TWINNING AZERBAIJAN

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

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

**EU Short Term Expert Mission Report**

**1. Basic Information**

**Component and Activity:**

Component: 4. Standards and Guidelines for QA in HE

Activity: 4.5 Pilot Evaluations

**Name of the Experts:** Mr. Heikki Malinen, Mr. Tauno Otto, Mr. Touko Apajalahti

**Dates of the Mission:** 24 – 28 April 2017

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

Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA)

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

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 offers an opportunity for applying the ESG in Azerbaijani higher education. One of the mandatory results of the project is 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.

In April 2016 a Drafting Group was appointed by the Ministry of Education 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 capacity of the pilot institutions to conduct a self-evaluation was supported through several trainings, which took place starting in September 2016. The self-evaluation reports were submitted by the three pilot universities in January-February 2017 and were translated to English. 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 evaluations have been set as: supporting the strategic management of institutions, providing external feedback to the institutions’ own internal quality assurance procedures as well as informing the internal and external stakeholders of the compliance of the institutions’ quality assurance with the ESG. The pilot evaluations will have an institutional approach with the focus on teaching and learning. The evaluation report will provide the pilot institutions with information regarding their strengths and good practices as well as recommendations for the institutions’ further development.

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

The overall aim of the Component 4 is to develop Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Azerbaijan, in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) and test them with three higher education institutions.

The objective of Activity 4.5 is to coordinate a trial/test run of the Standards and Guidelines at three higher education institutions in Azerbaijan. The objective of this mission was to conduct the third pilot at the Azerbaijan Technical University during the STE mission of 24-28 April 2017.

**4. Time Schedule of the Mission**

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| **Date** | **Activities/Meetings**  BC experts met  (title and institution) | **Remarks** |
| 24 April 2017 | Kick-off meeting at the Ministry of Education   * Mr. Elchin Jafarov (ANO), Ms.Tarana Mammadova (ANO), Mr. Natiq Akhmadov (ATU), RTA, RTA’s assistants * Evaluation team members: Mr. Heikki Malinen (chair), Mr. Ragif Gasimov, Ms. Elmira Ismayilova, Mr. Elshan Mirzazade, Mr. Tauno Otto, Mr. Touko Apajalahti   Meeting of the evaluation team at the Hotel Sapphire Inn   * Mr. Heikki Malinen (chair), Mr. Ragif Gasimov, Ms. Elmira Ismayilova, Mr. Elshan Mirzazade, Mr. Tauno Otto, Mr. Touko Apajalahti |  |
| 25 April 2017 | Azerbaijan Technical University   * Evaluation team: Mr. Heikki Malinen (chair), Mr. Ragif Gasimov, Ms. Elmira Ismayilova, Mr. Elshan Mirzazade, Mr. Tauno Otto, Mr. Touko Apajalahti * Observers from The Accreditation and Nostrification Office: Mr. Tofig Ahmadov, Mr. Elchin Jafarov, Ms.Tarana Mammadova, * Interviewees: see attached site visit programme |  |
| 26 April 2017 | Azerbaijan Technical University   * Evaluation team: Mr. Heikki Malinen (chair), Mr. Ragif Gasimov, Ms. Elmira Ismayilova, Mr. Elshan Mirzazade, Mr. Tauno Otto, Mr. Touko Apajalahti * Observers from The Accreditation and Nostrification Office: Mr. Elchin Jafarov, Ms.Tarana Mammadova, * Interviewees: see attached site visit programme |  |
| 27 April 2017 | Azerbaijan Technical University   * Evaluation team: Mr. Heikki Malinen (chair), Mr. Ragif Gasimov, Ms. Elmira Ismayilova, Mr. Elshan Mirzazade, Mr. Tauno Otto, Mr. Touko Apajalahti * Observers from The Accreditation and Nostrification Office: Mr. Elchin Jafarov, Ms.Tarana Mammadova, * Interviewees: see attached site visit programme |  |
| 28 April 2017 | Meeting of the evaluation team at the Hotel Sapphire Inn   * Mr. Heikki Malinen (chair), Mr. Ragif Gasimov, Ms. Elmira Ismayilova, Mr. Elshan Mirzazade, Mr. Tauno Otto, Mr. Touko Apajalahti |  |

**5. Achievement of the Expected Results**

The expected results for the mission were achieved: A practical testing of the Standards and Guidelines was carried out at the Azerbaijan Technical University.

The first day of the mission focused on preparing the experts of the evaluation group for the site visit. During the following three days of the mission, the evaluation group conducted a site visit to the University, interviewing management, staff, and students of the University. On the last day, the evaluation team began the drafting of the review report.

During the first day, first a kick-off meeting was organised at the Ministry of Education in order to discuss the Azerbaijani higher education system with the evaluation team.

In the afternoon’s meeting of the evaluation team, STEs reviewed together with the rest of the team the aims of the evaluation, the code of ethics guiding the evaluation team, and how to conduct the interviews and present questions. Also, during the meeting the team finalised preparations for the meetings with various stakeholders during the site visit.

The site visit was carried out successfully over three days and the team interviewed altogether nearly 100 members of the university community. Interview sessions were held with the management, teaching staff, support and administrative staff as well as students from different faculties, graduates and external stakeholders. During the interviews, the evaluation team discussed various topics with the interviewees to verify and supplement observations made based on the self-evaluation report and other material submitted by the university.

Observers from the Accreditation and Nostrification Office (ANO) accompanied the evaluation team. The interviews were conducted in English, translated into Azerbaijani.

**6. Unexpected Results**

No unexpected results were encountered.

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

No issues were left open.

**8. Recommendations for Future Missions**

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

All pilot evaluations have now been conducted. Also the third pilot was conducted in good cooperation with the participating university. ANO has also been actively involved in all three pilot evaluations.

It is recommended that ANO and other project participants will take advantage of the experience and of the upcoming analysis week in order to further building of the capacity of the universities to undertake such evaluations. Special attention should be paid into the self-evaluation phase, in order to have a comprehensive self-evaluation and to include all the necessary annexes. Also, it would be good to have more systematic training for the evaluators in an early phase of the evaluation process: both for those new team members for whom it is the first experience of such process, and for international members who do not have deep knowledge of the local higher education system before the process. However, in conclusion, based on the third pilot, the university and the local experts are fully capable of carrying out such processes in a fruitful and beneficial manner.

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