

Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan



Twinning project ENI/2018/395-401

Mission Report

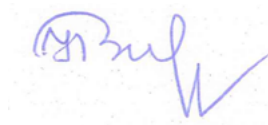
Short-Term Mission on Activity 4.6 Further reinforce knowledge about quality assurance in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and practices from international accreditations to ensure the application of the notion of student-centeredness

(June 22, 26, 30 2020)

1. Name and Function of the Expert:

Full name of expert

Ms. Jolita Butkiene, Lithuania



Signature

Full name of expert

Ms. Nora Skaburskiene, Lithuania



Signature

Full name of expert

Ms. Jolanta Silka, Latvia



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 4.6 Further reinforce knowledge about quality assurance in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and practices from international accreditations to ensure the application of the notion of student-centeredness

Benchmarks for this activity are:

- Workshop on quality assurance in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance EHEA and practices from international accreditations to ensure the application of the notion of student-centeredness implemented
- Proposals for the amendment of the legal and regulatory framework for quality assurance

3. Time schedule of mission:

Date and Time	Activity
Monday 22 June 2020	12:00-15:00 Online meeting with staff of Accreditation and Licensing Department of newly established Education Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA) Participants: <i>Ms. Lala Abbasova</i> , Head of Accreditation and Licensing Department, EQAA <i>Ms. Nisa Idrisova</i> , Senior Advisor at Accreditation and Licensing Department, EQAA <i>Mr. Asiman Ilyasov</i> , Senior Advisor at Accreditation and Licensing Department, EQAA <i>Mr. Javid Ibadov</i> , Advisor at Accreditation and Licensing Department, EQAA
Wednesday 26 June 2020	Deskwork
Tuesday 30 June 2020	14:00-17:30 Online session with external experts of EQAA and representatives of self-evaluation teams at pilot universities of Twinning project. <i>(The online session was attended by around 30 participants)</i>

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

During the TWINNING project the Methodology for conducting an external evaluation of study programmes was developed. It was piloted during 23 mock accreditations of 6 pilot study programmes at Bachelor level in 8 universities (BSU, SSU, ASOIU, AzTU, AzPU, BEU, Khazar University and University of Languages).

The following study programmes have undergone mock accreditations:

- Bachelor programme in Physics
- Bachelor programme in Computer Sciences
- Bachelor programme in Computer Engineering
- Bachelor programme in Chemical Engineering
- Bachelor programme in Foreign Language Teacher
- Bachelor programme in Mathematics and Informatics Teacher

The evaluation of each study programme was carried out based on the following six evaluation areas:

- Programme aims and learning outcomes
- Curriculum design
- Teaching staff
- Facilities and learning resources
- Study process and student performance assessment
- Programme management

Expert panels presented the evaluation reports and also formulated recommendations for ANO for further development of the process and the criteria.

During the mission, experts reviewed the Rules for accreditation of higher and secondary special education institutions and Handbook on methodologies and requirements for study programmes evaluations. Experts provided detailed comments and proposals to both documents which were sent to the Education Quality Assurance Agency.

However, experts would like to point out the following:

- both documents should be aligned and reviewed according to the experts comments (rules should indicate the general overview, while methodology should provide more detailed and specific information)
- redraft documents according to the proposed new structure of the document
- take into account all ESG standards, especially ESG 2.7. standard and follow-up procedures should be described
- in case of evaluation of joint study programme it is recommended to use a European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Study Programmes https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/02_European_Approach_QA_of_Joint_Programmes_v1_0.pdf
- revise and use unified terminology.

On June 30, 2020, experts conducted a workshop on results of mock accreditations and best examples of international accreditation. Representatives of Agency, local experts of mock accreditations and members of self-evaluation teams at pilot universities participated and shared their opinion.

Experts presented results of mock accreditations, pointed out positive sides of organization of accreditation process, as well as weaknesses (such as, lack of analysis in the self-evaluation reports, too little teams for preparation of SER, small number of stakeholders participating in the interviews during site visit). Experts also presented the findings from all mock accreditations in all areas of evaluation, highlighting most important points: lack of balance between the theory and practice, lack of practical skills, weak links between academic staff and employers representatives, non-implementation of learning outcomes approach and student-centred learning, too little attention to upgrade of pedagogical skills for teaching staff, little involvement of labour market representatives in the teaching process, low level of foreign language skills, little support to academic staff for participation in different events, low level of mobility, the periods abroad are not fully recognized, low level of facilities does not allow to use innovative teaching and assessment methods, availability of WiFi for students is very low, need for better management of quality improvement of the programmes.

Another presentation was about how programme level evaluation criteria were updated taking into account the results of mock accreditations, study of the legal documents, e.g., updated State Standards, discussions with the Accreditation department staff. The presentation outlined the necessity to align the criteria with the existing legal documents regulating the performance of higher education institutions and programmes, also, the adoption and integration of the ESG in national practice. Also, there is a need to ensure that the 2015 ECTS Users Guide is the basis for correct implementation of the system as it can make an important contribution to student-centred teaching and learning. Using a combination of the learning outcomes approach (at least at the module/course level, and student workload in module/course design and delivery puts the student in the centre of the teaching and learning process. Such an approach, on the one hand, helps in monitoring and, eventually, adapting teaching material and methods to different modes of delivery and student populations. To this end, the criteria was introduced to pay attention to this issue. Higher education teachers are the key players in enabling students' learning, and appropriate training in teaching and research skills is an essential pre-requisite for a high-quality system. Thus, the criteria devoted to the evaluation of the institution and/or programme level processes in developing teaching staff research and teaching skills was introduced. Also, a special criteria was introduced to evaluate the turnover of the teaching staff within the programme. A more detailed overview of the criteria is presented in the Annex.

And the last presentation shared best practices from international accreditations. There were presented accreditation practices from Latvia, Estonia, Austria and Norway. It was pointed out that according to the Bologna process implementation report (2018) in 8 countries quality assurance is based on an institutional level evaluation only, 20 combine institutional and programme-level evaluation, and in 22 systems, all programmes are subject to external quality assurance procedures. In addition, the importance of external experts' selection and training was emphasized, as well as the need to include students and employers in the expert's panel.

Also, recommendations were provided for smooth and fit-for-purpose quality assurance system development.

At the end of the workshop participants expressed their views and appreciated provided information. It was also highlighted that mock accreditations were a good practice, where participants had the possibility to learn and get recommendations from experts for further development of the quality of study programme and internal quality assurance system.

5. Achievement of the Expected Results

Planned results were achieved. The experts presented recommendations for improvement of quality assurance system, evaluation criteria for study programme evaluation and made presentations at the workshop.

6. Unexpected Results

Not applicable.

7. Issues Left Open After the Mission

Experts would like to point out that Agency has to do a lot of work ahead in order to finalise all necessary regulatory acts, to ensure communication with all relevant stakeholders for the successful implementation of the new system.

8. Recommendations (including recommendation for future missions)

- carefully review and redraft all the documents, as well ensure alignment between them;
- use unified terminology - ensure that the terms/concepts used in the Accreditation methodology and Accreditation rules are clearly defined and used consistently in the relevant documents. For example, it is necessary to distinguish between the process of accreditation and evaluation and the Bodies performing these functions;
- compile a glossary of the main terms (e.g., student centered teaching/learning, learning outcomes, competence, programme aim, study results, , ECTS, evaluation, accreditation, etc.) and share the glossary with the higher education institutions to achieve a common understanding and usage of the terms;
- ensure communication with all stakeholders in order to explain and discuss the new system, rules, methodologies etc.;
- ensure compliance with the ESG;
- ensure that quality processes should be fit for purpose;

- keep in mind that external quality assurance depends on the stage of the development of internal quality assurance system, specific needs and goals of higher education institution;
- keep balance between accountability and enhancement;
- international experience is very useful, but should be incorporated into the specific national context;
- ensure that conditions under which different types of accreditation decisions are awarded to the institution/programme are clearly spelled out and the types of accreditation decisions themselves are clearly defined in the relevant documents;
- it is important to develop guidelines for HEIs on how to host expert's visit:
 - careful attention to the visit – administrations should be aware of the visit;
 - assure participation of all people 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.;
 - only the teaching staff that teaching 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;
 - when experts are working as a group, the staff of the HEI should not enter the room.

9. Acknowledgments (if any)

We would like to thank Ms. Aytaj Ataishiyeva for timely communication, to Ms. Lalah Abasova and Ms. Lisa Bydanova for overall support during the mission.

Annexes

Presentations of the online session with external experts and representatives of self-evaluation groups.