TWINNING AZERBAIJAN

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

**AZ/14/ENP/OT/31**

**EU Short Term Expert Mission Report**

**1. Basic Information**

**Component and Activity:**

Component: 3. Developing AzQF

Activity: 3.2 Gap Analysis of the AzQF

**Name of the Expert:** Ms Maiki Udam, Ms Aune Valk

**Dates of the Mission:** 4-15 April 2016

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

Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA)

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

The **Azerbaijani Qualifications Framework** (AzQF) is a tool to systematise, classify and manage Azerbaijani qualifications. The development of AzQF started in 2011 supported by World Bank and European Training Foundation projects. A draft Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers on AzQF has been developed by 2012, stipulating the main principles, institutions involved, level descriptions, placement of types of qualifications, and quality assurance of qualifications. Seminars introducing the AzQF to stakeholders and international partners were held in 2012 and 2014. Nevertheless, the Decree is still in a draft form, and hopefully will be adopted this year. A draft of the **implementation plan** for the AzQF has also been prepared.

The AzQF consists of eight levels described in terms of knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility. The level descriptions of these eight levels are compatible with the level descriptions of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF). One of the aims of developing the AzQF was to make it compatible with the EQF, and particularly with the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

The draft Decree stipulates, that Sub-Bachelor degree, awarded by colleges (secondary specialised education), shall be placed on level 5, Bachelor’s degree on level 6, Master’s degree on level 7, and Doctoral degree on level 8. A specificity of the AzQF is that level 8 includes two types of doctoral degree: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Doctor of Science (DSc).

Qualifications are certificates, diplomas and other formally issued documents acknowledging that a person has achieved **learning outcomes** (LOs) that are described in standards. In Azerbaijan these are normally national educational standards. **National educational standards** are developed for each level of the degrees (Sub-Bachelor’s, Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral), as well as for each specialty**.** As a result, the number of national educational standards potentially involved in the Azerbaijani Qualifications Framework for Higher Education is huge: about 150 on Bachelor’s level, about 150 on Master’s level, about 400 on PhD level, and about 400 on DSc level. These are used by higher education institutions (HEIs) as starting point for developing their curricula.

LOs are the basis for moving Azerbaijan towards a competence based higher education system. There need to be more flexible ways of learning, while assessment and certification need careful quality assurance.

Moreover, in the future it is important that educational standards and curricula are defined on clearly identified needs. This means that the link with the labour market needs to be improved. Finally, LOs and the AzQF are instruments for **recognition of prior learning** and **comparing qualifications** from Azerbaijan with those of other countries in order to facilitate mobility.

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

The main aim of the mission was to facilitate a verification process of the AzQF against the overarching QF EHEA. From this the following tasks derived: to identify the level of knowledge of the QF EHEA in Azerbaijani universities; to update experts on the QF EHEA, external reference points, EHEA trends and practice; and to map relevant rules, regulations and practice.

**4. Time Schedule of the Mission**

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| **Date** | **Activities/Meetings**  BC experts met  (title and institution) | **Remarks** |
| 4.4.2016 | Meeting with RTA, assistants and MoE representatives: Mr Azad Akhundov – BC CL III, Science and Higher Education Department senior Advisor;  Mr Tofig Ahmadov - Senior Adviser, the Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department, RTA  Counterpart;  Ms Zahra Jafarova - Senior Advisor at Science, Higher and Vocational Education Department  Preparation of the mission |  |
| 5.4.2016 | Interview with the committee members of the national educational standard for teacher education:  Dr Malik Jabrayilov;  Dr Nazim Abbasov |  |
| 6.4.2016 | Attending Nizami Project meeting;  Interview with the committee members of the national educational standard for economics and business administration:  Dr Cahan Bulud | The Agenda of Nizami project meeting is attached |
| 7.4.2016 | Attending Nizami Project meeting;  Interview with the committee members of the national educational standard for ICT:  Dr Ramin Mahmudzade;  Dr Etibar Seyidzade |  |
| 8.4.2016 | Reflection of the week, preparation for the next week with RTA, assistants and MoE representatives:  Mr Azad Akhundov – BC CL III, Science and Higher Education Department senior Advisor;  Mr Tofig Ahmadov - Senior Adviser, the Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department, RTA  Counterpart |  |
| 11.4.2016 | Interview with university staff members responsible for recognition of studies from other institutions (credit transfer, RPL) at Qafqaz University:  Ms Sevil Imanova - Vice Rector for External Affairs;  Mr Islam Huseynov - Associate Dean at Pedagogy Faculty;  Mr Adalat Ibadov - Head of Quality Management Department;  Mr Khanlar Heydarov - Associate Dean at Faculty of Economics and Administration;  Mr Parviz Mammadov - Associate Dean at Engineering Faculty  Writing the gap analysis based on the interviews |  |
| 12.4.2016 | Interview with university staff members responsible for recognition of studies from other institutions (credit transfer, RPL) at Baku State University:  Ms Elmira Ismayilova - Head of International Relations Department;  Mr Akif Guliyev - Dean of Biology Faculty;  Ms Sabina Omarova - Vice Dean of Biology Faculty;  Ms Gulheyran Rahimova - Dean of International Department;  Mr Khanverdi Ganbarov - Head of Micobiology Department;  Mr Abdulsaid Azizov - Dean of Chemistry Faculty;  Mr Ralfrid Hasanov - Head of Biophysics and Molecular Biology Department  Meeting with the MoE representative responsible for development and implementation of AzQF:  Mr Emin Amrullayev - Head of the Educational Programmes Development Department, BC Project Leader  Writing the gap analysis based on the interviews |  |
| 13.4.2016 | Interview with university staff members responsible for recognition of studies from other institutions (credit transfer, RPL) at Azerbaijan State Economic University  Meeting with MoE representative responsible for the implementation of NQF, presentation of the first findings of gap-analysis:  Mr Azad Akhundov – BC CL III, Science and Higher Education Department senior Advisor  Interviews with MoE representatives responsible for nostrification of diplomas and accreditation:  Mr Natig Ibrahimov – Deputy Director, Science, Higher and Secondary Special Education;  Mr Afgan Abdullayev - Senior Advisor at Regulatory Legal Documents Unit | List of participants of the meeting at Azerbaijan State Economic University  is attached |
| 14.4.2016 | Meeting with the representative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection:  Mr Elnur Suleymanov – Head of State Employment Policy Department  Finalising the gap analysis |  |
| 15.4.2016 | Report writing  Mission review and planning of next mission with RTA, assistants and MoE representatives:  Mr Azad Akhundov – BC CL III, Science and Higher Education Department senior Advisor;  Mr Tofig Ahmadov - Senior Adviser, the Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department, RTA  Counterpart;  Ms Zahra Jafarova - Senior Advisor at Science, Higher and Vocational Education Department |  |

**5. Achievement of the Expected Results**

The expected result of the mission was Gap analysis report with the recommendations for changes. All expected **results were** **achieved**. The Gap analysis is provided in the Annex.

**6. Unexpected Results**

No unexpected results occurred.

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

The purpose of the mission was fulfilled and no issues were left open at the end of the mission.

**8. Recommendations for Future Missions**

The STE-s had chance to attend some seminars of the Nizami project (Erasmus+) that is aimed to develop doctoral studies in Azerbaijan which to a great extent overlaps the aim of the Twinning activity 3.3. Therefore it is recommended to the STE-s of 3.3 to be aware of the progress of the named project, interviewing during the missions, among others, the key players of the Erasmus+ Project: Dr. Eldar Shahgaldiyev from Khazar University, Professor Hasanova from Baku State University and representatives of the Academy of Science.

For future missions (and Twinning projects) including training, we also recommend to consider that instead of training large groups of local academic staff, to conduct seminars with smaller groups of local experts to prepare trainers, draft training plans, analyse training needs in respect to the development stage of the specific issue, etc. This recommendation is based on the feedback from some MoE representatives as well as on our own experience from numerous meetings indicating that English language skills of the majority of the academic staff are not sufficient for effective communication and active participation in discussions that are led by foreign experts. Although high-level interpretation has been provided, it cannot replace invaluable spontaneous communication between trainers and trainees. We have also experienced that the differences between the local situation and EHEA are in some aspects still large which complicates the understanding due to e.g. new terminology.

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

In 2014, ETF prepared a comprehensive document “Analysis of existing qualification standards in Azerbaijan”, containing the descriptions of different qualifications levels as well as concrete recommendations for further actions for 2015-2017 with division of roles and responsibilities in development, revision, approval and application of AzQF. The document was sent to the Minister of Education on November 12, 2014.

The situation in Azeri higher education and ETF’s recommendations concerning the AzQF are relevant also today, therefore the Gap analysis is to a great extent based on the ETF document as well as on the topic-related previous mission reports and on the meetings with various stakeholders - representatives of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection as well as university representatives, and members of the national educational standards committees.

The topics in the Gap analysis have been chosen according to the main principles in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). When analyzing the AzQF compatibility with EQF, the STE-s focused on two aspects :

* the compatibility of AzQF (levels 6-8) with the current practices in the field of higher education (both in the universities and on the government level);
* the compatibility of AzQF (levels 6-8) with the principles of EQF.

The STE-s value highly the efficient work done by the RTA team and Twinning Project counterparts from the MoE while organizing the numerous meetings with different stakeholders. We also appreciate the time, openness and hospitality provided to us in the MoE, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, and universities.

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

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