

Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan



Twinning project ENI/2018/395-401

Mission Report

Short-Term Mission on Activity 3.6 Conduct training for external reviewers, establish a pool of trained reviewers

(September 30 - October 4, 2019)

1. Name and Function of the Expert:

Full name of expert

Ms. Eliane Kotler, France

Signature

Full name of expert

Ms. Michelle Houffe, France

Signature



Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan
This project is funded by the European Union

2. **Objective and Tasks of the Mission:**

The mission is carried out within the framework of:

COMPONENT 3: THE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM IS FURTHER DEVELOPED TO REFLECT THE STUDENT-CENTEREDNESS OF STUDY PROGRAMMES

Activity 3.6 Conduct training for external reviewers, establish a pool of trained reviewers

Benchmarks for this activity are:

- a pool of reviewers (at least 100 persons), including student representatives and representatives of the labour market established and trained



Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan
This project is funded by the European Union

3. Time schedule of mission:

| Date and Time | Activity |
|---|---|
| Monday 30 th of September 2019 | Meeting with ANB about the context of the mission and presentation of our presentations content. |
| Tuesday 1 st of October 2019 | Methodology, criteria and indicators for study programme evaluation: presentation by the experts, and workshop about the preparation of the visit. See Annex |
| Wednesday 2 nd of October 2019 | On-site visit: interview ethics and techniques. Presentation of the role and duties of the external evaluators. Workshop about the conduct of the on-site visit. See Annex |
| Thursday 3 rd of October 2019 | Writing a good evaluation report: presentation by the experts and workshop about the drafting of some criteria evaluation. Debriefing with ANB. See Annex |
| Friday 4 th of October 2019 | Drafting of the experts' report about the mission. |

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

Only institutional evaluation has been performed in higher education institutions of Azerbaijan so far. The first Twinning project implemented in 2015-2017 supported the then newly established (2016) Accreditation and Nostrification Office at the Ministry of Education to build up its capacity in the field of quality assurance in compliance with the principles of the European Higher Education Area. The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Azerbaijan (AzSG) reflecting best EU quality assurance practices were developed jointly by the Twinning experts and ANO staff and pilot institutional evaluations were carried out in three pilot universities. At current stage the Accreditation and Nostrification Office needs to build its capacity in the field of study programme accreditation. As part of the Component III of the ongoing Twinning project certain number of documents concerning the programme evaluation (Handbook for Requirements and Methodologies for Programme Evaluation, Guidelines for Assessing Competence-based and Student-Centered Approach of St.Ps, Grid for Self-assessment of Competence-orientedness and Student-centeredness of Study Programmes) have been already developed by the Twinning experts to ensure the compliance of programme accreditation practices in Azerbaijan with EU best practices. As a next step, the higher education institutions were trained on how to conduct a self-evaluation of study programmes and were instructed to write the initial draft of self-evaluation reports on relevant programmes and submit them both in Azerbaijani and English before 25th of April. The second mission under this Activity took place from 29th of April to 3rd of May 2019. The objective of this mission was to hold meetings with the HEIs representatives involved in the SER writing and to support them in this process. The deadline for the submission of the second draft of self-evaluation reports was set for 30th of May 2019. The next mission implemented under the Activity 3.5 from 17 to



Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan
This project is funded by the European Union

21 June aimed to review the second drafts of the reports and give further instructions for the improvement.

The first round of training of external evaluators were carried out under the Activity 3.6 in mid-September 2019. A total of 16 experts representing local HEIs were trained on how to conduct a programme evaluation.

5. Achievement of the Expected Results

The goal of this mission was to train a panel of AZ external evaluators for mock accreditation of 6 study programmes planned in the next months.

The workshops were based on the ESG (2015) and on the documents developed previously by Twinning Project experts: Handbook on methodologies and requirement for study programmes evaluations (ANB-2019) and the Grid of criteria for SER of study programmes.

These documents were used by the pilot universities for drafting their SER.

The presentations of the experts and the corresponding workshops were based on 2 self-evaluation reports (SER) of Computer Engineering Bachelor's degree study program:

1. Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University
2. Sumgayit University.

The selected methodology was a comparative approach. In such way, the future AZ experts will be acquainted to diversity of SER, from different points of view: length, structure, quantitative and qualitative content. During the workshops, they were invited to compare one criteria at a time in both SER.

1 – Tuesday October 1st

During the first session, an introduction on the background, purpose and general methodology of the external evaluation was presented. During working group sessions, the participants were asked to compare Criteria 6 (Management of the study programme) of the 2 SER in order to point out the qualities and defects in both reports. This comparison was meaningful. In both reports, evaluative analysis was lacking. One report being very well structured but without any evidence nor reference to figures or data. The other one largely underpinned the compliance with the State regulations, provided too many unnecessary details but no in-depth analysis.

Both reports delivered a sincere SWOT analysis which should represent the kind of sincere and reflexive analysis to be adopted for drafting the whole SER.

2- Wednesday October 2nd

The second session was dedicated to the preparation of the on-site visit. The presentation gave insights about the ethics and behavior to be respected (“to be strict and fair”) when meeting with peers and provided practical tips for the external evaluators. The distribution and accurate preparation of question forms for each criteria should be anticipated among the experts.

2 workshops were organized:



Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan
This project is funded by the European Union

The external evaluators were asked to point out inconsistencies in Criteria 1 and correlate them with questions to be asked during the on-site visit. They were also given relevant thematics to investigate through precisely formulated questions:

1. Pursuit of studies
2. Employability
3. Bridges, Mobility and recognition of credits
4. Optional subjects in the curriculum.

Practical suggestions were, for example, to formulate short and precise questions, without anticipating the answer.

3 – Thursday October 3rd

The last session was dedicated to the drafting of a programme evaluation report. Attention was paid to the risks of copy-pasting from the SER, of mentioning personal names of teachers or students. It is also very important to bring in-depth analyze and bringing evidence to support the evaluative sentences.

The participants were invited to write mock-evaluation report, about Criteria 1, and to formulate strengths, weaknesses as well as precise and realistic recommendations.

The planned action was achieved in a satisfactory way, the participants have demonstrated deep interest, being very active during the workshops. The work in sub-groups was dynamic, collegial and efficient. The students were invited for the first time in such a training, they have brought a real added value and their participation was very welcomed by the panel.

The panel of external evaluators have demonstrated their will to take part in the enhancement of the quality of the AZ Higher Education system.

6. Unexpected Results

The experts team regrets that no representative of employers could attend the session, at least during one day. In the future, evaluation of study programmes should include one professional.

7. Issues Left Open After the Mission

An issue regards the conflict of interests in a small country where specialists of the same field know each other. In particular, the choice of the chair of the committee relates to this issue. In an ideal situation, the chair should be a peer, that is to say a professor of the same field. This is why the pilot evaluations rely on a foreign professor to be the chair.

Furthermore, the risk of insincere evaluation report may be avoided by a strict separation of the evaluation process and accreditation decision, each one relying on a separate commission.

The on-site visit will be the turning point of the evaluation of the study program since the SER are uneven, rather poorly informed, and generally too long (30 pages maximum). Nevertheless, accurate reading of the whole report and preparation of the questions ahead of the visit is



Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan
This project is funded by the European Union

absolutely a requisite. Specific methodology should be adopted to ensure this collegial preparation ahead.

Particularly, the evaluation of the sub-criteria related to learning outcomes is not very easy because the modules are scattered into small study units, each one being associated to LO.

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

8. Recommendations (including recommendation for future missions)

Two kinds of recommendations are provided:

1. practical recommendations for ANB and the future external evaluators
2. overall recommendations for the future missions.

ANB

- Continue to train external evaluators possibly able to speak English
- Check if the evaluation report is not too long (30 pages max.)
- Check the conflict of interest between evaluators and the programme
- Check the SER does not mention any name of person, whether teacher or student
- Ensure that all the stakeholders are involved in the panel of external evaluators, namely students and employers.

External evaluators

- Check the conflict of interest between evaluators and the programme
- Read carefully the SER
- Prepare clear and short questions for the on-site visit, according to the distribution decided by the chair (1 or 2 criterias for each expert).
- Adopt a neutral and external position, without any interpersonal link. Confidentiality is a must.
- Do not be too talkative and leave the floor to the interviewed person. On the contrary, be able to stop him/her if he/she does not answer the question or exceed a reasonable time limit.
- Bring evidence to the opinions formulated in the report.
- Suggest precise and realistic recommendations.
- Bear in mind the purpose of the evaluation: to enhance study programs in their context, there is no question of ranking.

Overall recommendations

The experts had the following feedback from their mission:



Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan
This project is funded by the European Union

The evaluation process would not be useful for the improvement of study programs without deep changes in the teaching and learning environment which needs modernization and updating. Modern lab equipments for scientific and research work are needed for the teaching staff and the students as well.

The main issues are the absence of involvement of employers and the poor attractiveness of the teaching profession. A solution could be to invite employers to stand in College Council in order to give their feedback on the programme content or to give practical lessons. There is a real shift to be implemented to ensure a continuous adaptation of the programme content to the needs of the labor market, and therefore the employability of the students. In particular the units of the Study programs should be gathered to ensure visibility and readability of the corresponding learning outcomes.

To enhance the development of the AZ Higher Education, in particular, and to implement an efficient evaluation process, quality assurance should be developed at every step of the programme delivery to ensure accountability, transparency and publicity. Therefore, a solid information system is needed to provide reliable key-performance indicators in order to manage the programme in an efficient way.

This section shall be 2.5 pages at maximum. All other relevant information shall be attached as annex.

9. Acknowledgments (if any)

We would like to thank the ANO staff and the project staff for their support during the mission.

We thank all participants who took part in the training of external reviewers for the input, positive attitude and involvement in all the training activities.



Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan
This project is funded by the European Union

Annexes

1. Presentation on Session 1: Methodology, criteria and indicators for study programme evaluation
2. Presentation on Session 2: Expert and ethics
3. Presentation on Session 3: Writing a good evaluation report
4. Test for the reviewers
5. Link to view 2 Hcéres videos about Hcéres' experts and the conflict of interests:

https://www.hceres.fr/en/web_tv?created_period=&page=1



Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan
This project is funded by the European Union