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TWINNING AZERBAIJAN

Support to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan for Further Adherence of the Higher Education System to the European Higher Education Area (AZ-ad-EHEA)

AZ/14/ENP/OT/31

EU Short Term Expert Mission Report

1. Basic Information

Component and Activity:

Component: 2. Coordination and Networking

Activity: 2.4 Steering and coordinating and

Activity 2.6a Benchmarking the Organisational Arrangements

Name of the Expert: Mr Örjan Andersson (2.4), Mr.Kauko Hämäläinen and Mr Rait Toompere (2.6)

Dates of the Mission: 14-18 November 2016

Contractor: Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) /
Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA)



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2. Relevant Background Information/State of Affairs

These missions are follow-up to Kauko Hämäläinen's and Rait Toompere's two earlier missions on the component 2.4, Steering and coordinating. These missions 2.4 and 2.6a are based on the recommendations of the mission dated 5-9.11.2016

3. Objectives and Tasks of the Mission

To assist the relevant institutions to implement the recommendations, including the establishment of appropriate steering, coordinating and training bodies and/or mechanisms, organizing training, issuing rules and procedures etc.

To train experts to advise and consult the further implementation process of the EHEA in Azerbaijan within a functional domestic expert network.

In the meeting with the representatives of MoE at the beginning of the mission it was decided that we should concentrate on the following recommendations:

1. Establish a platform or platforms for enhancing cooperation and networking and
2. Establishing a Rector's conference or conferences.

Reijo Aholainen has made a summary road map of our recommendations from last mission. Our discussions during this week are based on this list which is below:

Draft Road Map for Higher Education Institutional Arrangements

1. To create a platform could be establishing **an electronic Newsletter** for:
 - a. Improving communication and common understanding among the stakeholders
 - b. Uniting all possible parties into a single information platform
 - c. Collecting information in a way, that all participants could have a voice in the Newsletter
 - d. Informing on HE policy issues at the national and international level
 - e. Informing about funding possibilities available for HEIs
 - f. Identifying the main needs in HEIs.

The Newsletter should first become an instrument for the creation of a formalised platform. After the foundation of the platform, the Newsletter should take the role of connecting members/participants and other stakeholders.

2. To set a **Coordination Group**, a temporary body for the joint preparation of the Rectors' Conference. The mission of the Coordination Group would be to create one (or more) Rectors' Conference(s) in Azerbaijan.
 - The main task of the Coordination Group should be preparing **a co-operation agreement**, identifying potential members, stakeholders and their possible roles and the legal status of the platform.
 - In addition, the Coordination Group should keep the process going on between meetings, and take care of alignment with the MoE, information procedures, external and internal communication and organising reflection and follow-up.
3. **The co-operation agreement (covenant)** should define the mission, the legal status, objectives, key activities and the rules of procedures (e.g. organisation, administration bodies and financing). information and communication of the platform (a Rectors' Conference.)



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- **The mission of the Rectors' Conference** should be defined in terms of supporting universities by promoting co-operation between universities and with stakeholders to provide high-quality higher education and research.
- **All potential members** should be invited to the founding meeting.
- **The co-operation agreement** should be made public.
- **The founding process should support ownership** and sustainable functioning of the Rectors' Conference to maintain transparency, participation and trust.
- The Rectors' Conference should be **established in some form in spring 2017**.

4. **The activities of the Rectors' Conference should be financed by the member HEIs.**

However, during the first x years, the MoE could give financial support to the production of the electronic Newsletter and the general establishment of the Rectors' Conference.

- The MoE should support financially the Rectors' Conference and Azerbaijani student associations' international activities, to ensure increasing participation in international cooperation and academic networks.

4. Time Schedule of the Mission

Date	Activities/Meetings BC experts met (title and institution)	Remarks
14.11	MoE, Planning the Mission Programme	
15.11	Discussing the Rectors' Conference and electronic newsletter in MoE; V. Gurbanova from MoE, R. Isayeva from Khazar University, N. Abbaszade from Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University and P. Bagirov, Head of Erasmus+ Office Meeting the founder, two vice rectors and two deans of Khazar University, rector and vice-rector of Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University in those universities	
16.11	Meeting with representatives of the Azerbaijan Student Youth Organizations Union	
17.11	Meeting the rector and vice-rectors of the Baku State University Open seminar at the Baku State University	
18.11	Reporting the results, MoE	

5. Achievement of the Expected Results

On Monday we discussed in MoE how to proceed with establishing a Rectors' conference. Especially, the need to involve rectors in the preparatory work was emphasized by the STEs. Representatives of MoE arranged meetings for Tuesday with two rectors; Hamlet Isaxanli of Khazar University and Jafar M. Jafarov of Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University. On Thursday we discussed with the rector of Baku State University.



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On Tuesday we had discussion in MoE on how to proceed in implementing the two proposals. The rules of Arene - the Rector's Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland were discussed. Örjan Andersson also presented cooperation models for the six universities in Vaasa.

MoE is strongly supporting the creation of a rector's conference. It was proposed, that

- the coordination group should be nominated during this week,
- it is important to have at least one rector in the coordination group to prepare a draft for the rules,
- the initiative for starting should come from MoE and
- MoE should invite all rectors, but participation would be on a voluntary basis.

In Khazar University we met Rector Hamlet Isaxanli and two vice-rectors and two deans of different departments. The rector was very aware of the benefits of Rector's Conferences and had own experience from Europe, having published papers on the subject. He also seemed eager to proceed and suggested a seminar later. Örjan Andersson was asked to be one of the lecturers there to tell about experiences from Finland. It was our impression that he also thought that it would be good to start on a voluntary basis.

The question of autonomy was discussed in detail in the meeting. MoE is providing curricula for all universities. However, it seems to be possible to achieve compromises, if the university has a strong opinion in favor of its own curricula. It was discussed, that power to decide on the curricula, is in general seen as characteristic for an autonomous university. The same goes for the right to award/issue degrees.

In the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University we met Rector Jafar M. Jafarov, Vice-Rector Nigar Abbaszade and several other people from the university management. The university is the first one in Azerbaijan to have a double degree system with a foreign university and appears to be ambitious in its plans for internationalization.

The Rector was very aware of the benefits of Rectors' Conferences. He proposed, that the tasks of a conference could be e.g. to help society to solve problems in HE and to lobby interest of the universities. It can also be a platform for discussions and for sharing experiences. He also seemed eager to proceed. It was very clear that the Rectors' Conference has to be separate from MoE. Further, MoE should give up some of its tasks. These could instead be taken care of by the Rector's Conference. Thus, there might be a need to study the division of responsibility and tasks between MoE and the Rectors' Conference.

It seems that the question of autonomy also needs to be discussed among the universities, i.e. in a Rectors' Conference. It could be an engaging topic to start from, since presumably, all rectors would find it a matter of great importance.

We met also Rector Abel M. Maharramov from Baku State University. He also thought that rectors' conference is really needed and he promised to support it. He has very large experience in international conferences and networks, so his expertise can be useful in the future in creating rectors' conference.



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MoE has started a rectors' conference already more than 10 years ago. Also rules of the Conference were written. The conference had representatives from MoE and universities and the chairman was the minister of education. The conference had a couple of meetings at the beginning, but the interest faded. Some rectors told, that the main reason for closing the active work of the conference was the conflict between the ministry and universities about decision-making. This experience needs to be taken into consideration in establishing a new Rectors' Conference.

6. Unexpected Results

7. Issues Left Open After the Mission

8. Recommendations for Future Missions

The following recommendations are based on our earlier reports, discussions during the mission and experiences from Estonia and Finland. Both establishment of a newsletter and establishment of a rector's conference was supported by the MoE and the directors of the three universities.

I. Establishment of the Newsletter, steps for Email Marketing

a. Why an electronic newsletter is need

- Improves communication and common understanding among the stakeholders
- Connects into a single information platform all possible parties
- Collects information in a way, that all participants could have a voice in a Newsletter. Two way traffic of the information
- Informs what is in focus at the national and international level
- Informs about financing possibilities
- Identifies the main needs in HE

b. What is needed

- Coordination group
- Good communication specialist, e.g. from the MoE
- Set an owner of the Newsletter and roles of the editor

c. Find subscribers

First subscribers are employees of HE sector. They should be informed and kept up to date when it comes to external communication. Next round involves the partners / stakeholders you have already been working with.

Release web-page with newsletter sign-up form. Ask about subscribers interests (read no. 4 „Create your main topics”). Promote it (addition to articles, emails, QR-codes on leaflets, partners). Place an email newsletter sign-up link on every relevant page of your website(s).



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d. Find email marketing provider

The best solution is to find local service provider (faster service, personal approach, local market awareness). Plan B is to find global service provider (more updates and modern solutions).

<http://spaceedgetechnology.com/bulk-email-marketing-services-azerbaijan/>

<https://mailchimp.com>

Build your own or use provided **templates** to make your newsletter attractive and easily readable. Don't overdo the design!

e. Create your main topics

Create your main topics so you can distribute your subscribers by their interest. Do not send specific newsletters to everyone! Informing everyone about everything is not your goal.

f. Create content

Rule of thumb is to keep promotional content under 20%. Other 80% is informational (updates, researches, news and events). Same goes for photos-text balance. Having a newsletter that not only promotes, but also informs subscribers about the state of your sector as a whole is a great way to establish authority in your field and make sure your emails are being read by the people to whom you send them. **Use good writers!**

Test your newsletter spam level with tools provided by your e-mail marketing service. You might need to adjust your photos, logos and keep the capital letters and exclamation marks at minimum. Your subscribers must be able to or unsubscribe from your messages.

Do not put whole articles in the newsletter! **Use five to eight sentences** and link to original article. Keep it clear and simple. Linking back to articles you have posted on your website is a great way to drive traffic and let the consumer discover your web content.

g. Use statistics, refine, be modern

Track your subscribers behavior. Create your benchmarks.

Deliverability (rate at which your contacts actually received your message) should also be tracked.

Some ideas for the future:

Newsletter is perfect addition to cross-media campaign.

Let your newsletter “expand” to social media. Launching giveaways or contests will ensure that your newsletter gets talked about.

Good, well written summary of fresh research is quite sure way to get wanted attention.

II Establishment of a Rectors' Conference

a. Why needed

- ”WE ARE STRONGER TOGERHER”



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- Helping society to solve problems in HE
- Promoting higher education policy in Azerbaijan
- Promoting cooperation between universities
- Learning from each other / Platform for discussions
- Lobbying interests of the universities

b. General principles

- Initiation should come from the Ministry of Education
- Coordination group is needed to prepare basic documents
- Conference should be independent
- People from the ministry can be invited as experts to meetings as needed.
- Each university should be represented by its rector, or in exceptional cases, by a vice-rector. This is important for the credibility and decision-making power of the Conference.

c. How to start

- The Minister should invite rectors to a meeting to discuss how to proceed and to formulate rules. Rectors from both public and private universities should be invited.
- A coordination group can prepare a draft for the rules
 - Purpose of cooperation and main functions
 - Criteria for membership
 - Management bodies
 - Selection of a chairman, vice chairman and secretariat
 - Regular meetings and possible working groups
 - Rectors can discuss about the proposal

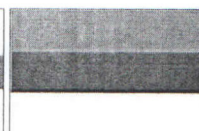
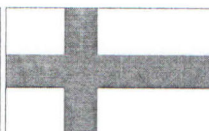
d. How to proceed

- Funding: Membership fees and donors. Initial funding by MoE for one or more specific projects could be considered.
- Chairman: Honourable rector
- On a voluntary basis
- Strongly motivated rectors are members
- Permanent secretariat at the beginning in one of the universities

We suggest that in order to motivate and get the process running, MoE may consider giving the Rectors Conference specific tasks, e.g. preparing paper on aligning the HE sector in Azerbaijan with the European one, developing autonomy etc. The idea is to have topics that are of great importance and interest for the rectors, the universities and MoE. MoE may also consider providing funding (1-2 years) for this; for motivation, as a statement of importance and to speed up the process.

In Finland the Rectors' Conference Arene started from a number of concrete projects and development needs common to all universities of applied sciences. Projects were separately funded by MoE, which made it possible to employ people and establish the Rector's Conference office.

9. Conclusions and General Remarks Concerning the Project



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The recommendations above were presented in the Open seminar on Thursday. Also experiences of rector conference in Finland (ARENE) were presented. There were over 20 participants in the seminar. Almost all the participants supported the establishment of a rector's conference in Azerbaijan and our recommendations.

18.11.2016

(Date and place)

(Signature of Experts)

18.11.2016

(Date and place)

(Signature of Experts)

18.11.2016

(Date and place)

(Signature of Experts)