



Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan



Twinning project ENI/2018/395-401

Mission Report

Short-Term Mission on Activity 4.1. Assess the current legal and regulatory framework on education standards, quality assurance, credits and recognition of parts of studies

(December 10 – 14, 2018)

1. Name and Function of the Expert:

Full name of expert

Ms. Marie-Odile Ott, France

Signature

Full name of expert

Ms. Aurelia Valeikiene, Lithuania

Signature

Full name of expert

Ms. Jolanta Silka

Signature



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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 4.1. Assess the current legal and regulatory framework on education standards, quality assurance, credits and recognition of parts of studies

Benchmarks for this activity are:

- A synopsis report on the legal and regulatory system for education standards, credit system, recognition and quality assurance of study programmes
- Presentation of selected European country cases on regulation regarding credits and recognition of prior learning

3. Time schedule of mission:

Date and Time	Activity
Monday 10 December 2018	<p>9:30-13:00 A meeting with representatives of the Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department, Ministry of Education</p> <p>Stakeholders: <i>Mr. Azad Akhundov</i>, Chief Advisor at Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department, MoE <i>Ms. Nargiz Garakhanova</i>, Component Leader IV and Senior Advisor at Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department, MoE <i>Ms. Vusala Gurbanova</i>, Leading Advisor at Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department, MoE <i>Mr. Kamran Rasulov</i>, Senior Advisor at Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department, MoE</p> <p>13:00 – 14:00 LUNCH</p> <p>14:30-18:00 Deskwork at MoE.</p>
Tuesday 11 December 2018	<p>9:30-13:00 Deskwork at MoE.</p> <p>13:00 – 14:00 LUNCH</p> <p>14:00-17:30 A meeting in the Accreditation and Nostrification Office (ANO). Discussing the new version of State Standards for Higher Education. Stakeholders: <i>Mr. Tofiq Ahmadov</i>, Head of Accreditation Department, ANO <i>Ms. Lala Abbasova</i>, Senior Advisor at Accreditation Department, ANO</p>
Wednesday 12 December 2018	<p>9:30 – 12:00 Deskwork.</p> <p>STEs <i>Ms. Marie-Odile Ott</i> and <i>Ms. Aurelija Valeikiene</i> review the relevant legislative documents in MoE and discuss them with <i>Ms. Vusala Qurbanova</i>, Component Leader I and Senior Advisor at Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department, MoE.</p> <p>STE <i>Ms. Jolanta Silka</i> reviews relevant documents in ANO and discusses them with <i>Ms. Lala Abbasova</i>, Senior Advisor at Accreditation Department, ANO.</p> <p>13:00 – 14:00</p>



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	<p>LUNCH</p> <p>14:00-17:30 Deskwork continues after the lunch.</p> <p>STEs Ms. Marie-Odile Ott and Ms. Aurelija Valeikiene review the relevant legislative documents in MoE and discuss them with <i>Ms. Nargiz Garakhanova</i>, Component Leader IV and Senior Advisor at Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department, MoE.</p> <p>STE Ms. Jolanta Silka reviews relevant documents in ANO and discusses them with <i>Ms. Lala Abbasova</i>, Senior Advisor at Accreditation Department, ANO.</p>
Thursday 13 December 2018	<p>9:30 – 13:00 Deskwork at MoE</p> <p>13:00 – 14:00 LUNCH</p> <p>14:00-18:00 Deskwork at MoE</p>
Friday 14 December 2018	<p>9.00 - 10.00 Deskwork at MoE.</p> <p>10:00-12:00 Meeting with ANO and MoE representatives to debrief about the mission results</p> <p>Stakeholders: <i>Ms. Nargiz Garakhanova</i>, Component Leader IV, Senior Advisor at Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department, MoE <i>Mr. Azad Akhundov</i>, Chief Advisor at Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department, MoE <i>Ms. Vusala Gurbanova</i>, Leading Advisor at at Science, Higher and Secondary Professional Education Department, MoE <i>Ms. Lala Abbasova</i>, Senior Advisor at Accreditation Department, ANO</p> <p>12:00 – 13:00 LUNCH</p> <p>13:00-18:00 Report writing</p>



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4. Mission report:

4.1 Recommendations

4.1.1 GENERAL ANALYSIS OF LEGISLATION REGARDING HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

The Mission had a list of 20 documents made available, either already approved legislation items on different issues of higher education (HE), or draft documents such as the draft of the State Standard of higher education and Accreditation Rules of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes.

- The Law on education (2009) is mainly focused on primary and secondary education, yet there are few articles on higher education. The Law sends back to the respective executive Authority to establish rules and regulations pertinent to the issues raised.
- “The Action Plan on the implementation of the national strategy for the development of education in the Republic of Azerbaijan” approved by the order of the President 19/11/2018. This document encompasses primary and secondary education and also focus on some HE topics and life-long learning with many aspects;
- A national strategy for “Increasing international competitiveness of the HE system in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019-2013” which proposes a set of measures and an Action Plan was approved by the decisions of the President on 16/11/2018.

For complete list of legislation analysed in this mission, please see under 4.2.

The current Twinning project succeeds a previous Twinning project, which took place 1/9/2015 - 1/10/2017 and was entitled “Support to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan for Further Adherence of the Higher Education System to the European Higher Education Area” . The overall objective was to enhance Azerbaijan's higher education through closer integration with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The STE understand there is a national concern and action going on the development and modernization of HE. The STE were provided with a draft of the *New state standard on HE* (not yet approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, a draft dated 2017).

They also understand the currently enacted “State standards for higher education and programs for higher education”, approved on 23 April 2010 by the Decision No. 75 of the Cabinet of Ministers, was supposed to be revised in 2016, yet the process took longer and currently is still on-going. This provides a window of opportunity to Azerbaijani authorities to take into account recommendations given in terms of the present Twinning project. A revision of this draft has been undertaken in the Ministry of Education, also considering some conclusions from the previous Twinning project.

This new *State standard of Higher education* is expected to be in line with the *Law on Education* and to serve as a framework and provide a set of norms for the different requirements of HE in the present context of modernization and internationalization of HE.

The STEs understand this revised State standard of Higher education (NSS) will be approved by the decision of the Cabinet of Ministers. It will define norms that will need further elaboration and provisions to be written in the form of several supporting (lower level) legislative documents, to be established and issued by the Ministry of Education and adopted by the concerned Minister.



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4.1.2 General Recommendations on the new State Standard of HE

The New State Standard (NSS) shall explicitly refer in the general provisions section, to other **national level strategies and documents** such as the National Strategy for Development of Education; State Programme for international competitiveness of AzHE and others if required. This will create coherence between strategic level documents and clearly indicate their legal hierarchy.

The general provisions section should include clear references to **Azerbaijani commitments of implementing Bologna Process reforms for the full participation in the EHEA** (<http://ehea.info/>), and **the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals towards 2030** (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>).

Throughout the text of the NSS, it should be clearly stated which documents the MoE is authorised to develop in order to implement the NSS. The revision of the NSS implies that such documents should be updated and revised accordingly to the new provisions and decisions adopted in the New State Standard of HE and considering new commitments made in the Bologna Process.

The STEs can propose some suggestions for the drafting of the NSS in order to put them more in line with current developments in HE both locally and internationally, and the necessary link of HE with the socio-economic sector with the aim to train young people as responsible citizens able to work and to adapt to the requirements of the labor market throughout their life.

High quality teaching, learning and research are the key catalysers in the development of critical and creative thought. **The active involvement of all students in research practices allowing them to develop research skills and problem solving capacity and to contribute to the creation of new knowledge (research based teaching and learning) should be supported.** Higher education institutions (HEIs) should be enabled to ensure that synergies between teaching, learning and research are considered in a more systematic way.

The public responsibility for higher education and research is complemented by the public responsibility of higher education and research, exercised by its institutions, bodies, students and staff. **It is advisable to formulate four purposes of higher education both in the new draft of State Standard in HE and Azerbaijani Qualifications Framework (AzNQF)** in accordance with the Council of Europe Recommendation on public responsibility for higher education and research (adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 16 May 2007 at the 995th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies) [full text in French and English available at https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/PublicResponsibility/CM_EN.asp].

Students and academic and pedagogical staff should be made familiar with ethics, ethical awareness and research integrity and this should clearly be communicated in the NSS. While there can be and are national and disciplinary differences in the way research is organized and conducted, there are also principles and professional responsibilities that are fundamental to the integrity of studies and research wherever they are undertaken.

The Council of Europe has set up the ETINED Platform as a network of specialists appointed by member States and of States Parties to the European Cultural Convention which mission is to share good practices in the field of transparency and integrity in education, to define guidelines on the subject and to develop capacity-building for all actors (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/ethics-transparency-integrity-in-education>). **Azerbaijani authorities are encouraged to get acquainted with the work done and proceedings of ETINED and appoint its representatives in it.** For example, in France, some HEIs have appointed a delegate to research integrity, and the Office for Scientific Integrity (OFIS) was installed at



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the Hcéres (www.hceres.com) in 2017. For comparison, in Lithuania, a representative of Academic Ombudsman Institution (<http://www.etika.gov.lt/en/>) and a representative of SKVC (as external quality assurance agency and ENIC/NARIC centre), both take part in work of ETINED.

The spirit of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) should be taken into account and throughout the text of the NSS it should be clearly reflected, by including student-centered approach in teaching and learning, responsibility and autonomy of HEIs, quality assurance, stakeholder participation, development of teachers and other staff, etc.

The NSS should clearly define the establishment of internal and external quality assurance system in HE. In accordance with the ESG quality assurance system shall be developed in the way it supports the development of a quality culture that is embraced by all: from students and academic staff to the institutional leadership and management. The NSS should indicate the aims and instruments for quality assurance, including the responsibilities and obligations of stakeholders involved. The NSS should state the main principles, however the development of more detailed acts should be delegated to the respective responsible body, i.e. the Accreditation and Nostrification Office (ANO).

The STEs see this NSS as a framework document for setting higher education standards which will need further developments in the form of accompanying regulatory documents which will describe and establish the required rules and regulations.

4.1.3 General Recommendations for External Quality Assurance

ANO as a national quality assurance agency should take into account the ESG as a whole and ensure the compliance of external quality assurance in line with the ESG. It is recommended that ANO and the Ministry of Education continue working to support the concept of the new model for study programme review under the remit of ANO. There is also a need to ensure that ANO has full independence in designing methodologies and other relevant documents.

For introducing the study programme accreditation, it is necessary to develop appropriate legislative acts, methodology and other relevant documents, as well to revise current legislative acts related to the institutional accreditation. The legal framework has clear impact on the operation of quality assurance in general. It is important that **all documents, which are regulating external quality assurance, are publicly available and stakeholders shall be involved in the development** and continuous updating of them. When designing the methodology, it is necessary to keep in mind that the ESG 2015 *Standard 2.2. Designing methodologies fit for purpose* indicates that external quality assurance **should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it and stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.**

The requirements to the experts included in the **Accreditation Council and Accreditation Commission**, the composition of these bodies, selection and approval of experts included should be indicated in the legislation and publicly available. It is advisable that **students and labour market representatives, as well as foreign experts are included in external QA procedures in Azerbaijan** for the purposes of greater objectivity and learning from the best foreign experiences.

The State Program on Increasing the International Competitiveness of the Higher Education System in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019-2023 intends establishment of initial 5 (five) international double



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diploma programs for the purpose of modernizing the content and quality indicators of higher education system of Azerbaijan. STE note the difference between double degree and joint degree programmes and that, following EUA recommendations, development and award joint degrees rather than double degrees is preferred. The evaluation of joint (including double) programmes, which are established between national or with foreign higher education institutions, should be **in line with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes** which was endorsed by Education Ministers of EHEA in 2015.

https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/02_European_Approach_QA_of_Joint_Programmes_v1_0.pdf

4.2 THE COMPLETE LIST OF LEGISLATION ANALYSED BY STE

1. Law on Education, signed by The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on 14 June 2016; unofficial translation into English.
2. State Program on Increasing the International Competitiveness of the Higher Education System in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019-2023, approved by the decision of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan of 16 November 2018.
3. "State standards for higher education and programs for higher education", approved on 23 April 2010 by the Decision No. 75 of the Cabinet of Ministers.
4. Draft State standard of higher education, to be approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, a file dated 2017
5. National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Approved by the Decree No.311 dated 18 July 2018 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, unofficial translation
6. Criteria determining the compliance of the activity of an education institution with the requirements of the state education standards, approved by the Order No 656 dated April 26, 2011 of the Minister of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan
7. Order on the establishment of Accreditation and Nostrification department, issued by the Ministry of Education.
8. The Regulations of the Accreditation and Nostrification Office, issued by the Ministry of Education.
9. On making supplements to the Regulations of Accreditation and Nostrification Office, issued by the Ministry of Education.
10. Bachelor's Study Content and Arrangement Rules, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers Decision No 117 on 24 June 2010
11. Rules on Organizing the Credit system education at bachelor and master levels of higher education institutions, main (basic higher) medical education and master level studies of Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, approved with Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan No 348 of December 24, 2013 (amended in 2018)
12. Legal and normative framework for higher education (comparative table) done under the previous Twinning project (ANNEX TO THE MISSION REPORT OF ACTIVITY 1.1: COMPARATIVE TABLE, dated 27 October 2015)
13. Draft Accreditation Rules of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes (available only in Azerbaijani language), not dated, presented during the visit.



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14. Regulations on Guidelines on Filling in Professor, Teacher and Head of Chair Positions in Higher Education Institutions, approved by the the Ministry of Education order No 401 dated 07.08.1996
15. Draft Regulations on the Scientific Council of higher education institution, to be approved by the order of the Minister of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2016), unofficial translation
16. Regulation of Scientific Board of higher education institution, approved by the Order of the Minister of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan on November 10, 1997
17. Statute of Higher education institution, approved by the decision #9 dated 21 January 2011 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Annex N 1, unofficial translation into English

Annex I

DETAILED ANALYSIS OF LEGISLATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN: CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE NEW DRAFT STATE STANDARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (AzQF)

The new draft State standard of higher education (NSS) has not yet approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, a project dated 2017, establishes in article 1.8 that Credit system (European Credit Transfer System – ECTS) is applied at all levels of higher education, it is once again repeated under point 7.5, which says that “academic workload of students shall be defined by means of credit system at all levels of higher education”. **This intention of universal usage of ECTS is a clear strength.**

While article 2.3 of NSS establishes that bachelor and master training are organized according to programmes, doctoral education is not covered by this or any other article, which leads to conclude that doctoral education is still not (at least to some part) organized in terms of structured study programmes. If doctoral students in Azerbaijan are not by a general rule exposed to some structured training aimed at development of their pedagogical competences, also some transversal skills, such as strategic planning, personal career management, communication and academic writing, project management and fundraising etc., this constitutes a weakness.

Point 9.2.3 of NSS regulates that “credits of sub-bachelor students - graduates who completed secondary specialized education with high results are recognized by the institutions for relevant specialties in line with the rules determined by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan.” STE asked for a copy of those rules (either in English or Russian). In response, it was explained that these rules are still under development.

Contra to requirements of the NSS under points 1.8 and 7.5, the workload of Bachelor level students is not expressed in credits under point 9.3.1 of the same document, instead it is regulated that “Standard study period for full-time intramural studies at Bachelor level is 4-5 years (extramural study period is one year longer than study period for full-time intramural studies). Standard study period for main (basic higher) medical studies is 5-6 years. This period is defined by study programmes of different specialties. Besides, part-time type of intramural studies is applied at Bachelor level. Period of study of



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part-time intramural studies at Bachelor level is determined in accordance with the individual teaching plan of learner". This is a clear weakness.

Similarly, under point 10.3.1 of NSS it is regulated that "Standard study period for full-time intramural studies at Master level is 1-2 years (extramural study period is six months longer than study period for full-time intramural studies). This period is defined by study programmes of different specialties. Period of study of part-time intramural studies at Master level is determined in accordance with the individual teaching plan of learner". This is an apparent weakness.

Thus, since there are no references to ECTS credits in relation to more detailed descriptions of either Bachelor or Master studies in the draft new State Standard for HE, this is identified as a gap in legislation that should be addressed. Also, it is advisable to revise the definitions of full-time and part-time studies in relation to the terms of "intramural" and "extramural" studies, as these concepts are not so widely used internationally and relate to older approaches of organization of study process.

Under point 10.5.2 of NSS it is stipulated that "Depending on the study programme persons who fully complete teaching plan are awarded "Master" high scientific-specialty or "Master" high specialty degree and relevantly numbered state document - diploma". **When analysing provisions of the draft NSS in relation to the National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning of the Republic of Azerbaijan (AzQF), approved by the Cabinet of Ministers' Decree No 311 on July 18, 2018 one can see that in the AzQF there is no mention of two different types of Master degrees referred to in the NSS, and this constitutes a gap in legislation.**

Learning outcomes of PhD graduates are defined in AzQF. According to point 1.3.2., qualifications are described in terms of minimum learning outcomes (LOs) required from learners. Point 1.3.4 establishes that qualifications of higher education and secondary specialised education (sub-bachelor education) are referenced to ECTS compatible credits. As **there is no further mention of doctoral qualifications in relation to ECTS credits, this constitutes a gap between the requirements of the NSS and the AzQF.**

For recognition of foreign qualifications in Azerbaijan, it is very important how qualifications are defined in Azerbaijan, as the process of recognition necessary involves determining the value of the two qualifications compared and assessment of the main five elements of each qualification (level, workload, quality, learning outcomes, duration). Point 1.3.5. of AzQF maintains that all qualifications are described in terms of knowledge, skills and autonomy/responsibility, and referenced to the AzQF levels. This should be taken as a departure point when establishing comparability between foreign-origin qualifications and qualifications awarded in Azerbaijan. To that effect, a subsidiary text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention on usage of qualification frameworks may be consulted (full text available at [http://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/LRC Subsidiary Text on the Use of QFs ENGLISH.pdf](http://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/LRC_Subsidiary_Text_on_the_Use_of_QFs_ENGLISH.pdf))

In AzQF 1.3.7 point reads: "The quality assurance of education and scientific research by the Higher Attestation Commission under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which awards qualifications of doctor of philosophy and doctor of science, is regulated by the "Statue on the rules on awarding scientific degrees and titles" approved by the decree No. 857 dated February 21, 2003 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan". **This leads to assume that HEIs are not autonomously issuing third cycle qualifications as is the case in the overwhelming majority of EHEA countries, and it is advisable to reconsider such a practice.**



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Point 2.1.6 of AzQF refers to the QF – EHEA, adopted by the 47 countries participating in the Bologna Process. It is recommended not to have a specific number of countries mentioned in the national legislation, since it may change, as indeed from 2015 Ministerial meeting it is 48 countries participating in educational reforms within the EHEA framework.

For recognition of foreign qualifications it is very important what is stipulated under 2.1.8 of AzQF, namely that a formal recognition has a specific purpose in mind – either access to educational or employment activities. Thus, recognition is not absolute, but relative to the purpose the applicant bears in Azerbaijan. This leads to assume, that a certain level of flexibility may be exercised when assessing foreign qualifications, and that there could be instances when the recognition decisions regarding the same qualification may differ depending upon the purpose that its holder has. Such an approach would be very much in line with the current international best practice in recognition of full qualifications from abroad and would move away from the legacy of nostrification which by no standard is a good practice for the implementation of the LRC.

Recognition is much facilitated when Diploma Supplements (as annexes to the official qualification) are used. **Intention to issue DS is mentioned under point 2.1.12. of AzQF and this is a clear strength. Efforts should be made ensure issuance of DS to all graduates of HE automatically and free of charge, as this is one of the key commitments within EHEA.** STE have learned that currently HEIs issue DS only upon request, most often when graduates move abroad, and that in the labor market (all sectors - public sector, private sector, non-governmental sector) there is low awareness of the value of DS and it is not used for employment purposes. **It is advised that Azerbaijani authorities take note of recently updated template of the Diploma Supplement**, which was adopted as an official document (annex IV to the Communiqué) in the 2018 EHEA Ministerial meeting in Paris (available here http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2018_Paris/78/2/EHEAParis2018_Communique_Appendix_V_952782.pdf).

In AzQF point 2.1.16. quality assurance is defined as a process or a set of processes adopted nationally and institutionally, but no further definition is given of the purpose of it (e.g., such purposes as accountability, improvement, information provision, meeting threshold standards, achieving excellence, assuring threshold standards etc.) or the nature thereof (such as evaluation, review, audit, benchmarking etc.). The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (adopted in 2005, revised in 2015) could serve as a reference point in further elaboration of the AzQF (from several unofficial translations into Russian it is advisable to use the one available here: https://enqa.eu/indirme/esg/ESG%20in%20Russian_by%20IQAA.pdf).

In AzQF, definitions under 2.1.18 (credit) and 2.1.19 (credit systems) do not mention a very important function of credit serving the purposes of not only accumulation (expressed in terms of workload), but also transfer, e.g. between higher education institutions within the same higher education system or between different higher education systems – that of Azerbaijan and other EHEA countries or the wider world; between different types/levels of educational institutions.

Among stated purposes of the AzQF as in point 2.1.28 (bearing the definition of the National qualifications framework), an aim of helping individual formation is not currently mentioned, while collective formation (for the labor market and society) is included. **The Council of Europe Recommendation for public responsibility of higher education and research should serve for guidance.**



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Under point 2.1.31 of AzQF it is stipulated that national standards of education set comprehensive norms, common state requirements for a certain period of time (not less than 5 years). The question arises how this relates to bachelor and master degrees and formulation of requirements for each of the higher education cycles separately. Possibly, the NSS would be a good place to describe in general terms that graduates of the first cycle programmes are allowed progress for second cycle studies at another HEI in the country, if, in order to practice a certain profession they necessarily need to complete 5 years of university education and gather 300 ECTS.

The definition of the “European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)” under point 2.1.35 of AzQF show **confusion between EQF for LLL with EHEA-QF (developed within Bologna Process) that needs to be sorted out.** The point starts with definition of EQF-LLL, and then proceeds to EHEA-QF, which should be described under its own point.

The definition of the ENIC/NARIC under point 2.1.47 of AzQF needs benefit from clarification: separate explanations of roles and functioning of ENIC and NARIC networks could be given, since European Union (EU) has nothing to do with the ENIC network, as NARIC is the network supported and funded by EU, whereas ENIC network is supported by the Council of Europe and UNESCO. While ECTS is promoted within EHEA, Diploma Supplements are promoted much widely, as the format was developed jointly by the Council of Europe, UNESCO, and the European Commission; thus, attributing ECTS and Diploma Supplements to EU domain only is not correct. NARIC members are EU member states, while ENIC members include countries, parties to the Council of Europe Cultural Convention and among members have Canada, the United States of America, Israel, New Zealand and Australia.

Under point 4.5. of AzQF it is said that the qualifications at the levels 3-7 are related with specific occupation and specialities at the labour market and are based on occupational standards. As a rule, higher education cannot be solely based on occupational standards because of the four purposes of higher education, where relevance to the labour market and gainful employment of graduates is one, but there are also other purposes, such as production of the wide and advanced knowledge base and contribution to innovation being another aim, then personal development of individuals, and last but not least – it is among aims of higher education to contribute to the development of civic and democratic society. This means, **there is specificity in higher education which cannot limit higher education qualifications to be based only on occupational standards.** Moreover, for some study fields, more professionally oriented, the labor market intelligence is very important (e.g., accounting, public relations), whereas for others it is not so much relevant (e.g., mathematics, philosophy).

While for VET education occupational standards and defined content of educational programmes are very important, for higher education it is not, and this is specificity of this sector. It should be noted than **in the majority of EHEA countries there is no typical curricula in the format of “state standards” approved, but rather there are framework descriptors** (called in various ways, e.g. subject benchmark statements, study field descriptors etc.), **within which HEIs have autonomy to develop different study programmes.** They are broadly in line with the frameworks, but still allow for flexibility and variation between institutions. It should be reminded that diversity and autonomy of HEIs, and respect to these principles are among the basic values of the Bologna Process.

As for recognition, the point 5.3 5.3. of AzQF stipulates a joint responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population **to create a system of recognition of competences obtained through non-formal and informal education.** STE are aware that it is yet to be done.



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Under 6.3.5. of AzQF it is mentioned that external quality evaluation is by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Higher Attestation Commission under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. It should be noted, that according to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in EHEA, the official document of EHEA, therefore, a commitment of Azerbaijani authorities as well, external quality assurance should be done by an independent agency. Only independent agencies, working in substantial compliance to ESG, maybe be admitted to the register of trustworthy agencies, the EQAR. **Among parties of the EQAR, are governments, including Azerbaijan, thus, it is an international commitment of Azerbaijan to have an independent agency.**

In AzQF, the descriptions of 8 levels, there is no consistency in a way, that for level 8, it is prescribed that somebody with this level of a qualification “writes and defends a dissertation in order to obtain doctor of philosophy and doctor of science scientific degrees”, whereas in case of lower levels, e.g. level 6 and 7, there is no expectation that a bachelor and master thesis correspondingly are necessarily produced and defended.

Point 4.3. of AzQF placing the existing qualifications is of utmost importance, but is somewhat confusing, as it lists specific academic and some professional qualifications, and then continues with „further education” and “experience”, but does not clearly state that an appropriate level qualifications can be obtained outside of formal education arrangements, and somebody deemed to be on a certain level should not necessarily have a corresponding formal qualification. Thus, sub-points under point 4.3 would benefit from being more specific, or, alternatively, there could be a general point in the description of AzNQF included, that all qualifications of all levels from 1 to 8 can be obtained in a way of formal education, but also by in-formal and non-formal learning and in the places of work, practicing a certain profession. This way, an aim of AzQF to “support the lifelong learning, as well as provide the recognition of the competences obtained through non-formal and informal learning” would be fully realised (point 3.1.5.).

Point 4.7. of AzQF is very important, as establishes compatibility of Azerbaijani qualifications to EHEA qualifications. It stipulates that “Generic descriptors of the secondary specialised (Sub-bachelor’s) qualification are compatible with the QF-EHEA short-cycle higher education level descriptors, generic descriptors of the Bachelor’s and basic higher medical education qualifications are compatible with the QF-EHEA first cycle descriptors, generic descriptors of the Master’s and postgraduate medical education (doctor-specialist) qualifications are compatible with the QF-EHEA second cycle descriptors and generic descriptors of the Doctoral qualifications are compatible with the QF-EHEA third cycle descriptors”). This clarity is a positive feature.

ANNEX II Quality Assurance

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE LEGISLATIVE ACTS RELATED TO THE QUALITY ASSURANCE

- **Analysis**

Analysis of the documents related to the quality assurance of the Accreditation and Nostrification office, in order to introduce new assessment procedure study programme accreditation, was done based on such provided documents:



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- Order on the establishment of Accreditation and Nostrification department (hereinafter - Order)
- The Regulations of the Accreditation and Nostrification Office (hereinafter – the Regulations)
- On making supplements to the Regulations of Accreditation and Nostrification Office
- Legal and normative framework for higher education (comparative table) done under the previous Twinning project
- Law on Education
- Accreditation Rules of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes (draft and available only in Azerbaijani language)

- 1) The Accreditation and Nostrification office (ANO) is established under the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

In the order it is stated that ANO shall be included in the list of units subordinated to, but not belonging to the structure of the Ministry.

The Regulations prescribe that ANO is led by a head appointed and dismissed by the Minister for Education, the deputy head and heads of departments of the ANO are appointed and dismissed by the Minister for Education on the submission of the head of ANO. The other staff is selected and approved by the head of ANO. Also the paragraph 4 of the Regulations indicates the independence of ANO to some extent.

However, the ESG 2015 *Standard 3.3. Independence* states that Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. In considering the **independence of an agency, it is important to assure the organisational and operational independence as well as independence of formal outcomes.**

There should be a **clear structure of legislative acts**, which are approved by the Cabinet of Ministers, by the Ministry and by ANO itself. Besides, it is advisable that the Ministry involves ANO in design of regulatory acts related to the quality assurance issues or delegates ANO to draft relevant acts.

- 2) According to the part I General Provisions of the Regulations ANO provides services on the accreditation of education institutions (including branches and representations of the universities of foreign countries operating in the Republic of Azerbaijan) of all educational levels operating in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

However, part II (The areas of activity of the Office) includes such areas:

- 7.1. to execute the accreditation of education institutions;
- 7.2. to execute the accreditation of study programs.

Therefore, it could be inferred that ANO is authorised to conduct the accreditation of study programmes.

The Education Law defines the accreditation of educational institutions only. Therefore, in the legislation it is necessary **to prescribe both procedures - institutional and study programme accreditation - and provide definitions for both procedures, for example, this could be indicated in the new State Standard for Higher Education.**

- 3) Accreditation Council



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According to the Regulations, ANO submits a proposal to the Ministry of Education for approval of the composition of the Accreditation Council.

The Accreditation Council is approved and chaired by the Minister for Education. The Accreditation Council shall decide on the accreditation. In the legislative acts there is no clear reference what institutions are represented in the Council; how many members are there, what are their rights and obligations.

In order to ensure compliance with the ESG 2015, it is necessary **to reconsider the composition of this Council, ensuring that students and labour market representatives are included in it.** It is necessary to indicate the requirements to the experts included in the Council and its composition in the legislation and make it publicly available.

4) Accreditation Commission

According to the Regulations, ANO establishes an Accreditation Commission for each education institution under accreditation. The same procedure could be applied also for study programme accreditation.

In the Rules for accreditation (or another legislative document), it is necessary to indicate the requirements for the experts to serve on the Accreditation commission, its composition, as well as the procedure of selection and approval of this Commission.

In order to ensure compliance with the ESG 2015, it is necessary to include **students and labour market representatives, as well as foreign experts.**

- 5) The comprehensive analysis of the draft document “Accreditation Rules for Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes” was not possible due to the document’s availability in Azerbaijani language.

The draft document and the main principles which should be included in this document were orally discussed with ANO.

● **Recommendations**

Considering the available information and analysis done, for the introduction of a new procedure - study programme accreditation, the recommendations are provided below.

The provided recommendations are aimed to achieve the greater compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Although the ESG part 3 applies to quality assurance agencies, it should be kept in mind that all three parts are interlinked and work on a complimentary basis. Part 3 sets standards for quality assurance agencies and refers to part 2, indicating that agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG. However, Part 2 sets that external quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

Therefore, **ANO as the national quality assurance agency should take into account the ESG as a whole and ensure the compliance of external quality assurance in line with the ESG.** It is recommended that ANO and the Ministry of Education continue to work support the concept of the new model for study programme review under the remit of ANO. There is also a need to ensure that ANO has full



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independence in designing methodologies and other relevant documents. Indeed, the capacity of ANO should be improved.

In order to build quality assurance system in line with the ESG and to ensure quality of higher education, **close working relationships and open communication between the Ministry of Education and ANO should be facilitated.**

For introducing the study programme accreditation, it is necessary to develop appropriate legislative acts, methodology and other relevant documents, as well to revise current legislative acts related to the institutional accreditation. The legal framework has clear impact on the operation of quality assurance in general. It is important that **all documents, which are regulating external quality assurance, shall be publicly available and stakeholders shall be involved in the design** and continuous improvement of them.

1. Rules (regulations) for study programme accreditation

The Rules should define the purpose, procedure and main principles of study programme accreditation, as well the rules should delegate the development of other related documents to the responsible body, i.e. ANO.

The Rules could consist of such main chapters:

- 1) General provisions (describing the purpose and structure of the rules);
- 2) Institutions Involved in the Process of Accreditation, their rights and obligations (indicating the institutions involved, such as ANO, higher education institutions, Accreditation Council, Accreditation Commission, Ministry etc);
- 3) Procedure for the accreditation of study programme (setting the main requirements and steps of procedure);
- 4) Final provisions (describing some additional issues, e.g. financial, appeals).

2. Methodology for accreditation of study programmes

When designing the methodology, it is necessary to keep in mind that the ESG 2015 *Standard 2.2. Designing methodologies fit for purpose* indicates that external quality assurance **should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it and stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.**

As in Azerbaijan there already is the institutional accreditation in place, each individual procedure should be defined clearly, including any potential relationship between them.

The methodology shall specify the purpose, procedure and provide methodological support for the assessment of study programmes. The methodology shall ensure the quality assessment in compliance with the ESG 2015.

The methodology could include the following:

- 1) The purpose and general outline of methodology;
- 2) The parties involved, their rights and obligations (based on the high level document and including more detailed specification);



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- 3) The evaluation process (describing all steps of procedure in details, indicating the terms and requirements)
- 4) The evaluation area, criteria and indicators;
- 5) Application procedure and requirements for a self-evaluation report;
- 6) Experts' team work (describing the selection and approval of experts' team, the possibility of higher education institution to reject any expert if conflict of interest is occurred, the main principles of work, the report writing requirements, on-site visit);
- 7) Decision taking procedure (describing the procedure of taking decisions);
- 8) Appeals procedure (describing the rights of higher education institution to appeal or to submit complaints and the procedure of the review of appeals and complaints);
- 9) Follow-up procedure (describing the procedure).

3. Guidelines for the preparation of a Self-evaluation report of a study programme and Guidelines for the preparation of an experts' final report

Developed guidelines could **provide the higher education institutions and experts with a structured framework for the preparation respective reports**. The guidelines set out the information and analysis to be included in the reports, the scope of them. It will facilitate the work of both higher education institutions in the process of self-evaluation and experts in the process of assessment.

The purpose of the self-evaluation process in the higher education institution is to get a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the study programme. The higher education institution carries out analytical and critical assessment of its activities within the study programme. The self-evaluation report is prepared as an analytical reference material and it contains analysis and description of the assessment criteria and their indicators which are justified by particular examples. Quantitative indicators included in the self-evaluation report complement the qualitative analysis carried out by the HEI.

Experts shall assess all criteria followed by indicators which are to be taken into account when assessing the relevant criteria. Experts shall analyse each criteria and make conclusions, specifying strengths and weaknesses. Experts shall provide recommendations which are clear, understandable and measurable.

4. Accreditation Council

The requirements to the experts included in the Accreditation **Council and the composition of it should be indicated in the legislation and publicly available**. It is advisable that **students and labour market representatives are included in it**.

ANO should ensure the independence from third parties, such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholder organisations. Therefore the composition of this Council should be revised.

5. Accreditation Commission

The requirements to the experts included in the Accreditation **Commission should be clearly defined in the respective documents (methodology or rules/regulations) and publicly available**. It is advisable that **students and labour market representatives, as well as foreign experts are included in it**.

The procedure of selection and approval of Accreditation Commission shall be developed and publicly available.



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6. Evaluation of Joint programmes

The evaluation of joint programmes, which are established between national or with foreign higher education institutions, should be **in line with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes**. It was adopted in 2015 by European Ministers responsible for higher education and has been developed to ease external quality assurance of these programmes: it defines standards that are based on the agreed tools of the EHEA, without applying additional national criteria. This is expected to facilitate integrated approaches to quality assurance of joint programmes, which genuinely reflect and mirror their joint character.

https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/02_European_Approach_QA_of_Joint_Programmes_v1_0.pdf

Annex III Credit Transfer and Recognition

CURRENT GUIDANCE ON CREDIT TRANSFER IN HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

During the most recent meeting of Education Ministers of EHEA countries in Paris (France) on 24-25 May 2018, the revised overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA was adopted (full text available at http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2018_Paris/77/8/EHEAParis2018_Communique_AppendixIII_952778.pdf). **Observing the joint ministerial commitment made, it would be advisable when nationally regulating credit transfer, that Azerbaijani authorities take into consideration the following:**

- There is no general guidance provided how many credits could be transferred from lower levels to short cycle studies (EQF level 5), towards the first cycle qualification (EQF level 6), and towards the third cycle qualification (EQF level 8) – this is left for countries to make decisions as they deem fit respecting the principle of subsidiarity;
- at the second cycle level (EQF level 7), from 30 ECTS credits (in case Master studies take 90 ECTS) to 60 ECTS credits (in case Master studies take 120 ECTS) could be recognised from prior cycles or knowledge and skills gained in informal ways and non-formal settings.

Within European Union's Erasmus+ programme, it is a general expectation that students enjoy full recognition of credits gained at another HE institution.

- It is among criteria for project selection according to the applicant's guide that recognition is granted (see page 38 of Erasmus+ programme guide: "Quality of the activity design and implementation (maximum 20 points) The completeness and quality of arrangements for the selection of participants, the support provided to them and the recognition of their mobility period (in particular in the Partner country)").
- To facilitate recognition of credits gained abroad, as a rule, trilateral agreements are drafted before the mobility period, involving the sending (home) institution, the receiving (foreign) institution, and the student. Model agreements can be found here:



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https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/applicants/mobility-agreement_en. The aim of this agreement is to achieve clarity on subjects (courses, modules) taken and transfer of credits. The learning agreement is a mandatory document, and it includes the following Commitment: “By signing this document, the student, the Sending Institution and the Receiving Institution confirm that they approve the Learning Agreement and that they will comply with all the arrangements agreed by all parties. Sending and Receiving Institutions undertake to apply all the principles of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education relating to mobility for studies (or the principles agreed in the Inter-Institutional Agreement for institutions located in Partner Countries). The Beneficiary Institution and the student should also commit to what is set out in the Erasmus+ grant agreement. The Receiving Institution confirms that the educational components listed in Table A are in line with its course catalog and should be available to the student. *The Sending Institution commits to recognise all the credits or equivalent units gained at the Receiving Institution for the successfully completed educational components and to count them towards the student's degree as described in Table B. Any exceptions to this rule are documented in an annex of this Learning Agreement and agreed by all parties.* The student and the Receiving Institution will communicate to the Sending Institution any problems or changes regarding the study programme, responsible persons and/or study period.”

As Azerbaijan is an eligible partner country for International Credit Mobility (under the category of European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) Eastern Partnership) within Erasmus+, **it is strongly suggested to make every effort to promote proper usage of ECTS within higher education institutions for credit transfer purposes between institutions within and outside Azerbaijan.**

To ease the mobility in the EHEA, ECTS was developed as a tool to measure the student workload and learning outcomes – for accumulation and transfer purposes. STE are aware that there is a national piece of legislation adopted by the decree No. 348 of the Cabinet of Ministers on 24 December 2013 (revised in 2018) called “**Rules on Organizing the Credit System education at bachelor and master levels of higher education institutions**”. **This piece of legislation needs amendments.** A clear reference to ECTS measuring all student workload both in and outside a class is missing under point 2.1.1. Also, the general terms part fails to include a reference to Diploma Supplement to be issued. Definitions on study modes (full-time, part-time) need to be improved, and, more importantly, practices within HEIs need to be modernised as well to correspond to the international best practice. STE propose to consider awarding credits for non-academic activities (such as voluntary work, community engagement). Also, it should be clear that internship periods (e.g. practice and training in companies) need to be covered by credits, and correspondingly point 3.2.7.

When the opportunity comes to revise this Decree, Azerbaijani authorities are advised to consult the updated version of ECTS User’s Guide, which was endorsed at the Ministerial meeting in 2015, and thus has a status of an official EHEA document

(http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/ECTS_Guide/00/0/ects-users-guide-2015_614000.pdf).

Introduction of ECTS in various European countries has shown that application of ECTS is not always automatic and easy, this was repeatedly recorded in various documents that the biggest challenges for recognition lay not so much in the national legislation (although there are some), but rather in every day application within higher education institutions (see e.g. EUA Trends reports, and Bologna Process Implementation Reports of 2015 and 2018, the latest one available at <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/european-higher-education-area-2018->



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[bologna-process-implementation-report_en](#)). Therefore, **STE recommend analysis of Bologna Process implementation reports as a source for own benchmarking and identifying good practices.**

The notion of “student centred approach “ implying of students as self-regulated learners and co-contributors to the content of their education is missing altogether, thus, Azerbaijani authorities are advised to consult relevant guidance available on European level, starting from ESG (which contains a specific section 1.3 Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment), continuing to materials developed by European Student Union (available at www.esu-online.org, for example the publication “Student Centred Learning: Toolkit for Students, Staff and Higher Education Institutions” https://www.esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/4-SCL_toolkit_ESU_EI.pdf), among other. The development of pedagogics and didactics for higher education teaching is an area of growing importance for universities, which in the recent years had to respond to a larger and more diverse student body, while emphasising student-centredness and focus on learning outcomes. This is central to the European University Association Forum on Teaching and Learning since 2017 and developed with the EFFECT project (<https://eua.eu/101-projects/560-effect.html>).

EXAMPLES OF CREDIT TRANSFER AND RECOGNITION IN SELECTED COUNTRIES IN EHEA

● Recognition of prior learning and “V.A.E.” in France

The French system called VAE “validation of knowledge acquired along professional experience” allows obtaining a diploma of a “qualification certificate” on the basis of a professional experience after validation by a jury of acquired knowledge and competences according to a defined process.

In the framework of a Social Modernization Law (n°2002-73), the so called VAE sets up the right for everyone involved in active life (employee, independent worker or volunteer) with at least a 3 year experience to get a full (or partial degree on a “RPL” (Recognition of Prior learning) basis with learning outcomes from work experience similar to the degree LOs.

This is a new way of graduating in a Life Long Learning scheme and/or a way to have access to further higher education. VAE offers the right for every working citizen, to obtain a recognition of his/her prior experience, in order to get a diploma or a vocational degree

- Used to deliver a full or partial qualification;
- The recognition of non-formal, informal and formal prior learning, acquired in various situations (professional or professional-like experience, volunteering, leisure activities, etc.);
- By the way of RPL, different paths lead to HE diplomas or vocational degrees.

Only qualifications or diplomas registered on the National Register for Professional Qualifications / RNCP (French National Qualification Framework RNCP) can be delivered by way of the VAE (see <http://www.rncp.cncp.gouv.fr/>).

This scheme involves responsibility of different key players:

- The state: through the necessary monitoring & assessment (Ministry for Labour),
- Regional authorities: information and guidance for the applicant and also organization and coordination of VAE (regional level),
- the Institutions: to carry out the procedure (by setting up juries who are in charge of this task),



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- Social partners: accredited joint bodies finance and give advice to companies and interested persons,
- Companies: in their training plan, internal communication.

Since this 2002 Law a new RPL system is set up consisting of:

- VAP: just gives access to a certain level of studies,
- VAE: for people having a 3-year professional, professional-like or any form of experience (whatever their age, profession, gender, situation etc.) gives possibility to validate part of a diploma or obtain it fully,
- VES: (Validation of HE studies) for students, awarded with a qualification/diploma that is not a (French) university diploma.

Nowadays, the same qualification / diploma can be awarded through VAE as it is through initial/regular or continuing education. Qualifications of all levels can be obtained through the VAE (not only HE levels) provided the diploma is registered on the RNCP.

The VAE is inscribed in Education and Labour codes, it is recognised as an activity for professional training, and is part of the policy for further training for employees. Collective VAE is currently encouraged and developed in some companies.

The so-called “LRU” law (10 August 2007-LRU: libertés et responsabilités des universités) defines the responsibilities and autonomy of the universities. Specifically, the autonomous universities have all the levers to organize their training according to the needs of their students and the employment situation, to initiate new niches of scientific excellence, to recruit high-level researchers, to enhance the value of commitment of staff, create foundations, develop cooperation with companies and to be more reactive on the international scene. The aim is to improve the living and working conditions of the entire university community, reinforce training for students to succeed and increase the attractiveness of higher education and research professions.

The credits are defined accordingly to the level of study and diploma (following the ECTS Users’ Guide), some institutions can award ECTS credits in some defined contexts, additional or specific training or also some extra-curricula activities can be eligible. Using ECTS contributes to the visibility of the HEI in European and international cooperation, and improves recognition of their curricula and diploma in the EHEA.

In France, one academic year is equal to 60 ECTS, correspondingly one semester is equal to 30 ECTS. Higher education institutions are autonomously deciding upon the workload equal to 1 credit ECTS, it is between 25-30 hours of student work in and outside the classrooms.

There is equivalence when there is partnership between two institutions such as with ERASMUS programme. In other cases, in the situation of a student mobility and in another country, the host institution and the institution of origin of the student have to establish the so called “contract of study exchange” or a learning agreement in order to recognize the credits. HEIs keep such model or form of “contract of study” at disposal of students to be fulfilled when they apply for mobility. The two institutions have to exchange documents about the student. This contract has to be fulfilled when the student departs from his/her institution and also when he/she will leave the host institution, at the end of the planned mobility. The traceability with an official document (academic transcript) containing information by semester and ECTS earned during the student’s training is very important for recognition of his/her mobility.

Recognition of extracurricular activities:



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In France indeed, the Law on Equality and Citizenship that was adopted early 2017 allows for the validation, by the higher education institutions awarding State diplomas, of the competences and knowledge acquired by students through extra-academic activities (namely voluntary work, military operational reserve or civic service). French higher education institutions have been implementing the recognition of the involvement of students in associations since 2001, usually using ECTS.

In the framework of Erasmus+, **EXTRASup** is a project supporting the implementation of policy reforms linked to the European Higher Education Area. It is led by the French Ministry for Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MESRI) and the International Center for Pedagogical Studies (CIEP). From November 2016 to March 2018, **EXTRASup** aimed at gathering higher education stakeholders in France together with European experts to produce a **methodological toolkit**. **The toolkit** is meant for the **higher education institutions, the teaching staff and the students willing to take steps towards the recognition and validation of the learning outcomes and competences developed by students in the framework of citizenship activities or personal involvement within their training programs**. More information in English language is accessible under the link :

<http://www.ciep.fr/en/europe-extrasup-reconnaissance-garantie-qualite-acquis-competences-extra-curriculaires-etudiants>

This is in phase with the Bologna process, which includes, as part of its orientations, the need to introduce a social dimension within the European Higher education Area as well as a student-centered learning approach.

Other actions can be eligible to ECTS: The PEPITE award, dedicated to students and young graduates with a status of student-entrepreneurs, is a symbol of support from the Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The goal is to **support company creation projects** from students and/or young graduates by awarding the best innovative projects from **30 student centres for innovation, transfer and entrepreneurship (PEPITE**, "Pôles étudiants pour l'innovation, le transfert et l'entrepreneuriat" in French) distributed all over the French territory by helping higher education institutions, economic players and association players work together. Teaching units (U.E.) "professionalization" were gradually introduced in the training models to allow the issuance of credits ECTS to students.

Information on the PEPITE action is available under the following link <https://www.campusfrance.org/en/student-entrepreneurship-53-laureates-of-the-pepите-award-0>. In 2018, 3/4 of projects presented are the result of **teamwork** and are included in the category of **technological projects**. But non-technological projects are definitely gaining momentum (45%, against 28% in 2017). Candidates thus presented more and more **social innovations in the field of everyday life**. 60% of laureates are students and 40% are young graduates; 22% have a doctorate (PhD) or Master's degree.

- ***Credit transfer in Latvia***

Each higher education institution shall establish the procedure for credit transferring, based on the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and respective Cabinet of Ministers regulations.

Credit transfer is possible in such ways as follows:



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- To transfer from one higher education institution to another one,
- To transfer from one study programme to another one within the same higher education institution,
- To transfer ECTS that have been allocated through the procedure of recognition of prior learning or professional experience from one higher education institution to another.

It is allowed to start studies at the same or lower level study programme. After short cycle (EQF level 5) it is allowed to continue studies at bachelor or professional higher education programmes (EQF level 6). A higher education institution decides on the level of studies that the student may enter and the amount of credits that can be transferred.

Knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education or acquired through professional experience should meet the following criteria:

- the documents presented contain clear, unambiguous and complete information about the acquired or acquired knowledge, skills and competences;
- at least one credit point may be awarded for recognized, acquired or acquired knowledge, skills and competences;
- the person's previous formal education corresponds to the requirements for admission to the relevant study programme;
- in the examination, organised by respective higher education institution, a person has presented knowledge, skills and competence corresponding to the requirements of the relevant study programme or its part;
- knowledge, skills and competences acquired through professional experience can only be recognized:
 - o in that part of the study programme, which consists of practice;
 - o on the study results to be attained in a study programme or a study module that certifies the acquired practical knowledge;

Skills, knowledge and competences acquired outside formal education can be recognized if they correspond to the higher education level and are achieved as follows:

- o a continuous educational programme, a professional development programme or another educational programme (except for primary, secondary and higher education programmes), in which the knowledge, skills and competences acquired correspond to the study results achieved in the study programme or a study module;
- o other forms of non-formal education (e.g. self-education). The knowledge, skills and competences acquired in these forms of education in the study programmes in which specialists are trained in regulated professions can only be recognized as study results to be attained in the study programme or a study module, which confirm the acquired theoretical knowledge.

One credit point for knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education or acquired through professional experience may be awarded if they have been completed for at least one week (40 academic hours) in an educational or professional activity. In Latvia, 1 national credit is equal to 1,5 ECTS credits.

Knowledge, skills and competences acquired or recognized outside formal education or acquired through professional experience cannot be considered as the final examination of a respective study



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programme, a state examination or a final examination – a professional qualification examination or doctoral thesis.

The recommendations have been developed within the framework of the project “Recognition of Prior Learning” (Erasmus+ KA3 project) with the aim to facilitate fair and transparent assessment of learning outcomes achieved outside the formal education or in professional experience. Recommendations are available in English at the following link:

http://www.izm.gov.lv/images/Erasmus/leprieks_iegutas_izglitibas_pielidzinasa/Recommendations.pdf

● **Credit transfer in Lithuania**

The principles of credit transfer and recognition of prior knowledge (RPL) are established by the Ministry of Education and Science, which in its turn obliges all higher education institutions to develop their own internal procedures for credit transfer and RPL. To assist in implementing RPL, there were a number of national projects financed which enabled almost all HEIs to prepare their own regulations on the matter. However, to date there are not so many cases of RPL as it involves high demands for time and other resources of both HEIs and individuals.

The general regulation on progression and credit transfer from VET sector to HE sector in Lithuania is as follows:

- in cases when there is an agreement between a VET provider and an HEI and coordination of curricula is done, progression in studies (from VET to HE) and possibilities for credit transfer should be described in the agreement between the two institutions;
- in cases when there is no agreement between the VET provider and the HEI and no coordination of curricula, progression in studies (from VET to HE) and possibilities for credit transfer should be described in the internal regulations by HEIs; they have autonomy to decide how this is executed.

The limits for credit transfer between VET and HE are not centrally established, it is up to HEIs to decide.

As to recognition of study periods in higher education, credit transfer is regulated as follows:

- If a student studied at another HEI in Lithuania or abroad and there was an agreement between institutions on the content of studies, a student gets full recognition of credits without any limitation imposed, if there were no breaches of the agreement. In cases when there were deviations from the agreement that did not depend upon a student, upon returning to Lithuania a student should have a possibility to take necessary courses, be assessed and gather the credits without facing additional fees.
- If a student studied at another HEI in Lithuania or abroad and there was no prior agreement between institutions on the content of studies, credits are transferred as follows:
 - o The course from study field fundamentals or attributed to a (professional) specialisation is transferred if the workload completed makes up no less than 2/3 of the workload of a similar course to be studied and its structure and aims are comparable, or in case there are no similar courses in that part of the study programme, the course corresponds to the general requirements for the subjects and gives necessary knowledge and skills;
 - o The course from general subjects to be taught at the HEI is transferred, if it is substantially comparable to the main aims and the main structural parts of the course content, transfer for which it is sought;



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- o Free elective courses are transferred without any limitations;
- o The final thesis and/or final exam is not transferable;
- o In case a student transfers between the sector of colleges of higher education and the university sector; the total amount of courses and credits transferred at the first cycle cannot be higher than $\frac{1}{2}$ of the workload of all subjects attributed to the fundamentals or specialisation to be completed at a relevant university first cycle course;
- o In total, not more than $\frac{2}{3}$ of the entire workload of a chosen study programme can be transferred; within this transferred amount the workload from another study programme, belonging to a different cycle (first cycle, second cycle) and another type (university, college of higher education) of studies, shall not surpass the limitations as follows:
 - § Up to $\frac{1}{2}$ of credits can be transferred towards acquiring the first cycle qualification (EQF level 6);
 - § Not more than $\frac{1}{4}$ credits could be transferred in case a student follows an integrated study programme (usually – in medicine and engineering) towards a second cycle (Master) degree (EQF level 7).

In Lithuania, ECTS credits are used as national credits from 1 September 2011. 1600 hours of one academic year are equal to 60 credits.



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