Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan

Twinning project ENI/2018/395-401

Mission Report

Short-Term Mission on Activity 1.5. Provide recommendations for improvement of education standards for qualification for programmes in the priority areas (incl. legislative arrangements) with a view to describing achievements based on competences and skills, considering the AzQF

(February 18–22, 2019)

1. Name and Function of the Expert:

Full name of expert

Ms Tatjana Koke, Latvia

Signature

2. Objective and Tasks of the Mission:

The mission is carried out within the framework of:

COMPONENT 1: **SELECTED NATIONAL EDUCATION STANDARDS ARE ALIGNED TO INCLUDE A COMPETENCE-BASED FOCUS**

Activity 1.5. Provide recommendations for improvement of education standards for qualification for programmes in the priority areas (incl. legislative arrangements) with a view to describing achievements based on competences and skills, considering the AzQF

Benchmarks for this activity are:

- **State standards for selected study programmes are revised**, with a view to describing achievements based on competences and learning outcomes, considering AzQF;
- **Other relevant documents/ methodology materials are prepared**.

3. Time schedule of the mission:

Date and Time	Activity
Monday 18th of February 2019	Deskwork to review a new version of study programmes in priority areas suggested by Twinning experts.
Tuesday 19th of February 2019	Deskwork on preparation to workshops in three higher education institutions
Wednesday 20th of February 2019	- Workshop on development of competence-based and student-centered study programmes. Mapping of learning outcomes in Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University - Meeting Working Group on Natural Sciences at Baku State University
Thursday 21st of February 2019	Workshop on development of competence-based and student-centered study programmes. Mapping of learning outcomes in Azerbaijan Technical University.
Friday 22nd of February 2019	- Meeting with staff of the Science and Higher Education Department, Ministry of Education (**Stakeholders**: *Mr. Yaqub Piriyev*, *Head of Science and HE Dept., Mr. Shahin Bayramov, BC PL, Deputy Head of Science and HE Dept., Mr. Yashar Omarov, RTA Counterpart, Head of HE Unit)* - Report writing

4. Relevant Background Information/State of Affairs regarding the mission

This mission is as a continuation of the **missions carried out** under the same activity (Activity 1.5) in **September 10-21, November 19-23 and January 28 – February 1 2019**.

The objective of the **third mission** carried out in January-February 2019 was to revise current state standards for selected study programmes with a view to describing achievements based on competences and learning outcomes, considering the AzQF. **As an outcome of this mission, a new template for state standards for study programmes (SSSP) was created and further revised by experts.**

The objective of this **third mission** was twofold:

- **discuss the new suggested format of SSSP with the staff from the Ministry of Education** (Dept. for Higher Education, Accreditation Unit of Dept. for Accreditation and Nostrification, Higher Education Unit at Institute of Education), considering the revised version of general state standards in Higher Education, and provide a finalised version of SSSP;
- devise **state standards for selected study programmes** in the areas of natural sciences, engineering sciences and educational sciences.

5. Achievement of the Expected Results

Planned action was achieved due to particular interest and support of top management of all three HE institutions Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University, Baku State University and Azerbaijan Technical university.

6. Unexpected Results

State if any unexpected results were identified during the mission. Add any relevant comments.

1/During the workshops some doubt was expressed on students' competence to evaluate teachers' performance by filling up questionnaires. Nevertheless, student surveys are compulsory for implementing student-centred learning (SCL).

2/ Faculty statements of striking differences between study program aims and content for local and international labour market, even for regulated professions, e.g. engineering.

3/ At the workshop of APSU some participants stated that constructivist learning theories are not used by teachers which means that some teaching should be provided on up to date learning theories opening possibilities for students active involvement.

7. Issues Left Open After the Mission

State if any issues were left open. Add any relevant comments.

1/ To accumulate more information for legal, organizational and financial basis to establish "Teaching and learning Centre" at HE institutions in order to provide tailor-made further education for faculty.

2/ To provide experience on assessment methods of acquired competences by students within competence based study program.

3/ To look for possibilities to merge students research and studies within study program.

8. Recommendations (including recommendation for future missions)

1. Within the current mission the major focus was to give input into the development of academic staff understanding and competences to implement meaningful change from teacher and subject centred teaching to student-centred learning through competence-based curricula. By sharing Riga Stradiņš university experience of SCL as it got EUA PASCAL SCL award in 2016 we intended to help the participants in APSU, BSU and ATU workshops to recognize their own existing practices with regards to student-centred learning and to give them ground for developing their educational philosophy and practices related to teaching, learning, assessment in close relation with student engagement. The following definition of student-centred learning adopted by the PASCL partners served as the basis for discussion: "Student-Centred Learning represents both a mind-set and a culture within a given higher education institution and is a learning approach which is broadly related to, and supported by, constructivist theories of learning. It is characterised by innovative methods of teaching which aim to promote learning in communication with teachers and other learners and which take students seriously as active participants in their own learning, fostering transferable skills such as problem solving, critical thinking and reflective thinking." (T4SCL Toolkit 2010).

As at all three institutions participants expressed clear willingness and need to become more student-centred, basic suggestions to reach the goal were disseminated, namely:
1/ strong recommendation and examples for students involvement in university governance at all levels was proposed. Latvia's experience on Student bodies and financial allocation for their functioning was described;
2/ involvement of students in quality assurance both internal and external is mandatory;
3/ different support services for students should be developed and accessible. One-stop agency where student can clarify all the necessary information may be of help for students to adapt in a new study environment;
4/ students' opinion should be taken into account in curriculum design process;
5/ students' prior learning experience should be acknowledged and used in teaching, learning and assessment processes, especially focusing on digital skills and ability to work in virtual environment. Development and implementation of questionnaires and feedback on them following by improvements in study programs should be evidenced.

2. The suggestion to introduce several different awards to stimulate change was accepted with high responsiveness both on behalf of academic staff and administration. Thus, it is recommended to introduce annual awards:
   1/ an institutional award for SCL,
   2/ an individual award for best teacher (which may be nominated by students at each university),
   3/ an award for best implementation of e-learning in order to stimulate digitalization of universities and study process. The impression is that rarely if any classroom has access to internet and students get learning materials, including subject syllabus in paper.

3. In all three visited institutions staff members complained that there is very limited possibilities for professional development regarding innovations in education management and HE pedagogy. Consequently, it is advisable for Ministry of education to allocate some additional resources for the purpose to establish such centres or units in HEIs. Teachers competences should be stregthened significantly:

- in modernization of study programs through competence based approach,
- in implemetation of active and interactive theories of teaching and learning,
- acquisition of research skills within studies,
- simulation based assessment methods allowing students to demonstrate and prove their acquired competences during studies.

Besides great effort should be made to motivate teachers and students to learn foreign languages as language proficiency opens opportunities to get access to international experience and strengthens possibilities for networking with professionals in other countries.

4. Discussion and exchange of experience on learning outcomes (LO) of study programs made it clear that in majority of cases LO are formulated in syllabuses but exist only on paper. Neither staff members nor students could refer to cases which give evidence of real and successful achievement of defined LO. Thus, for the following missions it is important to ask academic staff to revise LO of their programms and courses and submit them to expert/-s for evaluation. A special session should be delivered to academic staff (with participation of some students and employers) according to their subject fields in order to do ammendments and modernise their study programs. Besides, in order to implement LO in full scale and productively, any additional manual workload for academic staff should be avoided and instead common IT solution for mapping LO must be provided.

5. Last but not least, the improvement of state standards of higher education for teachers of different subjects with a view to describing achievements based on competences and skills, considering the AzQF (revision of study programmes in Educational Sciences: foreign language teacher, IT teacher, math teacher, primary school teacher) should go in line with main issues of Occupational Standard of Teacher. The structure of educational standard preferably should be based on tasks and functions of teachers' profession with further description of them in terms of knowledge, competences, attitudes, responsibilities as stated in AzQF. The recommendation is to reconsider what state standards in the field of teacher education should be produced and instead of subject based it would be more reasonable to produce education standards according to education levels; pre-primary, primary, basic, secondary, secondary vocational and vocational teachers. HEIs have to develop sustainable ties with industry and employers in order to increase awareness of the current and future needs of the labor market. Practice placement, study course delivery, participation in examination and evaluation process as well as involvement in university governance might be recommended forms of cooperation.

9. Acknowledgments (if any)

The expert expreses gratitude to Mr Yashar Omarov, RTA Counterpart and also Head of Higher Education Unit at the Science, Higher and Professional Secondary Education Department at Ministry of Education and Ms. Lisa Bydanova, Resident Twinning Advisor, RTA Assistant Ms. Aytaj Atakishiyeva and Language assistant Mr. Tarlan Arzumanov as well as to the representatives of universities, especially top management of ASPU, BSU and ATU for their high involvement and leadership in order to implement necessary changes to comply HE in

Azerbaijan with requirements of EHEA, particularly by revision of lists of competences (generic and professional ones) for selected study programmes.

Annexes

Annex I: Suggested revised version of The State standard of Bachelor level "050503 – Physics" and Master level "060503 – Physics"specialties
Annex II: Power Point Presentations
Annex III: Lists of participants