

Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan



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

(November 12-15, 2019)

1. Name and Function of the Expert:

Full name of expert

Ms. Eliane Kotler, France

Signature

Full name of expert

Mr. Philippe Turek, France

Signature



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

Benchmarks for this activity are:

- Minimum 2 mock accreditations of study programmes implemented



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3. Time schedule of mission:

Date and Time	Activity
Tuesday, 12 th of November, 2019	Meeting at the Accreditation and Nostrification Office (ANO) to prepare on-site peer-evaluation of the BSc. Physics programme at the two pilot universities, namely Sumgait State University and Baku State University. Joint elaboration of the modus operandi for the conduct of the on-site mock evaluation. Appointment of the chair of the peer-review team, revision of the methodology for the peer-evaluation, discussion of the questions arising from the Reports submitted for the BSc Physics peer-review evaluation.
Wednesday, 13 th of November, 2019	Peer-evaluation visit to the Sumgait State University to evaluate BSc. Physics 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, alumni, and employers.
Thursday, 14 th of November, 2019	Peer-evaluation visit to the Baku State University to evaluate BSc. Physics 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, and alumni.
Friday, 15 th of November, 2019	Meeting at the Accreditation and Nostrification Office (ANO) to discuss the process of the first peer-review visits, preliminary conclusions and to plan distant work among members of expert team to finalise evaluation reports.

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 final draft of self-evaluation reports was set for the end of August 2019. The current mission which is being implemented under the Activity



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3.7 aims to conduct the mock evaluation of Physics study programme in two pilot universities based on the final drafts of self-evaluation reports already submitted.

5. Achievement of the Expected Results

Planned action was achieved. Mock-evaluations of the BSc study programme in Physics were performed in the two pilot universities: Sumgait State University, Baku State University.

6. Unexpected Results

At Baku State University: the evaluation team felt that many of the representatives of the different themes desired for the evaluation had not been well informed about the purpose of the external evaluation. It appeared that, either they did not have access to or they were not interested in the documents of the self-evaluation report. Furthermore, the alumni representatives were employed by the university as tutors which is not a position disconnected from the university and the absence of labour market representatives did not allow the employers' point of view to be gathered.

7. Issues Left Open After the Mission

At Baku State University: the position of alumni does not provide a clear view of employment opportunities and the absence of labour market representatives did not allow the employers' point of view to be gathered.

8. Recommendations (including recommendation for future missions)

After the on-site visit, the panel of experts would express some recommendations

Recommendations to ANB:

1. It is necessary to ensure that all contributors to the evaluation process within the evaluated institution feel genuinely concerned by it. The effectiveness of evaluation strongly depends on the interest it receives. As a consequence, to do so, it may be necessary to comprehensively explain the outcomes.
2. Experts suggest to review the methodology for evaluation. Too many criteria are indicated. A procedural proposal was included in the evaluation report submitted to the Azerbaijan Accreditation Office (ANO)
3. During the briefing session prepare questions for each panel of persons interviewed (not too many because time runs), share the questions to be asked among the panel of experts and make sure that someone takes notes.
4. The coordinator appointed by the ANB must be present throughout the evaluation including the final debriefing.
5. It is difficult, if not inappropriate, for European experts to invite the local experts of the evaluation committee to contribute to the drafting of the final report. Indeed, they are



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not paid, unlike European experts. Their voluntary contribution must know the limits that we have defined by not involving them in the writing exercise. But this is counterproductive in terms of training expectations.

6. Remarks regarding the evaluation methodology:

- The evaluation methodology contains too many evaluation criteria. Such an approach does not allow evaluators to reflect freely and identify any original aspects that may appear. Similarly, the school method of giving a mark to each of these criteria does not provide a true overall picture. There are some redundancies in the evaluation criteria, e.g. 2.8 & 4.3; 2.6 & 4.4.
- A preliminary briefing note of a few lines specifying the objectives expected by the ANO for each evaluation area with a few key words/concepts would allow a less focused reflection. The ANO could then ask the evaluators to give an overall assessment for each evaluation area, which this expert group did in the following report. The marking scheme which has been adopted makes the correspondence with marking intervals as: 0-12=D; 13-17=C; 18-20=B; 21-25=A. This is further modulated by + or – sign meaning that the mark is pushed forward the top of the interval (+) or pushed down to the bottom of the interval (-).

7. Remarks regarding the final evaluation report:

- The below reports on mock evaluation are much more based on the on-site interviews than on the self-evaluation reports (SER) itself. The SER appeared as a limited exercise at some extent, where each evaluation point was indicated as satisfied, without however providing reliable measures in terms of examination pass statistics, deployment of resources and methods to promote teaching and research, monitoring of graduate employment.
- In an interesting and very encouraging way, the on-site discussions showed all the interest and involvement of the local teams in the self-evaluation and mock-evaluation process. In addition, the organization of the visit and the meetings with the various representatives were very relevant.
- In general, the overall assessment quite difficult to implement, which could probably be explained by the fact the European and international evaluation practices are not yet in place in Azerbaijan. It is recommended to pursue the work in this direction.

Recommendations to the universities

The SER could better prepare for the on-site visit. In that respect, it should:

- provide an introduction with an organization chart which presents the department within the university, and another one which presents the hierarchy of responsibilities from the head of the department to the Rector of the university;



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- provide stats and other data in order to bring evidence to the statements provided in SERs;
- Implement a human resources policy in order to assure a renewal of the teaching staff or plan its renewal in the future;
- Renew the teaching material.

Recommendations to the Ministry

- Provide the ANB financial and human resources so that they will have means to implement a sound evaluation policy
- Consider a policy of compulsory retirement age in order to eventually enable younger academic staff to enter universities. Possibly an increasing of retirement benefits could also be considered
- The system of state standards for study programmes would need to be revised in order to allow for more flexibility for universities in updating their programmes to the needs of employers and other stakeholders

9. Acknowledgments (if any) for study Programmes evaluation

The experts would like to extend their appreciation for the support provided by the ANO, and the head Mrs. Lala Abasova, who liaised with the universities and arranged all the meetings, to Mr. Tarlan Arzumanov for his impeccable translation, to Mrs. Aytaj Ataishiyeva for timely communication during the whole evaluation process, and to Mrs. Lisa Bydanova for overall support during this exercise.

The panel of expert would also like to thank the Universities for their welcome with a special mention for the Sumgait State University.

Annexes

Final evaluation report of the two pilot universities, prepared according to the template previously developed under the institutional twinning programme and submitted after its approval by the evaluation team, are attached in annexes I and II.



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