TWINNING AZERBAIJAN

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

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

**EU Short Term Expert Mission Report**

**1. Basic Information**

**Component and Activity:**

Component: 3. Developing AzQF

Activity: 3.1 EHEA and QF EHEA Training

**Name of the Experts:** Ms Maiki Udam, Mr Olav Aarna

**Dates of the Mission:** 15-19 February 2016

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

Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA)

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

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

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

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

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

Only few national educational standards and curricula clearly define LOs, but this will have to change, once the AzQF is adopted. LOs are the basis for moving Azerbaijan towards a competence based higher education system. There need to be more flexible ways of learning, while assessment and certification need careful quality assurance.

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

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

The objective of the mission was to identify the level of the knowledge of QF-EHEA, to update local experts on the QF-EHEA, external reference points and EHEA trends and practice, and to map relevant rules, regulations and practice.

Methods/tasks were consisting of interviews/working meetings with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and universities’ management, teaching staff and students, and of a one-day seminar for the MoE and universities’ staff.

**4. Time Schedule of the Mission**

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| **Date** | **Activities/Meetings**  BC experts met  (title and institution) | **Remarks** |
| 15.02.2016 | Meeting with RTA, assistants and MoE representatives Mr Azad Akhundov – BC CL III, Science and Higher Education Department senior Advisor; Mr Emin Amrullayev - Head of the Educational Programmes Development Department, BC Project Leader; Ms Vusala Gurbanova - Leading Adviser of the Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department, Component Leader II; Mr Tofig Ahmadov - Senior Adviser, the Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department, RTA  Counterpart  Preparation of the mission and trainings |  |
| 16.02.2016 | 1) Interviews with MoE representatives. Topics: EQF, AzQF  2) Interviews in Qafqaz University (Adm. Staff, Academic staff, Students) | List of people who participated in the meetings is in Annex 1 |
| 17.02.2016 | 1) Interviews in Baku State University (Adm. Staff, Academic staff, Students)  2) Interviews in Azerbaijan Technical University (Adm. Staff, Academic staff, Students) |  |
| 18.02.2016 | Presenting and leading a workshop at the joint seminar “Linking Azerbaijani qualifications to the EHEA and Lifelong Learning” with the MoE and ETF | List of people who participated in the seminar is in Annex 3 |
| 19.02.2016 | Report writing  Mission review and planning of next mission with MoE representatives and RTA |  |

**5. Achievement of the Expected Results**

The expected results were:

* trained local experts,
* training material/reference literature & documentation,
* increased knowledge on Bologna developments among the experts.

All expected **results were** **achieved**. The programme of the seminar is provided in Annex 2, the list of participants in Annex 3, and the presentations of the seminar, including references, in Annex 4.

**6. Unexpected Results**

It turned out in the beginning of the seminar workshop that the draft document of AzQF was not in the participants’ folder and the participants were not informed about the document before the event either. Although the RTA team was able to solve the problem rather quickly, it caused some unnecessary stress for all counterparts – the experts, organisers and participants, and somewhat diminished the expected outcomes of the workshop. A MoE representative explained, that as the Decree on AzQF is not yet approved by the Cabinet of Ministers and is still an informal document, it cannot be disseminated to the university representatives. This indicates that transparency and stakeholders’ involvement is not yet a common practice in Azerbaijan.

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

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

**8. Recommendations for Future Missions**

It would be highly recommendable that the respective counterparts at the MoE give constructive feedback to the training programmes and materials well in advance in order to maximize the usefulness of trainings.

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

Our conclusions and observations are based on the interviews conducted with the representatives of the MoE and three universities (see p.4 – Time Schedule), and on discussions during the seminar. The main aim of the EQF, the QF-EHEA as well as of the AzQF is to support recognition of learning, independent on the learning paths and places. Qualifications frameworks focus on LOs more than on procedures, and an essential part of their implementation is involvement of stakeholders and quality assurance. The subtopics below are chosen according to these principles.

**9.1 Learning outcomes**

Study programmes developed by HEIs are based on the national standards and HEIs can fill in 30% of the content of the programme. The representatives of the visited universities expressed their wish for more academic autonomy that would support introduction of changes into the programmes according to the labour market and students’ needs.

Teachers were aware of the concept of LOs and described adequately how the development of subject syllabi occurs, starting with the comparison with similar programmes at foreign universities, defining the LOs, dividing the content between lectures and choosing relevant study materials. The student assessment as one of the most important aspect at the outcome-based approach was not mentioned, though. The overarching assessment method is apparently the multiple choice test (especially in the Technical University), with some additional alternatives – projects, presentations – in the Qafqaz University and Baku State University.

Student assessment seems to be currently the main challenge while implementing the LOs and principles of the qualifications framework. Skills and competencies can definitely not be assessed with multiple choice tests.

Another challenge is related to the teaching methods. The main method is still lecturing that is not well-taken by the students who participated in the interviews. Students expect more interactive and hands-on methods. Teaching is divided clearly between theory and practice and there is hardly any interaction between these parts.

Neither students nor teachers favour the regulation that requires students’ obligatory attendance in lectures. This regulation contradicts essential principles for recognition of prior learning, based on validation of LOs. More importantly, this regulation ignores the fact, that students are adult responsible persons, and inhibits development of active and responsible citizens.

**9.2 Autonomy of universities**

Autonomy of universities is one of the focal points in developing the EHEA, particularly in assuring the quality of higher education. The autonomy of HEIs involves two major aspects: academic and financial. In both aspects the mission revealed several problems.

In 2013, the HEIs got limited financial autonomy that enables them to decide over some budgetary issues themselves. The major problem here is the inability of the university management and teaching staff to take advantage of the possibilities of diversifying the income base.

Academic autonomy of universities has two important aspects: autonomy in developing the curricula, and autonomy in awarding the degrees. Concerning the autonomy in developing the curricula universities have to follow detailed national standards for specialties (see p.2). Although the interviews revealed that universities would like to have more academic autonomy, the discussion at the seminar brought to the conclusion, that most universities are not ready to abolish these standards and develop their curricula based just on framework standards for degree levels. One of the intermediate options proposed was to develop national standards for wider study programme groups, e.g. humanities, engineering. Thus, development of a new generation of national standards for specialties (altogether about 1100) based on LOs needs careful consideration.

The autonomy of universities to award academic degrees is currently restricted in two aspects. One of them is incorporated into the present model of accreditation, which includes external testing (knowledge test with multiple choices) of potential graduates. Another aspect is related to the model of awarding PhD and DSc degrees by the Higher Attestation Commission.

**9.3 Quality Assurance**

Only quality assured qualifications can be included into the AzQF. Therefore, the quality assurance (QA) of higher education institutions and programmes is crucial for the implementation of the AzQF.

The present higher education QA system in Azerbaijan consists of internal QA systems in the HEIs and external QA system on the state level. The internal QA particularly involves collecting student feedback. Currently the legal framework for the internal QA in HEIs is absent.

The external quality assurance is based on regular accreditation of HEIs. This process also involves the elements of study programme accreditation. The criteria for institutional accreditation are prevailingly quantitative. The Accreditation Committee conducting site visit (about 10 members) often includes representatives of the MoE. This and many other aspects of QA on state level do not meet the requirements of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG) that is the main tool to assure the quality of implementing the QF-EHEA.

A positive example came up in the Technical University who passed the international accreditation (conducted by ASIIN) in study programmes of electronics. Participation in international accreditations helps to increase the understanding of ESG and could therefore be encouraged among all universities.

**9.4 Recognition**

Although in theory the university staff is aware of LOs, in practice the recognition does not take place because of the rigid formalities (e.g. obligatory attendance in lectures) and of a still input-based approach. Both students and teachers admitted that recognition of studies at other universities is based on course titles, or in some rare cases on course content. It indicates that the understanding of the core idea of LOs and qualifications frameworks is missing, and there is hardly any chance to recognize formal learning in other HEIs and no chance at all to recognize any informal or non-formal learning.

In addition, there is a very diverse understanding of the credit points (CP) and their value. At the MoE we learned that 1 CP equals to 30 hours student’s work. In the universities some teachers said that 1 CP is 15 hours students’ classroom work, some said that 15 hours contain both classroom and independent work and some did not understand the meaning of a credit point at all. The lack of recognition and of a common understanding of credit points is a great obstacle for student mobility.

Another issue that came up during the meeting at MoE was about the qualification level of medical doctors. Important amendment has been added to the draft Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers on AzQF concerning the diploma of basic higher medical education, and the diploma of residency. The diploma of basic higher medical education has been placed on the AzQF level 6 (together with Bachelor’s degree), and the diploma of residency on the AzQF level 7 (together with Master’s degree).

The basic medical education programme belongs to the integrated study programmes typical for regulated professions (human medicine, veterinary medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, architecture etc.). As in most European countries, including Estonia, these programmes are on the 7th level and graduates’ diploma equals to the Master’s degree, then it may cause recognition problems for Azerbaijani medical doctors who want to continue their studies on the next (doctoral) level in foreign universities. Correspondingly, the qualification awarded on graduation from residency is recommended to be placed on the AzQF level 8. The latter might cause confusion in the context of Azerbaijani doctoral qualifications, though. The best solution could be to remove reference to the qualifications in human medicine from the draft Decree, because besides these qualifications many other quality assured qualifications not mentioned in the decree can be included into the AzQF during its implementation. Another option is to indicate that qualifications awarded on graduation from integrated study programmes are placed on the AzQF level 7.

**9.5 Involvement of stakeholders**

One of the principles in QF-EHEA is stakeholders’ involvement. This seems not to be a widely used practice in the Azerbaijani higher education yet. Students and employers are not involved in study programme and syllabi development, and HEIs have not been involved in development of the AzQF, although the managers of the visited universities recognized the change-orientation of the current Minister of Education and said that they had participated in discussions about some reform plans at the MoE.

In all visited universities there is a feedback system where students can evaluate their teachers and subjects, and in a couple of cases the teachers have been replaced due to the request of students, but no systematic involvement of students or other stakeholders is taking place in development processes.

**9.6 Conclusions and recommendations**

The MoE has started positive developments related to the involvement of stakeholders and giving HEIs more autonomy, and we would encourage MoE to go even further with it, and especially increase the stakeholders’ involvement in the development and implementation of the AzQF.

During the seminar, the representatives of HEIs pointed out that in some cases the wording of outcomes in the draft document of the AzQF was unclear, and the outcomes in the column “Autonomy and responsibility” did not always reflect these characteristics. They expressed their strong interest to participate in further discussions concerning the document.

Concerning the implementation of the AzQF there is a great need for trainings at HEIs and they should focus especially on the following aspects:

* Student assessment and its link to LOs,
* Recognition of (prior) learning,
* Active teaching methods,
* Internal quality assurance.

The MoE may want to consider carefully the need of specific standards for each and every specialty (study programme). As pointed out by the university representatives during the seminar, the specialties could be organized into bigger study program groups, i.e. humanities, law, engineering etc., and standards could be worked out for these groups, and/or some pilot universities could be given full autonomy for developing study programmes themselves, following the AzQF at the respective level.

We would sincerely like to thank the RTA team and the MoE counterparts for the very well organized visits at the universities. We highly appreciate that the university representatives found time to meet us and were openly willing to share their experience. We have been impressed by the exceptional hospitality at the MoE and the universities.

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

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

*ANNEX 1*

**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

**Activity 3.1: EHEA and QF EHEA Training**

**Date: 16.02.2016**

**Interviews at Ministry of Education from 09:00 to 11:00**

1. Emin Amrullayev - BC PL, Head of the Educational Development Programs Department
2. Azad Akhundov - BC CL III, Senior Adviser, Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Department
3. Vusala Gurbanova, BC CL II, Leading Adviser, Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Department
4. Gulnara Garalova - Senior Adviser, Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Department
5. Tofig Ahmadov - RTA Counterpart, Senior Advisor, Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Department
6. Afgan Abdullayev - BC CL IV, Senior Adviser, Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Department

**Interviews at Qafqaz University from 14:00 to 17:00**

1. Sarvar Gurbanov - Head of Economy Department
2. Khalil Ismayilov - Dean of Engineering Faculty
3. Zafar Hasanov – Director of Project Development and Teacher Transfer
4. Akbar Aslanov – Director of School of Languages
5. Narmina Aliyeva – Head of Translation /Interpretation Department
6. Adalat Mikayilov – Head of HR Department
7. Sevil Imanova - Vice-rector for external affairs
8. Elmir Gurbanov – Vice director of School of Languages
9. Nargiz Nahmatova - Teacher at Department of Public Adminstration
10. Venera Suleymanova - Teacher at Department Enlish Language and Literature
11. Gulnar Zulfugarova - Teacher at Department of Public Administration
12. Nail Tahirov - Teacher at Department of Industrial Engineering
13. Polad Poladov - Teacher at Translation Department
14. Sannur Aliyev - Teacher at Economics Department
15. Adiljon Abdurazzakov - Teacher at Center Entrepreneurship Development
16. Alishiram Alakbarov – Student, Computer Engineering
17. Tabriz Isgandarov – Student, Computer Engineering
18. Hikmat Jafarli - Student, Computer Engineering
19. Minura Isgandarova –Student, World Economy
20. Chaquira Issufe – Student, Business Administration
21. Leyla Hasanova - Student, Public Administration
22. Hikmat Mursalzada – Student, Accounting and Audit
23. Roya Karimli – Student, English Language and Literature
24. Sabina Ahmadova - Student, English Language and Literature

**Date: 17.02.2016**

**Interviews at Baku State University, from 09:00 to 12:00**

1. Adil Khasayev – Dean of Geology Faculty
2. Nazim Shamilov – Dean of Ecology and Soil Science Faculty
3. Aydin Kazimzada – Vice-rector for science and innovations
4. Irada Aliyeva – Vice-rector for academic affairs
5. Gulheyran Rahimova – Head of International Relations Department
6. Maharram Valiyev – Dean of Philology Faculty
7. Nizamaddin Isgandarov – Dean of Mechanics-Mathematics Faculty
8. Akif Guliyev – Dean of Biology Faculty
9. Alizada Mammadov –Law Faculty, Head of Chair on International Private Law and European Law
10. Taladdin Baghirov – Physics Faculty, Matter Structure Chair
11. Abdulsayid Azizov – Dean of Faculty of Chemistry
12. Jasarat Shabanov – Faculty of Ecology and Soil Science
13. Magsad Gojamanov – Faculty of Geography, Head of Geodesy and Cartography Chair
14. Farda Imanov – Dean of Faculty of Geography
15. Elmira Ismayilova – Head of International Projects’ Department
16. Zohrab Aghamaliyev – Senior scientific worker of Nano-research Centre
17. Elvin Azizbayov – Faculty of Mechanics-Mathematics
18. Namig Shikhaliyev – Faculty of Chemistry
19. Fatima Ahmadova – Student, International Relations
20. Khoshbakht Janhasanzada – Student, History
21. Osman Zeynalli – Student, History
22. Roza Naghiyeva - Student, History
23. Parvin Abdullayeva - Student, History
24. Lala Mamiyeva – Student, International Relations
25. Gunel Asadova - Student, International Relations
26. Sara Alasgarova - Student, International Relations
27. Elnara Aliyeva - Student, International Relations

**Interviews at Azerbaijan Technical University, from 13:00 to 16:00**

1. Jehan Aslanzada – Dean
2. Arastun Mammadov - Dean of Faculty “Machine engineering”
3. Subhan Namazov – Faculty of Metallurgy
4. Hasan Huseynov – Head of Technology Chair
5. Khalig Yahudov – Vice-rector for academic affairs
6. Isa Khalilov – Vice-rector for scientific affairs
7. Hikmat Aliyev – Head of Chair “Electro-mechanics and electrical equipment”
8. Ziyafat Karimov – Head of Chair “Automobile technics”
9. Imran Yolchuyev - Head of “Sabah Centre”
10. Vahid Farhadov – Chair “Automation and Management”
11. Elchin Gozalov – Head of Chair “Communication…
12. Elchin Rzayev – Chair “Technology of Machine-building”
13. Huseyn Mirzayev – Chair “….
14. Sarkhan Kamilbayli – Student, Technology of arm and arm systems
15. Ilgar Aliyev – Student, Technological and Light Industry Machines
16. Leyla Abbasli – Student, Technological and Light Industry Machine
17. Javahir Babanli – Student, Engineering business and management
18. Ajdar Hummatov – Student, Metallurgy
19. Ilkin Ahmadli – Student, Transport

*ANNEX 2*

**The AZQF: Linking Azerbaijani qualifications to the European Higher Education Area and Lifelong Learning**

Joint Seminar of the Ministry of the Education of the Republic of Azerbaijanand European partners

**18 February 2016 –Hotel Europa, Baku**

The ***Azerbaijani Qualifications Framework*** is a new tool to classify and manage Azerbaijani Qualifications that should be adopted this year. Qualifications in the international understanding are certificates, diplomas and other awards, formally issued documents that acknowledge that a person has achieved ***learning outcomes*** that are described in standards. In Azerbaijan these are normally state educational standards.

Only few state educational standards and curricula clearly define learning outcomes but this will have to change once the AZQF is adopted. Learning outcomes are the basis for moving Azerbaijan towards a competency based education system. Learning outcomes are statements that describe what a person is expected to know and able to due at the end of a learning process.

The ways these learning outcomes can be obtained, are verified and assessed is also changing how state educational standards should be used. There need to be more flexible ways of learning, while assessment and certification needs to carefully quality assured.

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

How all these issues should be developed and implemented once the AZQF is approved will be discussed in this seminar. We will start by looking at the AZQF in an international and lifelong learning context. Then we will move in two separate directions. One group will focus more on the implications for higher education, through the Bologna Process and the integration of Azerbaijan in the European Higher Education Area. The second group of stakeholders will focus on vocational education and adult learning with a clear labour market orientation. At the end of the seminar we would like to agree ***recommendations for the implementation plan*** of the AZQF.

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| **AGENDA** | |
| 9:15 | **Welcome & Registration** |
| 9.45 | **Opening speeches,**  Mr Jeyhun Bayramov, Vice Minister of Education  Mr Jeroen Willems, EU Delegation  **Twinning project for bringing the Azerbaijan Higher Education closer to the European Higher Education Area**  Mr. Reijo Aholainen, EHEA Twinning Project Azerbaijan |
| 10.15 | **The National Qualifications Framework in Azerbaijan**  Mr. Azad Akhundov, Ministry of Education |
| 10.45 | **Establishing Qualifications Frameworks as international tools for recognising lifelong learning – Where we are now?**  Mr. Arjen Deij, European Training Foundation |
| 11.00 | Coffee / Tea break |
| 11.30 | **Making the AzQF compatible to the EQF, what does it mean?**  Mr Olav Aarna, Estonian Qualifications Authority, Kutsekoda |
| 12.00 | **Closing the Gap between Azerbaijan Higher Education and the Qualifications Framework of the EAHEA**  Ms. Maiki Udam, EKKA, Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education |
| 12.30 | **Implementing the AZQF – what does it mean?**  Mr. Arjen Deij, European Training Foundation |
| 13.00 | **Lunch Break** |

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| 14.00-17.00 | **Parallel sessions:** |
| 14.00-14.20 | **Session 1:**  **Higher Education**: **What should be done on the government/university level to implement Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (NQF-HE)?**  Moderators Ms. Maiki Udam and Mr Olav Aarna  *Room setting: round tables, each for max 6 people*  Short introduction to the session |
| 14.20-16.20 | **Discussion at tables**  Topics:   1. Learning outcomes in NQF-HE – are they achievable? 2. Assessment of learning outcomes 3. Level descriptors of the NQF-HE fitting for all, or dedicated standards (subject benchmarks) for specialisations? 4. Curriculum development – responsibility of the Government or a university? |
| 16.20-16.35 | Tea Break |
| 16.35-17.00 | **Reporting back from tables, consolidation of implementation plan and closure** |

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| 14.00-14.20 | **Session 2:**  **Implementing the Qualifications Frameworks for Vocational Education and Training & Adult Learning**  Moderators Ms. Nigar Ismayilzade and Mr. Arjen Deij  Short introduction into 4 Sub Groups (using round table settings)  Q&A session |
| 14.20-16.20 | **Subgroups**   1. Improving the anticipation of skill needs to ensure relevant qualifications 2. Updating Educational Standards and Curricula on the basis of learning outcomes in line with AZQF 3. Strengthening Quality Assurance and Assessment 4. Communication strategy for the AZQF as tool for lifelong learning and career development |
| 16.20-16.35 | Tea Break |
| 16.35-17.00 | **Reporting back from four subgroups, consolidation of implementation plan and closure** |