

EVALUATION REPORT FOR INSTITUTIONAL PILOT EVALUATION

University: Azerbaijan State Economic University (UNEC)

International evaluation group: Kristiina Tönnisson (Chair), Anar Naghiyev, Aytan Mirzayeva, Mikko Vieltojärvi, Shukur Sadikhov

Project manager: Hilla Aurén

Evaluation group sent the preliminary report to the university: 24/05/2017

Evaluation group received the comments from the university subject to evaluation: 01/06/2017

Report approved by the Twinning Project Leaders

Date: 12/05/2017



I 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 (EHEA). A central tool in this work has been the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (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 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, one of them being the Azerbaijan State Economic University (UNEC).

In April 2016 a Drafting Group was appointed by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan to work on a proposal for the 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 and amendments were made to the manual based on the feedback. The pilot institutions received several trainings in the fall of 2016 to conduct a self-evaluation. The self-evaluation report (SER) of UNEC was submitted to the Twinning office on 23 January 2017 and the translated version was presented to the international evaluation team on 16 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.

The main aims of the pilot evaluation are to support the strategic management of institutions; provide external feedback to the institution’s own internal quality assurance procedures; and inform internal and external stakeholders of the compliance of the institution’s quality assurance with the ESG. The pilot evaluation takes an institutional approach with a focus on teaching and learning.

The evaluation team was asked to assess Azerbaijan State Economic University against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Azerbaijan on the basis of seven assessment areas: Strategic planning; Management; Human resources; Study programmes and their development; Students; Research activities; Teaching and learning resources and support services.

The evaluation team consisted of five members, including international experts as well as local experts from Azerbaijan, and supported by the Project Manager. Dr Kristiina Tönnisson, the Chair person of the team, is the Head of Johan Skytte Institute of



Political Studies at the University of Tartu in Estonia. Mr Anar Naghiyev is an Associate Professor at the Azerbaijan University of Languages. Ms Aytan Mirzayeva is an Expert of the Quality of Education at the Azerbaijan University of Languages. Mr Mikko Vieltojärvi is an Advisor at the Union of Professional Business Graduates in Finland. Mr Shukur Sadikhov is a final year Bachelor student at the Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University. Ms Hilla Aurén, an Evaluation Expert at the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, was the Project Manager for the evaluation team.

After the preparation phase, the work of the evaluation team started in Baku on Monday, April 3, 2017, with an introduction to the higher education system of Azerbaijan at the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan and a review of the agreed upon guidelines for the site visit. On April 4, 2017, the team had an all-day meeting to prepare for the site visit to the university, which was carried out during April 5-7 (the site visit programme can be found in Annex 1). During the three-day site visit, meetings were held with the management, Scientific Council members, academic and research staff, representatives of various support services, students and student organization representatives. On the last day of the visit, feedback based on the preliminary conclusions of the team was presented to the rectorate of UNEC. At the end of the last day, the team had a meeting to discuss and agree upon the development level of each assessment area. The evaluation report was written collaboratively, and the division of work was made according to the expertise areas of each team member. The work was executed in a cooperative way and the members of the team had an opportunity to express their individual views on all the seven assessment areas. UNEC was given an opportunity to fact-check the evaluation report before its publication.

The evaluation was conducted on the basis of the self-evaluation report of Azerbaijan State Economic University and its compulsory appendices. At the request of the team, additional information was made available before and during the site visit. The team members had a tour of the premises on one of the side campuses of UNEC, thus obtaining an impression of the lecture rooms, library, sports facilities, auditoriums 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 regarding the seven assessment areas, as well as recommendations for the institution's further development.



II Description of the university

Founded in 1930, Azerbaijan State Economic University is one of the biggest economic-oriented higher education institutions in the Southern Caucasus. Currently there are six faculties (Finance and Accounting, Economics, Business and Management, Technology and Design, Commercial Studies and Turkish World Business Management) with 36 Chairs operating at the four campuses of UNEC in Baku. In addition, the SABAH center, Russian Economic School, International School of Economics, and UNEC Business School offer education at UNEC. The Rector leads the university, supported by six Vice rectors. The highest decision-making body of UNEC is the 44-member Scientific Council.

In the academic year 2016-2017 there were altogether 17,857 Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degree students studying at UNEC. UNEC offers education in four languages: Azerbaijani, Turkish, English, and Russian. In addition, studies are offered in five specialties completely in English at UNEC's International School of Economy. The number of international students is currently over 470, with undergraduate and graduate students coming from 14 different countries. UNEC employs 537 full-time and 362 part-time members of academic staff. The number of teaching support staff at UNEC is 180.

The role, mission and tasks of UNEC in the context of national education have been identified by President Ilham Aliyev. The President's chosen mission for UNEC is to contribute to the development of the country's economy and be a "world class university" in the training of economic specialists.

UNEC has been ranked as the leading Azerbaijani university in 2015 and 2016 in several rankings. UNEC is the first public university in Azerbaijan to obtain the international ISO 9001:2008 "Quality Management System" certificate and the first university in the country to become a full member of the European Foundation for Management Development, which conducts accreditation of business schools.

UNEC cooperates widely with foreign higher education institutions, including Erasmus+ programmes, exchange programmes with 41 Turkish universities, summer and winter schools in Russian and German institutions, and dual-degree programmes with the London School of Economics and Political Science and Montpellier University.



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		

Summary:

The assessment of the evaluation team is based on evidence presented in the university's SER, additional material requested from the university, and the interviews conducted over three days at UNEC. The following assessment areas mostly conform to the requirements presented in the AzSG: Management, Human resources, Students, and Teaching and learning resources and support services. The team found several strengths and good practices in these assessment areas, including the management's commitment to the institution's strategic goals, active international collaboration, highly qualified staff, and innovative practices such as the e-university. The team has also given recommendations how to pursue further development in these assessment areas, such as widening the involvement of students and external stakeholders in the decision-making as well as development of education in the university.

The assessment areas of Strategic planning, Study programmes and their development, and Research activities partially conform to the requirements presented in the criteria of the AzSG. Strengths and good practices were also recognized in these areas, indicating a commitment and a will from both the management and staff to succeed in these areas. The team also found several areas for improvement in the core requirements, such as approving a formal development strategy, involving students and external stakeholders in the development of education at UNEC, reviewing the content of study programmes regularly, and strengthening the research capacity of staff and students. Further evidence and analysis is provided in the sections below.

The evaluation team would like to thank the UNEC management for their hospitality and cooperation in the practical arrangements, which allowed the team to carry out a successful site visit. The team would also like to thank all the interviewees for open and trustful interviews, which allowed the team members to collect evidence and information for compiling the final report.

The summary below lists the main strengths and recommendations noted by the team. Each section in the report will describe further strengths, good practices and recommendations.

Strengths:

- The top management of the university has a clear vision and a realistic approach to what it is trying to achieve and why it is trying to achieve it, concerning strategic choices of UNEC. There is thorough strategic thinking among the leadership of the university.

- The university's management is committed to reforming the organizational structure in a way that supports the institution's strategic goals.
- UNEC's membership in several international and regional organizations and associations provides opportunities to learn about new trends and policies in education as well as share knowledge and establish bilateral cooperations with other universities. The university is actively working to find new international partners and provides many exchange opportunities for students, which is a strength for UNEC in the national context.
- A critical number of highly qualified and professional staff members is a major strength of UNEC.
- Majority of the staff have a clear desire to improve the quality of education at UNEC, which is a central factor that will assist the university in reaching its goal of becoming a world class university.
- The Differential Salary System (DSS) demonstrates UNEC's efforts to develop a systematic approach for the recognition and appreciation of the academic staff, and it has been received positively by most staff.
- The e-library and electronic access to teaching material through e-university are good practices recognised by the team.
- UNEC takes action in order to provide maximum transparency in the teaching and learning process.
- The Career Center is well known among staff and students and some of its actions are exceptional, including the support for student employment through employer-relations.
- UNEC is a forerunner in Azerbaijan in transforming the role of the support staff from providing administrative assistance to supporting teaching.

Recommendations:

- A formal development strategy should be prepared and finalized so that it is recognised and known by all staff members.
- Even if the management and staff are aware of the needs to monitor changes in the labour market, the needs of the society, and the need to involve more stakeholders, addressing those needs requires further attention. The university should also consider which stakeholders it should involve and what kind of involvement would be most beneficial for UNEC.
- UNEC should consider reviewing study programmes and syllabuses regularly. Students and external stakeholders should be involved in these reviews.

- The evaluation team recommends the university to emphasise the relevance of teaching materials and improve modern technical resources and the efficient use of technical equipment in the teaching and learning process. UNEC should consider having common standards or guidelines for the use of teaching and learning methods.
- Teaching staff should be offered more pedagogical training in order to raise the quality of teaching across the university. The improvement of staff competencies should be more systematic and there is a clear need to monitor the improvement.
- Students should be involved in the development of education at UNEC.
- UNEC should formulate a strategy for contributing to internationally competitive research and install procedures for ensuring the quality of research. It is necessary to ensure the financial resources for achieving the goal of becoming a research-oriented university.
- The team recommends establishing systematic mechanisms that support the staff's competencies, skills, and resources to conduct research.
- Access to international research databases is integral to improving research activities.
- Courses and training on research methodologies and skills should be offered to students.
- Students' access to e-university should be made easier on all campuses by providing internet access and more shared computers.
- The Career Center has information about graduate employability and labour market needs and this information should be used structurally in the planning of study programmes.

Recommendations to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan based on findings from the pilot evaluation:

- Higher education institutions should be granted more freedom and autonomy to continuously modify and update the curricula of their study programmes according to need.
- Higher education institutions need to have more freedom and autonomy to make decisions on their own organizational structure and decision-making bodies.
- Improving the study process and its organization requires more autonomous decision-making power within the institutions.
- Access to up-to-date academic research through electronic databases should be ensured at all Azerbaijani higher education institutions.

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
<p>Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>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.</i> ▪ <i>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.</i> ▪ <i>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.</i> ▪ <i>Relevant stakeholders (teaching staff, students and employers) are involved in the strategic development process of the institution.</i> ▪ <i>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.</i> ▪ <i>Information about higher education institution’s mission, vision and objectives is publicly available (website, media, other channels).</i> 							
<p>Comments/reflections, evidence</p> <p>According to the SER of the university, both the mission and vision of UNEC in the context of national education are identified by President Ilham Aliyev’s statement that “...UNEC’s mission is to contribute to the development of the country’s economy and be a ‘world class university’ in training of economic specialists.” Based on this statement, it is possible to say that there is quite strong support from the political leadership of the country, but at the same time, the actual role of UNEC is not defined clearly enough nor are there solid mission or vision statements available. It is highly suggested that the university, as an academic institution, work on its own mission and vision statements, which could have academic content, while showing the hoped and planned directions and strategic choices the institution is trying to make.</p>							

Regarding the current status of strategic planning at UNEC, the Rector has issued an order to set up a commission on strategic planning, but there is no approved development strategy yet. At the time of the evaluation, the commission had developed a draft strategic development plan that had been sent to the Scientific Council of UNEC, but the latter did not approve the plan, since both short and mid-term plans were missing from the plan. Therefore, UNEC does not have an approved development strategy yet, and the process of compiling one has only started.

At the same time, even if UNEC does not have a formally approved development strategy yet, the evaluation team still witnessed quite thorough strategic thinking and planning among the top leadership of the university. Quite a few central administrators, top and middle-level managers shared a common vision and approach to strategic thinking. An adequate way to characterise the situation would be to state that without a written development strategy, UNEC is managed according to an unwritten and informal strategic plan in the minds of the progressive top management. Even though this could be considered as a positive sign, a formal development strategy should certainly be approved, since it needs to be recognised and known by all the staff members, not just by a few selected persons. Currently most strategic choices are made by the Rector personally or by the Scientific Council of UNEC, which is in practice a governing or managerial board of the university. Although information about the mission, vision and objectives of UNEC is publicly available (for example through the university's website, public documents, and information material), the university should work on the quality, content and informative aspects of these statements.

During the interviews with the top management, it became clear that there are enough valid arguments for why it might make sense not to rush into compiling a formal development strategy. One way to conceptualize the current situation is that the university's top management might wait until it has gained broad support among academic staff for major critical reforms, attracted management staff educated in the best Western universities, and discussed possible strategic choices among stakeholders. Quite a few top-level managers shared the view that UNEC applies a realistic approach to strategic planning and decision-making. In addition, it is a good idea to have a solid mission or vision statement in place for the university before strategic choices are discussed and decided. Thus, while the evaluation team notes that there is no development strategy that is compliant with the mission statement and objectives of the institution, nor are there any short or mid-term plans in place, it might be a wise choice to take time to cultivate the context and foundational ground, where a real mission, vision and development strategy could start to grow at UNEC. Even if there are not enough resources for developing a strategy of the institution, in terms of people who are able to support the strategic level thinking of the leadership, there is certainly a will to proceed with the process and the

university itself has enough finances and infrastructure to support the process at this stage. Therefore, the evaluation team encourages the university's leadership to continue the process of developing the mission, vision, and development strategy.

The interviews revealed that the university currently has two strategic documents which form the strategic framework for decision-making, and could be considered as substitutes for the development strategy: 1) a central plan for raising the quality of teaching and research at UNEC and 2) a plan for the internationalisation of UNEC. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis in Azerbaijan on the national development strategy for higher education and the road map prepared by the President of the country, which universities often refer to in various discussions and decision-making processes. Also, the team found out in the interviews with the Deans and Directors that most faculties have their own strategic plans. UNEC has also concrete sub-approaches and sub-aims, which were often mentioned during the site visit: establishing a more effective School-College-University model, developing the electronic platform "e-university," and partnering with important international actors such as the London School of Economics and Political Science, to mention some. Furthermore, the university's strive for strategic vision and ambition is clearly demonstrated in the SER. Firstly, UNEC was the first Azerbaijani public university to obtain the ISO 9001:2008 quality management certificate. Secondly, it was the first university in the country to become a full member of the European Foundation for Management Development, which conducts accreditations of business schools. Thirdly, UNEC has been recognized in various rankings such as the Ranking Web and Webometrics. Additionally, UNEC is a member of six international and regional university associations.

During the interviews, the Rector of UNEC pointed out three concrete aims which are central to his current mid-term agenda: to be the best university in the region, for 80 % of the graduates to find a job within three months of graduation, and for 70 % of the students to be able to speak English. The Rector also mentioned three areas for improvement: the quality of teachers, attracting the best high school graduates in Azerbaijan, and transforming from an educational institution to a research-oriented institution.

While according to Western standards UNEC still lacks the capacity to attract external financial resources, the evaluation team acknowledges that according to the local standards UNEC is doing very well. In addition to some funds and external projects currently received by UNEC, it is even more important that there is a clear understanding of the importance of the research-oriented approach and mind-set within the management and the staff. Relevant staff understand the value of bringing more funded research into the institution, even if the practice is still lacking behind. They are aware of the need to monitor changes in the labour market and the needs of the society. Even though UNEC does not yet have a concrete system for monitoring those

needs, and it relies mostly on information gathered *ad hoc* (feedback from career fairs and internships, personal conversations among staff and practitioners, publicly available statistics), the management and staff share a common understanding of its value.

Concerning the involvement of relevant stakeholders, UNEC's efforts were visible to the team, but nonetheless the university could pay much more attention to formalizing the system. Stakeholders are involved sporadically and mostly based on *ad hoc* situations, but there is no established system applied across the university. In addition, the relevant staff at the university should elaborate on the need for involving external stakeholders: where, when and in what capacities would stakeholder involvement be most beneficial for UNEC. The university has many partners in various capacities (for example internship placements for students, partner organizations in projects and associations, customers of the applied studies, and personal contacts of the academic staff), but the university should provide an established, easily accessible platform for involving them in the strategic development processes of the institution as well as in the everyday operations of UNEC.

Strengths, good practices

- The top management of the university has a clear vision and a realistic approach to what it is trying to achieve and why it is trying to achieve it, concerning strategic choices of UNEC. There is thorough strategic thinking among the leadership of the university.
- The university has enough finances and the necessary infrastructure in place to support preparing the development strategy.
- In the absence of a development strategy, there are two substitutes: 1) the central plan for raising the quality of teaching and research at UNEC and 2) the plan for the internationalisation of UNEC.
- There is a clear understanding of the importance of the research approach and mind-set within a substantial number of people in leadership positions at UNEC.

Recommendations

- The university should work on its mission and vision statements and general objectives, which could be more academic in content and which lay down the general framework for the strategic choices.

- The formal development strategy should be prepared and finalized so that it is recognised and known by all staff members.
- Even if the management and staff are aware of the needs to monitor changes in the labour market, the needs of the society, and the need to involve more stakeholders, attention should be paid to addressing those needs. In addition, the university should consider which stakeholders it should involve and what kind of involvement would be most beneficial for UNEC.

2 MANAGEMENT							
Assessment	Fully conforms to requirements		Mostly conforms to requirements	X	Partially conforms to requirements		Does not conform to requirements
<p>Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>The management structure of the institution supports the achievement of institutional objectives set in the development strategy.</i> ▪ <i>Rights and responsibilities of structural units (Scientific Council, faculty, chair and others) are clearly defined and the implementation of decisions taken is effective.</i> ▪ <i>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.</i> ▪ <i>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.</i> ▪ <i>Structural units of higher education institution have mutual and functional relations (internal collaboration) and they cooperate with other institutions and organizations (external collaboration).</i> ▪ <i>The internal (formal and informal) communication between different levels of the management staff, teaching staff and students is purposeful and effective.</i> ▪ <i>Internal quality assurance system (monitoring, analysis, assessment and forecasting) is supporting the strategic management of the institution.</i> 							
<p>Comments/reflections, evidence</p> <p>UNEC’s management structure comprises of 1) the Rector and the Scientific Council 2) Vice rectors and 3) the Chairs and Centers in the faculties. Different supportive functions, departments and sections operate under the relevant Vice rectors. Each faculty is headed by a Dean, who manages the faculty’s operations and is responsible for the implementation of operations, assisted by Deputy Deans. Recently the Institute Secretary has been established within faculties to provide assistance in managerial and administrative tasks such as tutoring, registration and documentation, so that the Deputy Deans can focus mostly on academic issues.</p> <p>The 44-member Scientific Council is the supreme decision-making body of the university, headed by the Rector and consisting of</p>							



representatives from the Heads of faculties, Chairs, departments and six representatives from student organizations. The Scientific Council approves all regulations and decisions related to teaching and research. Decisions made and approved by the Scientific Council are disseminated to the relevant departments, who in turn report on the implementation of the decisions annually to the Scientific Council. In addition, scientific councils at the faculty level deal with faculty-related issues within the scope of strategic planning and decisions approved by the Scientific Council of the university. Some examples of recently approved UNEC-wide regulations include the “New staff schedule,” “Internal disciplinary rules for students” and “Internal disciplinary rules for staff,” passed in order to boost internal discipline. The evaluation team found evidence during the interviews that decisions made by the Scientific Council are mostly followed and implemented.

As mentioned already, the main goal of UNEC is to be a world class university. During the site visit, the university’s top management informed the team about UNEC’s institutional targets, which are:

- Transforming from an education-oriented to a research-oriented institution
- Training economic specialists for the global labour market by improving the quality of education, and focusing on capacity-building in the national and western context
- Collaborating with the world’s leading universities

According to the SER and interviews, structural reforms have been implemented at UNEC recently in order to achieve these goals. The number of faculties has been reduced from 10 to six, with the aim of establishing mega-faculties. Duplication between faculties and Chairs has been eliminated by reducing the number of Chairs from 44 to 36. Some interviewees expressed that the number of Chairs could be reduced even further in order to increase cooperation among staff. Three chairs are currently reviewing their functions as the result of structural and functional reforms. The team recommends the management to provide metrics that would support the units in reviewing their performance. The commitment of the university’s management to reforming the organizational structure in a way that supports reaching the institution’s strategic goals can be viewed as a strength. At a time of implementing a major shift from a purely educational institution to a research institution, a centralized approach to management is justified.

As organizational reforms are ongoing, the rights and responsibilities of some of the structural units are being developed. Even in this stage of development, the evaluation team found evidence that decisions are being effectively implemented. The responsibilities of the structural units and job descriptions are being reviewed, with the purpose of effective implementation of

development decisions. The definition of qualifications, rights and responsibilities of staff in managerial positions was recognised as an area for improvement in the SER. Supported by UNEC, the managerial staff takes part in a number of international and local trainings, seminars, conferences and events.

UNEC has also established a “1 Speciality 1 Chair” model, with the purpose of formally determining specific departments for each specialisation. The “School-College-University” model on the other hand aims to attract students with an interest in economics to the university already from a young age. Although the evaluation team did not yet find evidence of the usefulness of these new models, the reforms align with the institutional objectives and are therefore commendable, as is the management’s development-oriented approach.

The electronic document database and circulation system “DocNet” has been recently established at the university in order to improve the efficiency of the management and implementation of decisions among the four campuses of UNEC. Documents related to management and administration are published and shared on the DocNet, where the relevant manager or Head of a unit can approve them online. The evaluation team found that DocNet helps ensure effective communication on administrative matters between staff on different campuses.

Based on the SER and the site visit, the evaluation team concluded that the allocation of the university’s financial resources supports the strategic goals, focusing on modern technologies, teaching resources and research, capacity building of teaching staff and the creation of new organizational models. One robust example of the allocation of finances for supporting strategic targets is the Differential Salary System (DSS). Teaching staff expressed that the DSS is a strong motivational factor for improving their teaching and research outputs. However, the team also saw opportunities for UNEC to improve the DSS, especially with regard to supporting the staff who are not on top of the ranking list.

The DSS also acts as a link between the quality system and operational management. The university’s quality managers at the Center for the Assessment and Management of the Quality of Education (elsewhere referred to as the Quality Assurance Center) monitor and manage the teaching, research and publication as well as self-development activities of the academic staff. Although the system is accepted by the academic staff, it needs to be improved in order to raise the effectiveness of the quality process. The team suggests moving to a trust-based approach and using the system as a monitoring, assessment and motivational tool

rather than a tool that increases competition among the staff.

According to the findings of the evaluation team, the core features of the university's quality management system consist of:

- Facilitating the achievement of the strategic objectives at the university and unit level;
- An operational monitoring and evaluation system related to the research, teaching and self-development of academic staff (DSS) and regular feedback from students and quality ambassadors;
- Development of the infrastructure, learning environment, teaching and learning resources and support services;
- Motivational procedures for academic staff and administrative/supportive staff (in the form of salary rising, remuneration);
- Capacity building of the academic staff through international mobility, local trainings and conferences.

While UNEC has implemented functional quality assessment mechanisms, the team found also areas of improvement in ensuring the quality assessment of the teaching process. The role of the Institute Secretaries should be clarified and the role should include monitoring goals different from the quality ambassadors. The role of the university's 34 quality ambassadors could be developed further as well. The quality ambassadors are named from among the staff, and function under the Quality Assurance Center, monitoring the teaching methods of the staff during classes. They should be provided regular training and the focus of their role could shift from monitoring to mentoring. Quality ambassadors might be the most relevant staff members to follow the DSS and work with the staff members who have lower scores and were placed low in the ranking list.

Both internal and external collaboration at UNEC was visible to the evaluation team. UNEC's external collaboration takes place for example through membership in the following associations:

- The European University Association (EUA)
- The International Association of Universities (IAU)
- The Federation of the Universities of the Islamic World (FUIW)
- The Eurasian Association of Universities (EAU)
- The Black Sea Universities Network (BSUN)
- European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD)

UNEC cooperates with the London School of Economics and Political Science, allowing UNEC students to obtain a Bachelor's degree from the University of London while attending UNEC. UNEC also has a Bachelor-level double-degree programme with Montpellier University in France and cooperation with other European, Asian and North American universities. One of the objectives of these collaborations is to promote the competence development of UNEC staff. Different international projects and programmes through Erasmus+, Tempus and Fulbright open opportunities for the international mobility of academic staff and students. Offering study programmes in four languages furthermore helps UNEC realize its strategic objectives on internationalization.

UNEC also cooperates with local universities by exchanging professors, students and sharing practices. An exchange of electronic databases is being carried out with the Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University, Azerbaijan Technical University, Western University, Khazar University, Ganja State University and others. Overall, UNEC's local and international collaboration with other higher education institutions can be regarded as a strength.

Furthermore, UNEC collaborates with local employers in order to open internship opportunities and promote the employment of its graduates. External stakeholders are also involved in improving education at the university, for example through the laboratories, which are further described in the assessment area Teaching and learning resources and support services.

Internal cooperation between different units at UNEC takes place through joint development of syllabuses and updating curricula, and exchange of academic staff and students between faculties. Students can take courses from different faculties and gain credits, although as mentioned later in the assessment area of Students, the number of credits students can gain per semester is limited. Furthermore, the units cooperate closely with the Public Relations sector of the Marketing and Communication department of the university in terms of information management.

UNEC's public website, managed by the Marketing and Communications department serves as an information channel for staff, students and the general public regarding the university's activities. In terms of internal communication related to teaching and learning, e-university, which was launched in the 2015-2016 academic year, can be considered an effective way of communication. Electronic communication opens new opportunities for managing the quality of education for the university.

Students have opportunities to communicate with the management, for example through the three student organizations operating at the university (the Student Youth Organization, the Student Scientific Society, and the Student Trade Union

Committee). Students give online feedback about their teachers and the teaching process, and they are quite active in communicating with the Deans and the Rector both verbally and online. Students also have the opportunity to give feedback about the examination process and its results through the university hotline during the examination period.

Based on the SER and interviews, the team came to the conclusion that the active internal communication between different levels of the management staff, teaching staff and students can be considered as a strength of the university. Most management staff were well informed about the strategic organizational reforms and strategic decisions. The university should continue to ensure that detailed information about structural changes is well documented and communicated to all staff. UNEC could enhance the effectiveness of internal communication and collaboration by setting goals for what it wants to achieve through internal communication and collaboration.

Quality management remains a challenging objective among the university's strategic development goals. In the interviews it became clear to the experts that the importance of the quality of teaching was accepted and understood by all levels of staff. However, staff described quality development as the strategy of the Rector rather than a strategy of their units and their own work. The main focus of the staff in terms of quality management was on the quality of teaching. Based on the interviews and the SER, the team could not form a clear vision of the framework for the quality management, quality culture and quality system as a whole. An overall analysis of the SER and the interviews indicated that the main objectives of UNEC's quality policy are to improve the study programmes, syllabuses, and the overall quality of teaching; to enhance the capacity of the academic staff; to improve the learning outcomes of the graduates in compliance with the local and international labour market; the internationalization of the student body and academic staff; and to monitor and assess the operations for the purpose of the management. UNEC is in the process of moving towards the European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance, as mentioned in the SER. The evaluation team would suggest that the university should focus on a set of quality values and embed the quality culture in every area of its activities. The next step would be developing benchmarking statements and metrics for the quality management in the reporting system, which would support the awareness of the staff responsible for quality management as well as the whole staff of UNEC and create an understanding of the benefit of quality work in every unit of the university.

Strengths, good practices

- The university's management is committed to reforming the organizational structure in a way that supports reaching the

institution's strategic goals.

- Internal communication between the management staff, teaching staff and students is active.
- UNEC collaborates with local and international higher education institutions widely.
- UNEC has established a systematic approach to staff appreciation through DSS.
- The use of electronic platforms such as the DocNet and e-university opens new opportunities for management.

Recommendations

- The DSS could be improved and it could become the main system for monitoring the university's operations.
- The university should consider involving more external stakeholders in appropriate decision-making processes.
- The team recommends UNEC to consider moving from a control-based management approach to a trust-based approach.
- Management procedures should be clearly described and documented for the staff.
- Benchmarking statements and metrics for quality management should be developed.
- The evaluation team encourages UNEC to work towards embedding a quality culture throughout the institution.

3 HUMAN RESOURCES							
Assessment	Fully conforms to requirements		Mostly conforms to requirements	X	Partially conforms to requirements		Does not conform to requirements
<p>Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>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.</i> ▪ <i>The number (proportion) of full-time teaching staff members is in accordance with national requirements.</i> ▪ <i>The distribution of full-time teaching staff by age and qualifications facilitates the sustainability of studies in a certain study area.</i> ▪ <i>Existence of monitoring and assessment mechanism of the teaching activity of teaching staff (quality and professionalism) in higher education institution.</i> ▪ <i>Relevance of teaching support staff to regulatory requirements (number, major etc.) in higher education institution.</i> ▪ <i>The institution monitors, supports and encourages the professional and teaching-skills development of the academic staff on a regular basis.</i> ▪ <i>Academic staff members participate in international exchange programmes, projects and conferences.</i> ▪ <i>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.</i> 							
<p>Comments/reflections, evidence</p> <p>According to UNEC’s self-evaluation report, there are several strengths in the area of human resources, but there are also many needs for improvement in this area. The significant number of highly qualified and professional staff members working at UNEC is one major source of strength for UNEC, but the university should not neglect providing training for staff to improve their teaching and research skills. There is an overall will to improve the human resources policy of the university, and the university has already started a number of reforms, like establishing the Human Resources department and designing job descriptions for senior managers.</p> <p>Regarding recruitment, there is a clear understanding at UNEC that positions should be filled by people with a relevant background and staff should know their rights and responsibilities. Based on the interviews, it was evident that the university tries to ensure</p>							



transparency in recruitment. Open vacancies are announced nationally through the UNEC website, popular newspapers and other media outlets. CVs submitted by applicants are stored in a database at UNEC, including the CVs of those applicants who are not hired. The database is used to look for possible candidates when new recruitment needs arise. Potential candidates are interviewed by a special recruitment commission before they are hired. It was evident to the evaluation team that recruiting competent people is important to UNEC. Units and departments should be encouraged to plan their own recruitment policies.

Currently the use of job descriptions is not systematic at UNEC, and not all interviewed staff were aware of their job descriptions or the responsibilities and rights they have in their position. The evaluation team recommends that job requirements should be easily accessible and systematically documented for the university's staff. In addition, the role of the Teaching Staff Trade Union could be more prominent.

As mentioned in the SER, the number of teaching staff in the university is 845, of whom 537 are full-time, and the rest are part-time. These numbers fulfil the national standards, which state that about 10 % of academic hours allocated to the departments may be fulfilled through "hour-based" teaching. Furthermore, the SER stated that the average age of the teaching staff members was 53.3 years, with the highest average in Physics and Chemistry (63.8 years) and the lowest in International Economics (35.3 years). UNEC's top management aims to recruit highly qualified teaching staff, who are competent in modern teaching techniques, have good language skills and are able to cooperate with foreign universities. Some students expressed a wish that they had younger teachers. The numbers show that one challenge for UNEC is the unequal distribution of teaching staff by age, and it will be a challenge for a number of specialities or departments in the future.

UNEC's "1 chair 1 speciality" reform aims at establishing more proficient and well organised departments, increasing the professionalism of the teaching staff and raising their qualifications. It will also ensure the distribution of qualifications. The team did not find problems in the distribution of qualifications among the faculties and departments at the moment, and the team commends the policy as ambitious.

The SER stated that there is a need for improvement in the area of monitoring and assessing teaching activities. It is noteworthy that UNEC implements a number of mechanisms and tools for monitoring and assessing the activities of the teaching staff. First of all, in order to assess the quality of teaching, UNEC implements traditional methods of monitoring through "open classes" and presentations, knowledge sharing sessions and workshops. Teaching staff are encouraged to attend each others classes and

comment on the quality and methods. However, the evaluation team did not find evidence of follow-up mechanisms based on the results of the open classes.

Secondly, the faculties and the Quality Assurance Center implement different tools to assess the teaching methodologies. Deputy Deans have been responsible for class monitoring and assessment, but currently the responsibility is being transferred to the faculty Secretaries. The Institute Secretaries in the faculties aim to assist the faculty Deans in monitoring the classes. Another supplementary structure assessing the teaching activities are the quality ambassadors, who monitor the methods and techniques applied by the teaching staff during classes. The quality ambassadors and Institute Secretaries have been given many responsibilities, and it is important that they receive the proper training for their roles. The team also suggests establishing teaching assistant positions in the departments in order to assist the instructors in class management.

Thirdly, a major tool used by the university to monitor teaching activities is the student survey, which is conducted regularly online. In the survey students assess their teachers for their teaching activities. Teachers mentioned in the interviews that they pay a lot of attention to student satisfaction in their courses, since the student assessment contributes toward their DSS points and affects their ranking.

The SER mentions that there is no system in place to regularly monitor the improvement of the academic staff's teaching skills. The evaluation team raised this question at a number of interviews and received contradictory accounts. The top management is committed to improving the capacity of teaching staff as a major criteria for establishing a world class university. UNEC implements a number of events to support capacity building of the academic staff, from international mobility to local trainings, workshops and conferences. For instance, in 2015 and 2016 trainers from Sorbonne University conducted trainings on the topics of interactive teaching methods and the development of teaching materials for 120 and 130 teaching staff respectively. The leadership skills of teachers are developed through interactive class management, summer and winter schools, and additional instruction for dissertations. However, there is no annual plan for developing the competencies of teaching staff, and the trainings and workshops seemed mainly *ad hoc*. The improvement of staff competence could be more systematic and there is a clear need to monitor its improvement.

When the staff were asked whether personal development of each staff member was provided, they usually mentioned the Differential Salary System and personal rewards given on special occasions. The DSS is aimed to assist the academic staff to

demonstrate their accomplishments in research, academic results and self-development. While many of the staff felt motivated by the DSS, the system should also address the individual development needs of staff members and include functions of monitoring and assessing the professional development of individual staff, in order to provide motivational incentives for those who do not rank at the top of the list. Currently there is no individualized approach to the competence development of staff. The Human Resources department's functions could be improved and the department should work in close collaboration with the top management. UNEC's management indicated that there was little understanding of the essence of Human Resources policy regulations. UNEC should consider implementing needs assessments and development plans for staff members.

Another strength recognized by the evaluation team is UNEC's support staff. According to the SER, the number of support staff at UNEC corresponds with the national requirements. Support staff are hired to provide technical assistance to administrative units and faculties and to provide technical assistance to the Chairs. UNEC has successfully begun to change the concept and character of the support staff. UNEC is a forerunner in transforming the purpose of the support staff from providing assistance to the Chairs to supporting the teaching activities.

UNEC has launched a number of international projects and staff participate in numerous international exchange programmes. The SER mentions UNEC's cooperation with Siegen University (Germany), Mikolos Romeris (Lithuania), Montpellier (France) and CEFAM (France), among others. Agreements with 41 Turkish universities were signed by UNEC within the Movlana programme. Cooperation with European universities has also taken place within Erasmus Mundus and Erasmus+ projects. Representatives of teaching staff have participated in exchange programmes in Macedonia and Germany, including 21 teaching staff members who participated in an exchange programme at Zikko University in 2015-2016. UNEC aims to become internationally recognised and increasing the staff's language skills is one important step to reaching this goal. UNEC's target is to become the "Harvard of the CIS." Clearly internationalisation is a high priority for UNEC, not only in words but also in action.

Strengths, good practices

- Highly qualified and professional staff members are one major strength of UNEC.
- There is a clear understanding at UNEC that positions should be filled by people with a relevant background and staff should know their rights and responsibilities.
- One of the major tools used by the university to monitor teaching activities is the online student survey.

- UNEC has successfully started to change the concept of support staff. UNEC is a forerunner in transferring the role of the support staff from providing administrative assistance to supporting teaching.
- Internationalisation is a number one priority at UNEC, which is evident in the efforts to participate in international projects and programmes.
- The “1 chair 1 speciality” policy will help mobilise professionals in the same field, establishing more proficient and well organised departments, increasing the professionalism of the teaching staff and raising their qualifications.

Recommendations

- The improvement of teaching staff’s competencies as well as the monitoring of the improvement should be systematic.
- The human resources department should receive adequate resources for providing systematic support to the competence development of staff.
- Job requirements should be easily accessible and systematically documented for the university’s staff.
- The role of the Institute Secretaries and the quality ambassadors should be clarified and developed further in order to support the development of the university’s human resources, especially the teaching staff’s competencies.

4 STUDY PROGRAMMES							
Assessment	Fully conforms to requirements		Mostly conforms to requirements		Partially conforms to requirements	X	Does not conform to requirements
<p>Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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. 							
<p>Comments/reflections, evidence</p> <p>In Azerbaijan, the design of study programmes is controlled by the Ministry of Education. UNEC's study programmes follow the national standards on higher education and are revised in five-year cycles. UNEC is aware of the expectations of the society and labour market needs, but the collection and use of that information could be more systematic. The UNEC Career Center collects data about graduate employment and feedback from employers and students about internships completed by students as part of their studies. However, this data could be used more systematically in programme design. The staff have more autonomy in designing syllabuses compared to designing study programmes. The evaluation team received several translated syllabuses from UNEC as</p>							

examples, and the team found the syllabuses impressive, with clearly determined learning outcomes, course materials and evaluation standards.

During the interviews, the team found evidence that the teaching staff at UNEC revise syllabuses constantly based on both labour market needs and student feedback. However, there do not seem to be any guidelines for how to collect and use the feedback from employers about labour market needs. According to the interviews, one of the most important matters to improve within UNEC is the quality of education. Despite the fact that currently there is no development strategy approved by the Scientific Council, the staff seem to have a clear vision of the need to improve the quality of education. Despite the shared vision of enhancing the quality of education, there was no common understanding about what the quality of education means. Nevertheless, the staff's commitment to improving the quality of education could be seen as a strength and it is in line with the institution's strategic goal of becoming a world class university.

The contents of study programmes are generally updated by revising syllabuses. The study programmes that are taught in English have a different process than study programmes in Azerbaijani. Programmes in English follow the programme design of foreign universities instead of Azerbaijani national standards. The result is that UNEC can modify the courses of the English language study programmes more often. During the interviews, it was mentioned that UNEC changes approximately 5-6 courses in the English study programmes annually to correspond with foreign programmes. It was pointed out in the interviews that UNEC should improve the use of research results in education. The team recommends considering how to strengthen the link between research and education at UNEC and how to make sure that teaching in each study programme is in line with the latest research in the given discipline. Teachers should be able to teach what they personally research. This would benefit the institution in the transformation from an educational institution to a research-oriented institution.

The objectives and intended learning outcomes are clearly defined in syllabuses. During the interviews, students were unfamiliar with the term "learning outcome," but they seemed to be aware of what they are supposed to learn during their courses, which is much more important than knowing the correct terminology. Students in the interviews were not familiar with the graduation requirements of their study programmes, perhaps because most of the students interviewed were in their first or second year of studies, so graduation still seems far for them. However, it would be useful for students to know the graduation requirements early on in their studies, and UNEC should consider improving communication to students on this matter. Admission to the university is carried out by the Ministry of Education, so UNEC's influence on admissions is limited.

The workload in courses offered by UNEC is defined according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Some students noted that the workload is not always the same, even though the number of credits is. Although the issue of differences in the workload of courses with similar credits did not seem to be very important for students, UNEC should consider how to make sure that the workload for each course is in line with the given credits.

UNEC assures that internships support the learning outcomes by approving the companies where students can do internships and assigning teachers to supervise students during their practical training. Students can find their own internship placement, but the Internship department of UNEC checks if the internship place is suitable for achieving the intended learning outcomes. Students cannot complete an internship at a company which does not have an internship agreement with UNEC. After the internship, the Chair collects feedback from the company and submits the feedback to the Internship department and the Dean's office. The process of assuring the quality of practical training seems to be functioning. However, the number of graduates employed in their former internship places is surprisingly low, and the team recommends UNEC to pay attention to this when improving the practical training.

The online system e-university was broadly praised in the interviews by students. E-university is further discussed in the section on Teaching and learning resources and support services, but it is noteworthy in relation to study programmes that e-university seemed to function more as a support service for teaching and a channel of communication on issues related to the studies, not as an educational technology. UNEC should find out if it is possible to use e-university or some other software to make the learning process more interactive.

During the interviews, some teachers mentioned that they use a variety of teaching methods, such as interactive teaching and case studies. UNEC should consider providing training of such methods to every teacher and possibly even monitor the use of those methods. At the moment the use of modern and innovative teaching and learning methods seemed to be dependent on an individual teacher rather than a systematic UNEC approach. Besides training new teaching methods to teachers, it should be considered if UNEC should have common standards or guidelines for the use of different teaching and learning methods. UNEC could use the quality ambassadors when creating standards for the use of teaching and learning methods and monitoring the use of those methods.

UNEC does not have a system for regularly reviewing study programmes, except the programmes taught in English, which are

reviewed annually and changes are made if needed. Even in the English language programmes it is not clear if students and other relevant stakeholders are involved in the review process. UNEC should consider creating a process for regularly reviewing each study programme and syllabus, and students as well as external stakeholders should be involved in the review process. An annual review of every study programme would probably be too heavy of a workload, but some regularity is needed. The reviews should probably concentrate on syllabuses rather than study programmes, as study programmes are dictated by the national standards.

In addition to reviewing the study programmes, UNEC should consider creating a mechanism for collecting more feedback from stakeholders regarding study programmes. According to the interviews, the Career Center collects feedback from employers regarding the practical trainings. This system should be utilised to collect feedback also from employers of graduates and alumni, and a process should be created for using the collected feedback. These external stakeholders or at least their feedback should be included in the planning of the study programmes and syllabuses.

UNEC collects statistical information about the employment of graduates, but there is currently no system for collecting feedback from graduates about their satisfaction on the degree and studies at UNEC. Feedback could be collected when students graduate, or preferably a few years after their graduation. Information from graduates could be useful in the development of study programmes. The Career Center has many good activities aimed to increase the employment of graduates, but its role should be more structured.

Strengths, good practices

- The clear desire of staff to improve the quality of education is a major strength for UNEC.
- The syllabuses are a strength of UNEC, and they contain all the information needed.
- Mandatory internships in every programme with selected companies to guarantee the quality of internships is a good practice.

Recommendations

- UNEC should consider having common standards or guidelines for using different learning methods.
- Teachers should be offered more pedagogical training in order to raise the quality of teaching across the university.
- UNEC should consider having regular reviews of study programmes and syllabuses. Students and external stakeholders

should be involved in these reviews.

- The team recommends UNEC to consider how to strengthen the link between research and education and how to make sure that teaching in each study programme is in line with the latest research in the given discipline.
- The Career Center has information about graduate employability and labour market needs and this information should be used structurally in the planning of study programmes.

5 STUDENTS							
Assessment	Fully conforms to requirements		Mostly conforms to requirements	X	Partially conforms to requirements		Does not conform to requirements
<p>Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Students' rights and responsibilities are clearly defined; procedures to process complaints and proposals of students, and appeals mechanism regarding examination outcomes are in place.</i> ▪ <i>The system for the detection and prevention of academic fraud (including anti-plagiarism mechanisms) is in place.</i> ▪ <i>Students participate in decision-making bodies as well as in elections of student unions.</i> ▪ <i>Student assessment is objective, consistent, transparent and supports the achievement of learning outcomes.</i> ▪ <i>Flexible leaning opportunities are provided for the students. Recognition of prior higher education qualifications, periods of study in abroad and prior learning are in place.</i> ▪ <i>The higher education institution supports the international mobility of students, and the students' participation in international mobility is increasing.</i> ▪ <i>The institution has mechanisms to support the internationalisation of the student body.</i> ▪ <i>Graduates are competitive in the labour market in their specialty area and the institution monitors the employment of its graduates.</i> 							
<p>Comments/reflections, evidence</p> <p>Currently 17,857 students study at UNEC in Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral programmes taught in Azerbaijani, English, Turkish and Russian. UNEC also offers distance and part-time studies, coordinated by the Center for Distance, Part-Time and Continuing Education. Among students pursuing careers in the fields of economics and business, the university is a very popular place to study. The feedback received during the site visit showed that the university enjoys popularity not only among applicants to the university but also those currently studying there. Most students gave positive feedback about their university and expressed their support for the university, which does much in order to be rated highly.</p> <p>Having observed aspects related to the student body, it can be said that the university is mostly in line with the requirements set in the criteria. The team recognises UNEC's efforts to improve the learning environment through many projects related to facilitation, internationalization and counselling for students. Although a positive attitude prevailed at the university, the</p>							

evaluation team did note some points for further improvement.

The team learned that the system for proposals and complaints is very useful for the students. Students mentioned that in most cases the management listened to their proposals and acted upon them. Students gave examples of cases when their suggestions to the management of the university led to action. For example, on one campus students had complained to the Rector that their cafeteria was overly crowded, and in response the building received mini-cafeterias on each floor. In another case, a student complained about a scheduling conflict between exams and volunteering at a major international event in Baku, and the problem was solved by rescheduling the exams.

Although a system for complaints and proposals is in place, and students are aware of how to propose changes at the university and how to direct their complaints, addressing proposals and complaints directly to the Rector seemed to be the most popular line of action. While students might find this system effective, it can be very laboursome for the top management and some of the issues could be delegated directly to the faculties and departments. The evaluation team recommends the university to improve the feedback system in a sustainable manner, and to consider developing procedures for students to give feedback also to lower levels of management.

The main form of involving students in decision-making at the university is through student organizations, which are represented on the university's Scientific Council. The Student Youth Organization is the largest student organization in the university, and their elections are carried out as follows:

- The heads of student organizations within each faculty are appointed on behalf of the Dean of the faculty and the President of the Organization.
- The Committee of the Organization is formed out of the Heads of each faculty.
- In order to elect a new President, the election day is announced at the university. The Committee and all students are invited to the Election day.
- At the beginning of the Election day, the students approve the Committee with their votes.
- As soon as the Committee is approved, it makes its decision upon the new President of the organization.

The student organizations are mostly focused on organizing social events and activities for students. The team recommends that the student organizations should also include projects for the development of education at UNEC to their yearly plans. The role of

students could also be strengthened by allowing students to directly elect the members of the student organizations.

Furthermore, the Student Rector project is another approach to involving students in management. According to the SER, the Student Rector project was established in the previous academic year in order to engage students in the management of the university. The team found proof in the interviews that the Student Rector is effective in supporting and advising students on academic and social issues and acting as a channel of communication between the management and students. The project seemed to be appreciated among interviewees. The Student Rector is commended by the team as a good practice.

UNEC takes actions in order to provide maximum transparency in the teaching and learning process. The university has an anti-plagiarism system in place for checking theses. Most of the UNEC community members were familiar with the anti-plagiarism system. Interviewed staff members mentioned that the system functions very well. The evaluation team recommends UNEC to widen the use of the anti-plagiarism system from being applied only for theses to applying it on course work as well.

Another example of transparency is related to the mid-term and final examinations. UNEC has a long-term practice of administering examinations for its students. In 80 % of the study programmes, exams are computer-based. The system for administering exams is monitored regularly. The multiple-choice system that is currently in place provides transparency; however, in most cases it does not support the learning outcomes of the courses. Students mentioned that usually they simply memorize the answers without learning the content of the course. The university should consider differentiating the types of exams between different courses in order for exams to better support the learning outcomes.

The students' learning experience at UNEC is enhanced by several international exchange programmes offered by UNEC, which have already been mentioned in the report. Almost all of the students the team met during the site visit were aware of these programmes. The university recognizes the ECTS gained while studying abroad, although students might run into problems if the curricula of their studies abroad does not fit into their studies at UNEC, in which case some courses might have to be repeated. Unfortunately, the team could not acquire data regarding the number of students participating in exchange programmes. However, the team was told that the aforementioned programmes were only recently launched.

Furthermore, the university is working to not only send students abroad, but also bring more students from other countries to UNEC. During the site visit, the team interviewed staff from English-language programmes within the International School of

Economics and UNEC Business School. According to their Deans, the number of international students is currently 5 % and increasing. The newly created online application system for international applicants makes it easier to apply to UNEC from abroad. Moreover, another major project completed by the university is signing a dual-diploma agreement with some of the leading universities in the field, London School of Economics and Political Science being one of them. Thus, the university is more attractive and appealing for applicants from abroad.

One of the major factors motivating students in their studies is flexible learning opportunities. According to the interviewees, the university does not allow students to take the amount of courses they want during a semester. Thus, it can be concluded that the university could increase the flexibility of the studies.

UNEC is the leading institution that trains specialist in finance and economy in Azerbaijan, therefore specialists in the public and private sectors related to those fields are for a large part graduates of UNEC. According to the SER, the average number of employment among Bachelor's degree students who graduated in 2015-2016 is 30 %, while 43 % of the Master's students who graduated in the same year are employed. As mentioned already, UNEC has a functioning Career Center and based on the information from the site visit, the university organizes career fairs each year, where representatives of about 100 companies participate. Besides the career fairs, the Career Center presented ideas for improving the counselling services for graduates. Furthermore, the Career Center staff presented the idea of creating a website (jobs.unec.edu.az), which would serve as a portal between students and employers. The students expressed in the interviews that they need to learn more practical skills in their studies in order to have better employment prospects, and the university should take this into consideration.

Strengths, good practices

- A system for proposals and complaints is in place and it is useful for students. Students mentioned that in most cases the management listened to their proposals and acted upon them.
- UNEC takes action in order to provide maximum transparency in the teaching and learning process.
- The university has strong relations with many other universities and is actively working to find new international partners. This provides exchange opportunities for students, which is a strength for UNEC in the national context.
- The university is becoming more attractive and appealing for applicants from abroad.
- The Student Rector is commended by the team as a good practice.

Recommendations

- Students could be more closely involved in the development of education at UNEC.
- The university should consider developing the feedback system so that students could submit improvement ideas and complaints directly to lower levels of management.
- The exams should be designed according to the planned learning outcomes in each course, to support the achievement of those learning outcomes.
- The university should consider reviewing the regulations regarding the limit of ECTS that students can take and to focus on providing more flexible learning opportunities.
- The evaluation team recommends UNEC to widen the use of the anti-plagiarism system from theses to course work.

6 RESEARCH ACTIVITIES							
Assessment	Fully conforms to requirements		Mostly conforms to requirements		Partially conforms to requirements	X	Does not conform to requirements
<p>Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>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.</i> ▪ <i>The achievement of the objectives and the impact research activities are regularly measured and analysed (scientific and educational publications, doctoral students, patents etc.).</i> ▪ <i>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.</i> ▪ <i>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).</i> ▪ <i>Students are involved in research and development activities; the supervision of students' research papers (seminar papers, applied projects, final thesis) is well organised.</i> ▪ <i>The institution participates in different regional and international scientific and research networks in their areas of academic activities.</i> ▪ <i>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.</i> 							
<p>Comments/reflections, evidence</p> <p>UNEC's Rector emphasised that one of the missions of the university is to ensure that UNEC becomes a research-oriented university. This requirement was mentioned in the National Development Strategy of Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan, signed by President Ilham Aliyev in October 2013. UNEC's Rector also mentioned that different methods for identifying the needs of the society and labour market should be implemented and the interests of all stakeholders should be considered. As mentioned earlier, UNEC does not have an approved development strategy yet and therefore there is no strategic document where the scientific and research activities are defined as part of the mission and the development plan. According to some members of the</p>							

management, scientific and research activities are the priority for academic staff.

UNEC already implements some research projects, among which are seven projects implemented in partnership with different stakeholders, such as SOCAR (State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic) and the National Science Foundation. Besides being one of the largest universities offering economics-related studies in the entire south Caucasus region, UNEC is also among the three largest universities in Azerbaijan. The scientific and research capacity of the university is notable, and there is room for growth in the application of that capacity.

The SER stated that 1,068 articles and 30 monographs were published at UNEC in 2015-2016, as well as 265 articles published in international journals, including some Thomson Reuters listed journals. UNEC motivates staff to publish in highly-rated journals. According to the SER, UNEC staff members participated in 509 scientific conferences during the report period. Scientific work is usually conducted in two directions: a) staffs' research areas (PhD dissertations and degree defences) and b) staffs' research activities based on their teaching activities. The first type of research activities are conducted through the Doctoral Studies department under the overall supervision of the Vice rector for sciences. Currently there are 131 part-time and full-time doctoral students and independent researchers enrolled in the doctoral studies. The second type of research activities are usually conducted in the Chairs, and the teaching staff annually report to the Chair or department. Academic staff members annually plan their research activities based on the teaching areas. Research activities of this type are usually conducted in the form of journal articles and conference presentations.

The DSS is aimed at assessing the scientific, teaching and self-development activities of the teaching staff. Those who publish articles get higher rankings. The top 100 academic staff members get salary raises. The team notes that while UNEC has established a system of awarding and promotion, there is a need to ensure high quality standards of research at UNEC. UNEC should install techniques and methods to contribute to the quality standards of research. UNEC has purchased an anti-plagiarism system from a Polish company, which aims to identify cases of fraud and assists in preventing fraud in academic and research activities.

UNEC organises different specialised courses for the academic staff. For instance, trainers of Sarbanes University regularly conduct trainings for staff, organized at the Guba recreation center. Trainings cover topics such as interactive teaching methods, however one additional focus of these trainings could be strengthening the research skills of staff.

The team is aware that purchasing access to international research databases can be very expensive. The team received contradictory accounts from staff on whether or not they had access to the Thomson Reuters databases. The team would recommend the university to provide all teaching and research staff access to reputable international research databases.

UNEC administration plans fundraising activities for student projects in economy, education and research. The Business Center offers consulting services, including short trainings and consulting. UNEC also holds memberships in different international and regional organizations and associations, which provides opportunities to learn more about the new trends and policies in education as well as share knowledge. International memberships provide the UNEC with short-term services. The university has hosted five conferences of associations, and more than 200 university rectors have visited UNEC. UNEC also benefited from the memberships by establishing bilateral cooperation with different universities.

The SER provides examples of funding received to conduct research and scientific activities. However, the evaluation team did not find established mechanisms at UNEC that would support conducting scientific and research activities. Most international research was due to either personal achievements of the teaching staff or the university's participation in international programmes, such as the Mevlana Project, Erasmus+ projects, and bilateral cooperation with German and Macedonian universities. UNEC also lacks a strategy for contributing to the international competitiveness of research and science. Research conducted at UNEC could be developed through strengthening the centers, laboratories and research institutes with close ties to the labour market and industry, and ensuring funding for research projects by UNEC researchers.

UNEC regularly organizes scientific meetings and roundtables for students and the Student Scientific Society is responsible for regularly collecting scientific articles of students and organising annual conferences. Bachelor's students with a high GPA (over 91) submit diploma projects. Staff highlighted the university's Business Incubators, which enable students to realise the results of their research activities. Students' ideas are raised at the Center for Business Incubators and are usually supported there. At the same time, the departments and faculties regularly conduct scientific competitions among the students, and students are encouraged to establish different youth groups such as the young bankers' school. However, one improvement area for UNEC is systematic teaching of research skills for students. Courses and training on research methodologies and techniques should be offered to students. The laboratories are a good example of bridging the gap between studies and the labour market, and a research aspect could be added to the laboratories. Overall, UNEC should strengthen the involvement of students in research

activities.

Strengths, good practices

- Staff are motivated to publish their research especially in international journals, and publication is rewarded through the DSS.
- The number of PhD and post-doctors at UNEC is high and establishes good opportunities to apply research outcomes.
- UNEC is a member in different international and regional organizations and associations, which provides opportunities to learn about new trends and policies in education as well as share knowledge and establish bilateral cooperation with.
- The Business Incubators are a good practice which enables students to raise new ideas and apply the results of their research activities.

Recommendations

- UNEC should formulate a strategy for contributing to internationally competitive research and install procedures for ensuring the quality of research. It is necessary to ensure the financial resources for achieving the goal of becoming a research-oriented university.
- Additional mechanisms should be established by the university to support the staff in conducting scientific and research activities: strengthening staff's competencies, skills, and resources to conduct research activities.
- Research conducted at UNEC could be developed through strengthening the centers, laboratories and research institutes with close ties to the labour market and industry, and ensuring funding for research projects by UNEC researchers.
- Access to international scientific databases is integral to improving research activities.
- Courses and training on research methodologies and skills should be offered to students.
- Overall, UNEC should strengthen the involvement of students in research and development activities.

7 TEACHING AND LEARNING RESOURCES AND SUPPORT SERVICES							
Assessment	Fully conforms to requirements		Mostly conforms to requirements	X	Partially conforms to requirements		Does not conform to requirements
<p>Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>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.</i> ▪ <i>Up-to-date learning materials are used in the process of teaching and learning.</i> ▪ <i>Tutoring service provided by the institutions corresponds to the needs of the student body and takes into account special needs of individual students.</i> ▪ <i>The institution is providing internship opportunities, employment and career development services for students (career centre, alumni coordination system etc.)</i> ▪ <i>The institution recognises equal treatment of students regardless of their nationality, language, sex, social status, position and religion.</i> ▪ <i>The institution supports students' learning by providing different kinds of additional support services (dormitory, canteen, medical care, sport facilities, financial assistance etc.)</i> 							
<p>Comments/reflections, evidence</p> <p>UNEC has created appropriate teaching and learning infrastructure and possesses a good amount of specialized rooms for teaching and learning. According to the SER, UNEC has four functional campuses (one of which is currently under renovation) with 217 teaching spaces. The evaluation team conducted a campus tour during the site visit, and according to the team's observations, classrooms are supplied with the necessary equipment for teaching. The rooms are divided according to their function: theory-related teaching, practical subjects and laboratories. Rooms for practical subjects are equipped with computers. However, the computers do not necessarily have specialized software programmes installed, leaving the issue up to the teachers to solve. The team recommends the university to further develop efficient technical equipment in order to improve the teaching and learning process.</p> <p>Laboratories have been created at UNEC in collaboration with external stakeholders to enhance the practical skills of students.</p>							

UNEC and the State Committee for Securities of the Republic of Azerbaijan have jointly established a Finance Laboratory on one campus to enable students to witness ongoing trading activities in financial markets and develop analytical decision-making skills. Moreover, the Bank of Baku has created a laboratory to ensure realistic communication with the corporate sector. The Innovative Banking laboratory has been set up jointly with Kapital Bank with the aim of training highly qualified specialists who meet the requirements of the banking sector and to teach students not only theoretical, but also practical skills. In addition, to enhance the practical skills of Bachelor's and Master's degree students, Virtual Enterprise has been created at UNEC as part of the Social Protection Development Project implemented jointly by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population and World Bank. The evaluation team recognises the laboratories as a good practice for improving students' practical skills. The evaluation team recommends the university to enhance the effective use of these laboratories and specialized rooms in the teaching and learning process.

UNEC has libraries in four different buildings with a total number of 267,678 books, including teaching material, foreign literature, fiction and scientific books. The main library is located on the main campus. In addition, the university has launched an online library with 2,648 books in five languages and 70,000 e-catalogues. Based on the campus tour, it was apparent that the number of up-to-date books in English was limited. The evaluation team would recommend the university to enhance access to e-books. Electronic services are mainly located on only one campus.

The university has an agreement with the leading university libraries in Azerbaijan and students can access them. UNEC has a new cooperation with Thomson Reuters, which enables academic staff to have access to published research and articles in journals and get brief information about the publications in the Web of Science scientific citation indexing database. However, despite some claims that all staff had access to the Thomson Reuters database, the staff interviews gave the team the impression that not all staff knew if access to such databases existed. The evaluation team views it essential that the university provides its staff with access to up-to-date electronic research journals in their field of teaching.

In the interviews, students praised the e-university system, where they can find practically all the material used in their courses. E-university serves as an online platform where staff can share electronic timetables, teaching material, exams, score calculations, syllabuses and electronic journals with students. Course material and syllabuses are uploaded to the students' personal online cabinets. Furthermore, the student satisfaction survey is found in e-university, along with information on the teaching, research and self-development activities of the academic staff, creating a transparent and efficient educational environment. In addition,

through e-university students can also:

- Check their grades and exam results;
- Appeal exam results, lowering the threshold for placing appeals as it can be done online;
- Pick up lessons they have missed, allowing students to keep up the pace and not lose motivation;

Students mentioned that they use e-university on a daily basis, but in order to take full advantage of e-university, UNEC should consider providing wireless internet access, opportunities to charge laptops, and shared computers for students and staff to use on all campuses.

The use of up-to-date learning materials at the university is in the developing phase. The International School of Economics, UNEC Business School and SABAH groups are recognised as most successful in using up-to-date learning materials. The Schools also have their own libraries. According to the team's observations, academic staff use textbooks from different countries, mostly from Europe. The Translation Center of UNEC translates up-to-date materials from different languages for the effective organization of learning and teaching process. Teachers and students often use e-resources. However, older theoretical materials are still used at the university to some extent. The evaluation team recommends emphasising the relevance of teaching materials.

UNEC also supports teaching and learning by providing a tutoring service. The SER describes that one tutor is assigned per every 100 students. In accordance with the Rules on Organization of Education in Bachelor and Master Degree Levels, in public higher education institutions one tutor should be assigned for a group of students not less than 100. The maximum number of students for per tutor is defined as 100-700. The newly established Institute of Secretary in the faculties will be dealing with tutoring as one of their tasks.

Internship opportunities are provided for students as part of the Bachelor's degree studies. Students are sent to relevant enterprises and organizations to develop their practical skills. The internship procedures at UNEC allow the students to transfer their theoretical knowledge to practical skills. In addition, the Department for the Organization of Undergraduate Training defines and organizes procedures for undergraduate training on research and pedagogical practicum of Bachelor's and Master's degree students. The evaluation team recommends that the university should pay more attention to integrating the internship experience as part of the teaching process.

The Career Center has been created to increase the employability of graduates. The Center assists students with employment through career fairs. The Career Center also offers students opportunities to develop their careers by providing a database of local and foreign companies, presenting students' resumes to companies and negotiating for employment, creating a database of students and graduates, consulting graduates in their field of speciality to support career growth, organizing discussions with local and foreign experts from the public and private sectors, supporting the movement of volunteers, conducting studies in the labor market, analyzing employers' qualification requirements, proposing improvements to curricula, collecting data about new vacancies, identifying and supporting talented students, and keeping in touch with graduates, tracking their career growth and involving them with activities of the Center. During the site visit the team was informed that alumni coordination is a newly added function of the Career Center in its initial stage of development. Periodic alumni meetings are organized by the Career Center and Dean's offices. Although internships, the university's relations with external stakeholders and the Career Center support the employability of students, mainly it is up to the graduates to find a job. The university may wish to support and enhance the effectiveness of the Center by reviewing its regulations. It is also recommended that UNEC would add new tools to increase the employability of UNEC's graduates.

Different kinds of support services are provided for students to support their learning. The university also has one out-patient clinic, two medical aid stations, four canteens, three volleyball courts, chess hall, and two gyms. In addition, the university possesses a Health and Recreation Center in Guba. Guest houses are available for UNEC's academic quests. It is recommended to find solutions for the dormitory problems of UNEC's local and international students.

The evaluation team did not encounter evidence of unequal treatment of students during the evaluation process. The team encourages UNEC to ensure the equal treatment of students through documented principles.

Strengths, good practices

- UNEC has appropriate and well maintained teaching and learning infrastructure.
- The evaluation team recognises the laboratories created at UNEC in collaboration with external stakeholders as a strength in attempting to enhance the practical skills of students.
- Various activities implemented by the Career Center are a strength of UNEC.

- Extracurricular internship opportunities are a good practice, adding to the relevant practical skills possessed by students.
- The e-library and electronic access to teaching material through e-university are also good practices recognised by the team.

Recommendations

- The evaluation team recommends the university to emphasise the relevance of teaching materials and improve modern technical resources and the efficient use of technical equipment in the teaching and learning process.
- The university should enhance access to up-to-date e-books and especially electronic research journals in the university's fields of teaching and research. UNEC should also develop the scope of journals and books available.
- UNEC should consider providing wireless internet access, opportunities to charge laptops, and shared computers for students and staff to use on all campuses.
- The regulations of the Career Center should be reviewed, and more support and resources should be provided to the Center in order to enhance the effectiveness of its services and its connections with external stakeholders. It is also recommended that UNEC would add new ways to increase the employability of UNEC's graduates.
- The team encourages UNEC to ensure the equal treatment of students through documented principles of equality.

Annex 1: Site visit programme to UNEC

WEDNESDAY – APRIL 5

- 9.30—11.00 Top Management
- 11.30—13.00 Deans and Directors
- 13.00—14.00 Lunch
- 14.00—15.00 Scientific Council
- 15.15—16.30 Teaching and research staff
- 16.45—17.30 Quality assurance staff
- 17.45—18.30 Student representatives

THURSDAY – APRIL 6

- 9.30—10.30 Study programme in Finance - Staff
- 10.45—11.45 Study programme in Finance - Students
- 12.00—13.00 Support services
- 13.00—14.00 Lunch
- 14.00—14.45 Tour of the campus and learning environments
- 14.45—15.30 Travel between campuses
- 15.30—16.30 Study programme in Business and management - Staff
- 16.45—17.45 Study programme in Business and management - Students

FRIDAY – APRIL 7

- 10.00—11.00 Study programme in Economy - Staff
- 11.15—12.15 Study programme in Economy - Students
- 12.15—13.00 Travel between campuses
- 13.00—14.00 Lunch
- 14.00—15.00 Career center and Human Resources Department
- 16.00—16.30 Final meeting with the Top Management

