Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan

TWINNING

Twinning project ENI/2018/395-401

Mission Report

Short-Term Mission on Activity 3.7 Undertake a mock accreditation at each pilot university for a study programme in a priority area

(January 6-10, 2020)

1.   <u>Name and Function of the Expert:</u>

Full name of expert

Mr. Pierre Collet, France

Signature

Full name of expert

Ms. Nora Skaburskiene, Lithuania

Signature

2.   <u>**Objective and Tasks of the Mission:**</u>

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 3.7 Undertake a mock accreditation at each pilot university for a study programme (Computer Science) in a priority area

Benchmarks for this activity are:
- Minimum 4 mock accreditations of study programmes implemented

3. **Time schedule of mission:**

Date and Time	Activity
Monday, 6th of January, 2020	Preparation for the expert's visit for evaluation of three study programmes in Computers Sciences, development of questions-grid for the visit, based on that preparation of Final report template, revision of self-evaluation reports and the methodology for the peer-evaluation, developing the list of additional information needed from universities.
Tuesday, 7th of January, 2020	Meeting of full expert group and Quality assurance agency (ANO), preparation for the visit, distribution of tasks among team members, discussion of most important points that should be highlighted during the visit.
Wednesday, 8th of January, 2020	Peer-evaluation visit to the Azerbaijan Oil and Industry University to evaluate Computer Science study programme. Meetings with the main stakeholder groups: management of the University and the programme, self- evaluation group, academic staff of the programme, students of the programme, graduates, and employers. Presentation of observation remarks after the visit.
Thursday, 9th of January, 2020	Peer-evaluation visit to the Azerbaijan Technical University to evaluate Computer Science study programme. Meetings with the main stakeholder groups: management of the University and the programme, self- evaluation group, academic staff of the programme, students of the programme, graduates, and employers. Presentation of observation remarks after the visit.
Friday, 10th of January, 2020	Peer-evaluation visit to the Baku State University to evaluate Computer Science study programme. Meetings with the main stakeholder groups: management of the University and the programme, self- evaluation group, academic staff of the programme, students of the programme, graduates, and employers. Presentation of observation remarks after the visit.

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 Offiice 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 Nostrifcation 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 final draft of self-evaluation reports was set for the end of August 2019. Mock evaluation of five pilot programmes has already been conducted so far. The current mission which is being implemented under the Activity 3.7 aims to conduct the mock evaluation of programmes in Computer Science in three pilot universities.

5. Achievement of the Expected Results

Planned action was achieved. Three mock-evaluations of the study programme of Computer Science performed in three universities: Azerbaijan Oil and Industry University, Azerbaijan Technical University and Baku State University.

6. Unexpected Results

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

Not applicable.

7. Issues Left Open After the Mission

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

Not applicable.

8. Recommendations (including recommendation for future missions)

Recommendations to ANO:

1. Organization of study programme evaluation should start well in advance to the planned visits to universities.
2. After receiving self-evaluation reports from higher education institutions ANO should check compliance with the requirements presented in the Methodology for evaluation of Study programmes. It is important that all the data according to methodology would be presented as well as annexes.
3. All the expert's group including the Chair should be appointed at least one month before the visit in order to communicate with each other, share tasks.
4. There should be enough time to ask for additional data and documents, if needed.
5. To assure that all expert group would participate in the visit (including student and employer).
6. It would be very important to develop guidelines for HEIs on how to host expert's visit. Higher education institution should:
   o Pay careful attention to the visit – administration of the university should be aware of the visit;
   o Assure participation of all people that were listed in Agenda in the interviews;

- HEI representatives should respect the work of experts and stay in the room the whole time during the interview (no constant coming in and out);
- Institution should prepare all needed documents: final theses, exam papers, additional data, etc. if asked by the expert group;
- Only the teaching staff that teaches in the programme under evaluation should participate in the interview;
- Alumni that is invited to the meeting should not be working or studying in university, which programme is evaluated;
- Only Learning resources that are related to programme under evaluation should be visited;
- Students invited to the interviews should come from different groups and different courses;
- Graduates that are invited should be graduated not more than 5 years ago;
- When experts are working as a group, the staff of the HEI should not enter the room.

Recommendations regarding self-evaluation reports and visits:
- All 3 SERs were very poor;
- SAR of BSU was not changed after consultations in June 2019, it still contained remarks and corrections of the experts;
- In AzTU we were not able to receive up-to-date information: current study plan, final theses and examination papers, data on teaching staff;
- In most cases universities converted criteria into statements and put them into SERs;
- No evidences, or examples were provided to proof the statements;
- Universities should present and analyze data only on the teaching staff that is involved in teaching in the programme under review (not all the teaching staff of the Department);
- It was difficult to assess the criteria "Financing of the programme is appropriate for obtaining the learning outcomes" as universities were not able to distinguish financing of one programme. Maybe it would be useful to describe this criteria in more details – maybe the financing for upgrade of equipment and other infrastructure could be mentioned. Though even the infrastructure is usually shared by several departments and programmes;
- Universities have not been able to understand this criteria" "The study programme has taken into account the life-long learning opportunities", it should be reformulated or explained more explicitly;
- In two universities, not everybody listed on Agenda participated in the interviews;
- AzTU did not manage to organize the meeting with employers;
- Short breaks are needed between interviews (they were in case of AzTU and BSU, but not in ASOIU).
- Regarding criteria:
  - Fully agree with remarks of previous expert's group;

- It should be clearly explained what a term "teaching documents" means, because different experts understand it in different way;
- None of the three programmes have formulated programme aims (thefore it was not possible to apply some of criteria);
- Learning outcome approach is still not implemented, therefore it is difficult to assess. More trainings on this topic should be organized for universities;
- Study programmes are built strictly on state standars, therefore criteria "Different pathways for students exists in the programme" is not applicable;
- The criteria "The study programme is provided by the staff meeting legal requirements" requires additional documents or information by ANO about what legal requirements are approved regarding teaching staff in the country;
- HEIs still build curriculum only on their own experience (for example, one university organizes meetings of alumni, but only in order to help those, who still did not find job to get a help from the ones already employed. Do not use this for enhancement of programme);
- No willingness or initiative to change state standard, even if they find it to be outdated;
- Poor English language skills;
- Weak learning infrastructure (this is extremely important for Computer Science);
- Nearly no mobility (and no opportunities);
- The problem – do not understand the boundaries of Computer Science („part of Mathematics").

9. Acknowledgments (if any)

We would like to thank ANo for the support and Mrs. Lala Abasova. Special appreciation to the coordinator Ms. Ulviyye Rasulova, who managed to organize the visit in the best way, many thanks to Mr. Tarlan Arzumanov for his perfect translation and to Mrs. Aytaj Ataishiyeva for timely communication, to Mrs. Lisa Bydanova for overall support during the visit.

Annexes

(if any)