TWINNING AZERBAIJAN

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

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

**EU Short Term Expert Mission Report**

**1. Basic Information**

**Component and Activity:**

Component: 4. Standards and Guidelines for QA in HE

Activity: 4.5 Pilot Evaluations

**Name of the Expert:** Ms Hilla Aurén

**Dates of the Mission:** 20 – 24 February 2017

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

 Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA)

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

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

In April 2016 a Drafting Group was appointed by the Ministry of Education to work on a proposal for AzSG. A draft manual for the pilot evaluations was discussed with the Advisory Group in a seminar in June 2016. The draft was published on the Twinning project’s website in order to get feedback on the assessment areas and criteria. Amendments were made to the manual based on the feedback. The capacity of the pilot institutions to conduct a self-evaluation was supported through trainings and events in several previous missions. The self-evaluation reports were submitted by the three pilot universities in January-February 2017 and have been translated or are currently undergoing translation to English.

The main aims of the pilot evaluations have been set as: supporting the strategic management of institutions, providing external feedback to the institutions’ own internal quality assurance procedures as well as informing the internal and external stakeholders of the compliance of the institutions’ quality assurance with the ESG. The pilot evaluations will have an institutional approach with the focus on teaching and learning. The evaluation report will provide the pilot institutions with information regarding their strengths and good practices as well as recommendations for the institutions’ further development.

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

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

In Activity 4.5, the Standards and Guidelines are tested in pilot evaluations at three higher education institutions – Azerbaijan State Economic University, Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University and Azerbaijan Technical University. The objective of the first mission of Activity 4.5 was to prepare for the pilots by visiting the three pilot evaluation universities and meeting with the relevant staff to provide information on the arrangements of the pilots.

**4. Time Schedule of the Mission**

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| **Date** | **Activities/Meetings**BC experts met (title and institution) | **Remarks** |
| 20.2.2017 | - Meeting of STEs - MoE: Kick-off meeting - ANO: Meeting with the staff of ANO to define the main topics for discussion during the mission - Participants from MoE and ANO: Tofig Ahmadov, Vusala Gurbanova, Aytaj Pashayeva, Tarana Mammadova, Anar Muradov, Elmira Manafova, Marziya Aghayeva, Konul Ibadova, Tofig Musatafayev- STEs Heli Mattisen, Hilla Aurén - RTA’s team Reijo Aholainen, RTA assistant Aytaj Atakishiyeva, Language assistant Tarlan Arzumanov |  |
| 21.2.2017 | Azerbaijan State Economic University- Meeting with the Rector and the self-evaluation team, briefing of the site visit for the pilot evaluation- Participants: Adalat Ibadov, Shahin Bayramov, Rasim Sharifov, Sevda Hajibayova, Humay Agayeva, Anar Huseynov, Mehriban Maharramova, Afet Jafarova, Reshad Maharramov, Navai Aliyev, İnara Rzayeva, Ulviyya Rasulova, Ragif Gasimov, Mirsahib Eminov, Fatima Aliyeva- ANO: Tofig Ahmadov, Elshan Nuriyev, Tarana Mammadova, Anar Muradov- RTA’s team- STEs Helka Kekäläinen, Heli Mattisen, Hilla Aurén- ANO: Discussion of ANO’s accreditation standards with ANO team- Participants: Tofig Ahmadov, Elshan Nuriyev, Tarana Mammadova, Anar Muradov, Farida Huseynova; RTA team, STEs Helka Kekäläinen, Heli Mattisen, Hilla Aurén |  |
| 22.2.2017 | Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University- Meeting with the Rector and the self-evaluation team, briefing of the site visit for the pilot evaluation- Participants: Jafar Jafarov, Gamar Isayeva, Leyla Aliyeva, Munavvar Rajabova, Konul Asgarova, Farida Huseynova, Anvar Imanov, Yashar Huseyneliyev, Asef Kazimov, Shahla Ahmadova, Senan Aliyev- ANO: Tofig Ahmadov, Elshan Nuriyev, Tarana Mammadova, Anar Muradov- RTA’s team- STEs Helka Kekäläinen, Heli Mattisen, Hilla Aurén- Project Steering committee meeting at MoE |  |
| 23.2.2017 | Azerbaijan Technical University - Meeting with the Vice Rector and the self-evaluation team, briefing of the site visit for the pilot evaluation- Participants: Khalig Yahudov, Natig Ahmadov, Ali Khalilov, Elvin Bakhtiyarli, Mammadaslan Guliyev, Mehman Binnatov, Israil Elyazov, Huseyn Mirzayev, Mirzali Seyidzade, Fuad Mammadov, Nilufar Rahimova, Gabil Hashimov, Akif Bakhshiyev, Rafayil Ahmadov, Elchin Rzayev- ANO: Tofig Ahmadov, Konul Ibadova, Tarana Mammadova, Anar Muradov- RTA’s team- STEs Helka Kekäläinen, Heli Mattisen, Hilla Aurén- ANO: Discussion of Accreditations Rules with ANO team.- Participants: Tofig Ahmadov, Elshan Nuriyev, Tarana Mammadova, Anar Murado, RTA’s team, STEs Helka Kekäläinen, Heli Mattisen, Hilla Aurén |  |
| 24.2.2017 | MoE |  |

**5. Achievement of the Expected Results**

The meetings at the pilot evaluation universities - Azerbaijan State Economic University on February 21st, at Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University on February 22nd and at Azerbaijan Technical University on February 23rd - were carried out successfully. The STE was accompanied by the MS Project Leader, the MS Junior Project Leader, staff from the Accreditation and Nostrification Office as well as the RTA’s team. The delegation were welcomed by the Rectors and Vice-Rectors of the universities, who assured their satisfaction with participating in the pilot evaluations. The meetings were attended by the staff involved in the self-evaluation process and the contact persons from each university. During the meetings, the STE reviewed the aims of the evaluation, the ethical principles (code of conduct) of the evaluation group, and provided information regarding the schedule, programme, interviews, composition of the evaluation group and the reporting process. The STE also informed the universities of what is expected from them in preparing and conducting the site visits. Discussions took place at each university regarding who should be invited to the interviews. The universities also had an opportunity to comment and ask questions regarding the evaluation process. Some of the questions included who to consider as external stakeholders for the university, and how syllabi are reviewed in the evaluation.

In addition, several organisational issues regarding the pilot evaluations were discussed and decided during the mission between the Project Leaders, STE, RTA’s office and in consultation with the MoE and ANO staff. These issues included the compensation for local participants in the evaluations groups, the attendance of observers and the training provided for the evaluation groups at the beginning of the site visit weeks.

**6. Unexpected Results**

An issue that rose during the mission was that the same student representative had been assigned to all three evaluation groups, causing an unfair workload for the student. The RTA’s office will try to recruit other students for two of the evaluation groups.

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

The participation of some of the local experts in the evaluation groups still needs to be confirmed, including the student representatives for the Azerbaijan State Economic University and the Azerbaijan Technical University.

**8. Recommendations for Future Missions**

The evaluation groups have a considerable amount of work ahead of them, and the role of the project managers as well as chairs is crucial. It is necessary to coordinate the process among the FINEEC and EKKA project managers, in order to implement the three pilot evaluations in a similar manner in all three universities.

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

The mission provided a good opportunity to discuss the next steps in the pilot evaluations, and arrangements for the pilot evaluations are underway. The pilot evaluations will provide an excellent learning opportunity for all.

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