as raising the prestige of University.

On the contrary to ASPU academic staff, the graduates the team met were not aware of any kind of alumni organization. Graduates stated that it would be quite beneficial for the University to have such a body, as the alumni can support the development of new teaching and learning approaches which they acquire through work and assist in implementing them into designing of new study programmes.

The SER states that the University recognizes equal treatment among students regardless of their nationality, language, etc. Students did not mention any kind of discrimination problems regarding any of these fields. On the contrary, students regardless of their position and sex were engaged in different student organizations. In its turn, these organizations assist students with limited finances and carry out other types of events to keep all students engaged in social life of the University.

During the site visit it became clear that there are canteens in buildings and dormitory as well, though nothing was mentioned about medical care and sport facilities. Financial assistance is provided for full-time bachelor students without parents or from low-income and martyr families.

Strength/good practice

- Support provided to students in limited financial conditions

Recommendations

- It is advised to establish a Career Centre at the University, as this is vital for development of academia-industry relationship and would prepare students for their successful career.

- It would also be advisable to develop an Alumni Office; the needs and targets of this office should be discussed and set as a priority in the strategy of the University.

- The University should consider the use of online communication platforms between students and tutors to inform students about study process, events, etc. on time. The work of tutors should be monitored and students' feedback system could include questions about support services concerning tutors' support.

- It is suggested that some rooms be arranged for labs and workshop rooms where practicums and other experimental activities can take place.

- The library needs to be enriched with e-databases and outdated books should be removed.