

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

(February 10 – 14, 2020)

1. Name and Function of the Expert:

Full name of experts

Ms. Jurgita Šiugždinienė, Lithuania



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:

- Strategic plans of the three pilot universities assessed
- Proposals to improve strategic plans of three pilot universities developed

3. Time schedule of mission:

Date and Time	Activity
10 th of February 2020 Monday	10:00-13:00 Meeting with RTA Ms. Elizaveta Bydanova. 14:00-17:00 Reviewing the draft strategic development plans submitted by pilot universities with the help of the Project's Language Assistant.
11 th of February 2020 Tuesday	10:00-14:00 Meeting and consultations with Azerbaijan Technical University team 14:00 – 17:00 Review of strategic plans and preparation for the meeting.
12 th of February 2020 Wednesday	10:00-16:00 Meeting and consultations with Sumgait State University team 16:00 – 17:00 Review of strategic plans and preparation for the meeting.
13 th of February 2020 Thursday	10:00-14:00 Meeting and consultations with State Pedagogical University team 14:00 – 17:00

	Review of strategic plans and development of the roadmap.
14 th of February 2020 Friday	<p>10:00 – 16:00</p> <p>Development of the recommendations and mission report.</p> <p>16:00 – 17:30</p> <p>Debriefing with RTA Ms. Elizaveta Bydanova and Nargiz Garakhanova, Component Leader II and Senior Advisor at Higher Education and Research Department of MoE.</p>

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

Three pilot 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).

The first mission was led by international expert Mr. Jean-Jacques Paul and was carried out on December 16 – 20, 2019 to review strategic development plans of above mentioned universities, share the best practices and provide recommendations for improvement. Several examples of Strategic Development Plans from European universities were selected prior to the mission and shared with those universities.

Before the second mission, all three universities have provided their improved Strategic Development Plans. The document provided by AZTU was in English language, other two were provided in Azeri language. ASPU has not updated its strategic development plan, however, they have submitted a comprehensive list of indicators.

The universities have improved their documents; however, some additional work still needs to be done to have full-fledged strategic development plans.

5. Achievement of the Expected Results

Planned action was *achieved*.

6. Unexpected Results

N/A

7. Issues Left Open After the Mission

Pilot universities would like to receive additional support to develop their strategic plans.

8. Recommendations (including recommendation for future missions)

I. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UNIVERSITIES

1. Careful organization of strategy development process

The process of development of the strategy is as important as the strategy itself. The strategy should be accepted and internalized by academic community and therefore they should take active part in the strategy development. Proper organization of the process would help to diminish possible disagreements and to align thinking of the management team.

Similarly, it is very important that top management of the University would demonstrate interest and commitment to strategy development. It should not be considered to stay on the shelf; it should become real management tool for the Rector to implement changes. It should help entire team to focus on the most important activities and not to sink in the details. It also should facilitate consolidation of resources to the key priority areas.

Detailed roadmap for strategy development is proposed in the Annex 1 .Some important highlights for quality process:

- Strategic Group should be formally established consisting of key stakeholders (vice-rectors, advisors, deans).
- Leader of strategy development process should be appointed, given authority, and resources to manage the process.
- At least three to four strategic sessions should be organized to brainstorm on priorities, goals and indicators.
- Consultation process with University staff and students, as well as external stakeholders should be organized to ensure relevance and community participation.
- Internal and external communication of the strategy should be ensured.

2. Comprehensive situation assessment

It is advised not to limit situation assessment to SWOT. It is important to agree on clear parameters for situation assessment in all areas of university activity – education, research, student satisfaction, human resources, and infrastructure. This would also provide a good background for development of indicators.

It is important to compare the position of the university in relation to its national and international peers. It is highly advised to select national and international peers and analyze their situation and compare with their achievements. This would also allow setting up meaningful of indicators. Stakeholder mapping would also facilitate the development of the strategy.

3. Hierarchy and alignment of goals

All levels of the strategy – vision, priority goals, objectives and actions should be well aligned with one another. It is not appropriate to have disconnected and different articulations of priorities, goals and objectives. Priority goals should be established based on the results of the SWOT analysis. Usually, opportunities identified in the process of SWOT are translated into the priority goals.

4. Simple and clear logic, not too many goals and indicators

Strategy should be document easy to read and understand, since not only management of the University but entire community should follow the Strategy. It is highly advised not to exceed 5 goals/objectives/actions.

Goals must be clear and well defined. Vague or generalized goals are unhelpful because they don't provide sufficient direction. Goals and objectives should be measurable. It is not enough to say "to introduce modern teaching technologies into education process". It should be clear how will we know that we are successful? Goals should be attainable in a set of period of time. Therefore it is important to make sure that it's possible to achieve the goals you set. If you set a goal that you have no hope of achieving, you will only demoralize yourself and erode your confidence.

5. Competitive advantage of the University

It is very important that strategic team would think about unique set of actions to achieve strategic goals. How we can be different from others? What actions would help us to attract more students and become more competitive? What is our competitive advantage? What is our unique value proposition for students and business companies?

6. Action plan with timeframe, resources and names of responsible

For each objective, it is important to propose concrete actions to be carried out. Action plan should contain result indicators, timeframe, responsible person and required human and financial resources (see Annex 2).

7. Monitoring plan

It is important to agree on the mechanism for monitoring implementation. Monitoring should be carried out on continues basis and responsibility of this should be assigned to specific person. It is advised to have quarterly meeting of strategic group or rectorate and request all responsible for priorities and goals to report about the progress. It would be very good to have on-line tool to monitor progress using traffic light principle.

II. SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNIVERSITIES

AZERBAIJAN TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

Azerbaijan technical university (AZTU) in their strategic development plan has provided a comprehensive overview of the national context for strategy development; it has discussed the role of science and education in achieving sustainable development goals. The vision, slogan and mission as well as values have been defined and adequate SWOT analysis was provided.

The following recommendations are provided to improve the strategy and its development process:

1. It is recommended to streamline the process of strategy development and/or revision based on the roadmap recommendations provided in Annex 1.
2. It is advised for AZTU to revise and align hierarchy of goals, since linkages between "Strategic development orientations of the University", "Strategic development goals and objectives of the University" and proposed action plan are unclear.
3. Strategic development orientations (priority areas) should be streamlined and reduced to five or less. Goals should be aligned under strategic development orientations or priority areas. Objectives should be revised and reduced in numbers (not more tha five). Action plan should be developed for each objective specifying concrete actions (Annex 2).
4. Wording of goals and objectives should be revised and simplified. Goals should not be very complex statements covering several different topics in one sentence.

For instance, the goal: "To build higher education at the University in accordance with modern standards" has 19 objectives, some of them are very wage and unclear. All

objectives should be aligned with the goal and to contribute to its implementation. It is necessary to think about the specific set of objectives, which would allow to achieve the goals. However, you also should clarify - What does University mean by “modern standards”? And how will we know that education in the University is modern? How we will measure our success? Answering these questions would help you to set relevant indicators.

5. It is recommended to decide on priority areas for study and research at AZTU in relation to industry potential of the country. Consequently, it is important to concentrate resources and efforts to develop those priority areas.
6. It is suggested to consolidate objectives to not more than five – the most important ones.

Presentation discussed during the meeting attached (Annex 3)

SUMGAI STATE UNIVERSITY

The Sumgait state university (SDU) has prepared a very comprehensive and well designed strategy document. Mission and values of the University has been defined, as well as goals, objectives and activities. The indicators for each area of University activity has been presented as well. The document is nicely illustrated and contains a lot of interesting information about the University and its history. University partners are also presented in the strategy document.

The following recommendations are provided to improve the strategy and its development process:

1. Develop long term university vision, answering to the question - what would be your dream University in 2025? Similarly, discuss your mission in more detail. Life-long learning and innovations are mentioned in your mission. This means that these important issues should be reflected and properly addressed within your strategy document.
2. Opportunities identified in the SWOT analysis should be linked to strategic goals.
3. It is advised to review formulation of some objectives, since they are very broad and complex, for example “Ensure the formation of competences (knowledge, skills and habits) during the education period, assisting alumni in joining the labor market and staying there” (google translation).
4. Suggested objectives and actions should demonstrate your unique approach to achieve strategic goals. It is advised, to reduce the number of actions to not more than 5 and make them more specific and concrete.
5. Develop full-fledged action plans outlining timeframe, resources and responsible persons (see ANNEX 2).
6. Assign indicators for each strategic goal (not more than 2-3 key indicators). It is advised do not present indicators in a separate table; they should be aligned to the goals.
7. It is advised to quantify objectives were it is possible. For instance: “0.2.3. Increase the number of research projects on orders and grants by X % by 2025.”

STATE PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY

The strategy of State pedagogical University (ASPU) was developed back in 2015 and requires revision. Team of the State Pedagogical University has developed a comprehensive list of indicators and is planning to initiate new process of strategy development.

1. It is advised to organize strategy development process based on recommendations provided in the Annex 1 .
2. It is advised for ASPU to revise and align hierarchy of goals, since linkages in between “Strategic goals of the programme” and strategic priorities and goals are unclear. Currently, they are disconnected and different wording is applied. It is highly recommended to align priority areas, strategic goals, objectives and actions.
3. It is important to develop full-fledged action plans outlining timeframe, resources and responsible persons (see ANNEX 2).
4. It is important to assign indicators to each strategic goal (not more than 2-3 key indicators) and do not present indicators in a separate table; they should be align to the goals and objectives. Table with lists of indicators can be presented as additional informative material.
5. Some goals are extremely complex and requires simplification and rewording. For instance, “The content, organization and technology of the educational process requirements of educational program standards, self-education principles, scientific research activities and modern forms of practice interaction with students, taking into account the possibilities of using ICT systematic upgrade of independent business systems.” (Google translation).
6. Goal “to align with international standards of education and research” has been mentioned several times in the document. It would be important to clarify the essence of international standards, what exactly do we mean and what indicators we are going to implement in order to be in line with those standards.
7. It is advised to pay attention to the most important indicator of this university – number/percentage of students who successfully passed national exam to become a teacher. As well as the indicator of employability – how many of those students have managed to get employment in the schools.

Presentation discussed during the meeting is attached (Annex 4)

9. Acknowledgments (if any)

The expert expresses his full gratitude to the Twinning team of the project and Ministry of Education for their availability, support and useful discussions. Secondly, the expert would like to thank the top management and other staff from three pilot universities who are interested and committed to develop quality strategic development plans.

Annexes

Annex 1: Roadmap for strategy development

Annex 2: Template for the action plan

Annex 3: Presentation for AZTU

Annex 4: Presentation for ASPU