

Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan



Twinning project ENI/2018/395-401

Mission Report

Short-Term Mission on Activity 4.5 Assess the university governance system in three pilot universities with a view to ensuring the best approaches that support the development and review of student-centred programmes, through the participation of students in university governance, and develop proposals to enhance the system

(December 16 – 20, 2019)

1. Name and Function of the Expert:

Full name of experts

Mr. Jean-Jacques Paul, France

Signature

2. Objective and Tasks of the Mission:

The mission is carried out within the framework of:

COMPONENT 4: **RECOMMENDATIONS ON AMENDMENTS OF LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATIVE FRAMEWORK DEVELOPED**

Activity 4.5 Assess the university governance system in three pilot universities with a view to ensuring the best approaches that support the development and review of student-centred programmes, through the participation of students in university governance, and develop proposals to enhance the system

Benchmarks for this activity are:

- Governance system in three pilot universities assessed
- Proposals to enhance the governance system of three pilot universities developed

3. Time schedule of mission:

Date and Time	Activity
Monday 16 th of December 2019	Meeting with RTA Ms. Elizaveta Bydanova and leaders of relevant Components of the project. Deskwork, translation and reading of strategic plans of local universities
Tuesday 17 th of December 2019	Deskwork - On current governance system in Azerbaijani higher education institutions - Detailed mapping of university governance system in two separate European universities
Wednesday 18 th of December 2019	Meeting with top management of Sumgait State University Deskwork on university governance system with relevant staff of SSU Meeting with the Head of Finance Department of the ministry of Education
Thursday 19 th of December 2019	Meeting with top management of Azerbaijan Technical University Deskwork on university governance system with relevant staff of AzTU
Friday 20 th of December 2019	Meeting with top management of State Pedagogical University Deskwork on university governance system with relevant staff of ASPU

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

Three pilot local universities were identified by the Twinning project to benefit from this activity. They are the Sumgait University (SDU), the Azerbaijan Technical University (AZTU) and the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University of Baku (ASPU).

Before the mission started, all 3 universities provided their Strategic Development Plans in Azeri language to the Twinning project. During the first two days of the mission, the expert could go through these documents with the help of the Twinning project translator and using internet in some cases as well.

Several examples of Strategic Development Plans from European universities were selected prior to the mission and shared with some universities. For example, the Azerbaijan Technical University reported their will work on this area, hence relevant documents were sent to it by the Twinning office before the mission start. The following SDPs were pinpointed:

- Strategic Plan of the University of Bologna, Italy, 2019 -2021;
- Corporate Plan of the Queen's University Belfast, UK, 2016 – 2021;
- University of Groningen Strategic Plan, Netherlands, 2015-2020;
- University of Bordeaux, France;
- University of Oxford, UK;

5. Achievement of the Expected Results

Planned action was achieved.

The current Strategic Development Plans (SDPs) of pilot universities were scrutinized. Meetings with Rectors, Vice-Rectors and other members of university staff took place and helped to share best European practices and discuss how to take them into account to bring the current SDPs closer to European standards.

The mission enabled to provide an overview on some general trends in the governance system of pilot universities. Relevant recommendations for further improvement are provided below.

It was agreed during the meetings with universities that the current SDPs will be revised considering the examples shared by the expert. The revised version of SDPs will be discussed during the second part of the mission to be carried out tentatively in February 2020.

6. Unexpected Results

The mission gave the opportunity to notice the importance given by the ministry to the involvement of students in the governance of universities, through the new legislation that will be implemented soon.

It also allowed pointing out the limits imposed by legal texts regarding the presence of representative of employers in scientific and faculty councils of universities.

7. Issues Left Open After the Mission

N/A

8. Recommendations (including recommendation for future missions)

8.1. Assessment of the current situation.

The current strategic development plans, that the expert had the opportunity to look at, showed a quite different levels of proficiency from one university to other when strategic planning is at stake. However, the following observations common to all could be mentioned:

- a) **Distinctive features of universities**, that distinguishes clearly in what respect the university is different from other local or international universities, **are not presented in a visible enough way.**

Most SDPs give a too general vision of universities, without insisting on what can be the distinctive value of the university. It is not always clear what are the strong points of the universities which would make them attractive to students, and other stakeholders (i.e. employers for attracting more research contracts, etc.). Also, if we bear in mind that the public funding by the ministry of Education is per capita based, it is crucial for universities to be attractive in order to get several students that ensures basic resources. Originality and specificity are means of enhancing attractiveness.

- b) Targets are not specified in terms of **quantitative indicators** to be achieved.

Most of SDPs do not refer to precise goals and targets and do not use indicators. However, without such goals and specific indicators, the SDPs' implementation over the time is difficult to assess and to measure.

Examples from EU universities could be followed in this regard.

- c) SDPs could be made **more reader-friendly**, being used as a tool for universities' **marketing strategy.**

The European examples illustrate that plans can be considered as communication and marketing tools whose destination must be all the stakeholders of the community. That means that the presentation is clear, pleasant, using photos and colors. The use of the website of the universities allows limiting the cost of diffusion of such enriched documents.

- d) It is necessary to make sure that every SDP points out the **university vision, mission and goals.** It is recommended to carry out and to include in the SDP the **SWOT analysis.**

The overview insisted on the importance of a clear presentation in the plan of the vision, mission and goals of the university for the period. The use of indicators enables to situate the university regarding the strategic areas and to get precise targets. Appropriate methods can be implemented to identify the most important issues to be tackled by the university (such as SWOT analysis).

- e) It is up to universities to define their **internal procedures for the revision/design of SDPs.** The expert shared some usual experience as an example.

The expert suggested the following steps to elaborate strategic plans: setting up of a small team at the top management; discussion/self-evaluation within each Faculty/Chair and with all stakeholders (teachers, administrative staff, students, graduates, employers); use of SWOT analysis; choice of some indicators for each area where the university can improve or foster. During the meetings at universities, a brainstorming (interactive discussion) was done with the working groups in order to **identify strategic areas with 5-6 indicators for each area.** The members of the working groups were asked to roughly estimate the current value of each indicator and imagine its targeted value to be achieved within a 5-year period. A reflection has been engaged about the actions to be implemented for achieving the targets and the relevant costs.

8.2. Recommendations for further improvements.

- The **communication strategy and communication skills of universities** could be strengthened, upgrading the ability to express the strategy of the institution in a **more dynamic, more visible and more attractive way**. The presentation of SDPs could be revised to make sure it is more attractive for external stakeholders (i.e. students, employers, ministry of education, etc.).
- There is a need to continue the work started during this mission in order to make sure that pilot universities come with a **finalized list of indicators, targets and actions** to be implemented. This is planned to be done during the second part of this activity.
 - A discussion could be open with relevant persons of the ministry of Education about the presence of representatives of employers in governing bodies of university. Such a presence could allow the university to be more aware of the evolution of the labor market for graduates and to enhance their employability. In this regard, the **setting-up of steering committees, composed of both academic staff and representatives of the labour market, at the level of each study programme** could be considered.
- The reinforcement of managerial competences of universities could consider the means to diversify the financial resources, the methods of estimating the costing of the planned activities.
- The **collection of strategic data** could be enhanced, for example in extracting figures on the proportion of graduates amongst the cohort of new students, or the number of years students need to get their degree, in systematizing the implementation of tracer studies and in collecting feedback from employers about the competences of graduates.
- The discussions with representative of universities pointed out the need to **promote the hiring of young faculty members**, who could support development of new teaching practices, but also new ways of management and governance within universities. Some specific measures and policies could be considered in this regard. For instance, a status of Emeritus professor could be regarded, allowing senior faculty members to get pensions, and to let recruitment of younger staff at university, without any official academic charge but with the possibility to give seminars.

9. Acknowledgments

First, the expert expresses his full gratitude to the team of the Ministry of Education for their availability, warm welcome and fruitful discussions. Secondly, the expert would like to thank the top management and other staff from three pilot universities who showed interest and enthusiasm for learning new practices in the area. Lastly, my thanks also go to the Twinning office team for their support during the mission.

Annexes

Annex1 – 5. Mapping best practices in institutional governance of higher education institutions. Example of Strategic Development Plans of some EU universities:

- Strategic Plan of the University of Bologna, Italy, 2019 -2021;
- Corporate Plan of the Queen’s University Belfast, UK, 2016 – 2021;
- University of Groningen Strategic Plan, Netherlands, 2015-2020;
- University of Bordeaux, France;
- University of Oxford, UK;