*Unofficial translation*

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of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan of 16 November 2018

**State Program**

**on Increasing the International Competitiveness of the Higher Education System in the Republic of Azerbaijan**

**for 2019-2023**

1. **Introduction**

Growing role of education in economic life in modern age necessitates the formation of knowledge economy and continuation of state support to the development of human capital, and increasing the international competitiveness of the higher education system in Azerbaijan. Advanced countries achieved sustainable and successful economic progress owning to improving the level of higher education in line with international standards.

The key goal of the “State Program on education of Azerbaijani Youth abroad in 2007-2015”, approved by the decree N 2090 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan of 16 April 2007, was to meet the need of the country for highly qualified specialists for the purpose of ensuring the formation of competitive economy in the country and to transform oil capital (black gold) into human capital. In addition to training national specialists in different areas of life, the successful implementation of the State Program sparked the interest of youths in science, modern technologies, and advanced knowledge.

In addition to employment in their professions in various institutions and organizations upon graduation and returning to Azerbaijan, they also engaged in academic activity in higher education institutions of the country, and share the knowledge and experience they have gained.

Overall, 3558 Azerbaijani citizens gained a right to study in over 350 most prominent higher education institutions of 32 countries, hundreds of youths studied or currently studying the fields that are priority for our country in such prestigious universities as Harvard University, Yale University, Oxford University, Bristol University, Sorbonne University, Kyoto University, Toronto University, Heidelberg University, Bilkent University, Moscow State International Relations Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Those youths have been invited to do internships in leading organizations and companies of the world (UN, NASA, “Microsoft”, “Google”, “Bloomberg”, “Samsung”, “LG” etc.). Participating in public and cultural life of the countries they live, they are particularly active in promoting Azerbaijani history, culture, art, and in diaspora.

The youths uniting behind the idea of Azerbaijanism and national values in countries like the United States of America, Australia, Great Britain and Japan serves to protect the interests of our country.

Completing their studies with high academic indicators and coming back to Azerbaijan, the youths are working in different institutions and organizations. These youths play an important role in the development of higher education institutions ("ADA" University, State Administration Academy under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku State University, Baku Higher Oil School, Azerbaijan State Economic University etc.) by modernizing the academic skills of the teaching staff, and being an example on how to organize the teaching.

Over the last years, a number of projects have been implemented to train highly-qualified specialists in the higher education institutions of Azerbaijan. The “State Strategy for the development of education in the Republic of Azerbaijan”, approved by the decree N13 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan of 24 October 2013, establishes the key goals of modern education system which ensures sustainable and competitive development, keeps the development of human capital in the spotlight, and realizes the training and management of human resources. A number of innovative projects, including SABAH groups (consisting of educated, skillful and ready students) were established in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan as of 2014, branches of prominent universities of several countries (Baku branch of Moscow State University named after M.V.Lomonosov, Baku branch of Moscow State Medical University named after M.Sechenev) were established in Azerbaijan, international double diploma programs (Azerbaijan Tourism and Management University and University of Applied Sciences Krems of Austria, Baku Higher Oil School with Heriot-Watt University of Great Britain, ADA University with n Michigan University of US and Maastricht University of Holland, French-Azerbaijani University (UFAZ)" project between the Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University and Strasburg University of France) were set up.

Besides, it is highly relevant for our country to develop higher education in line with the international experience in order to train competitive specialists in line with the new challenges emerging in the context of globalization, and to achieve continuous and sustainable development of human capital. Having regard to the activities identified by the "Azerbaijan 2020: outlook into future" Development concept and the "State Strategy for the development of education in the Republic of Azerbaijan", it is necessary to adopt new State Program for higher education.

1. **Objectives of State Program**

Benefiting from the experience and achievements gained following the successful implementation of the “State Program on education of Azerbaijani Youth abroad in 2007-2015”, the "State Program on Increasing the International Competitiveness of the Higher Education System in the Azerbaijan Republic for 2019-2023" was developed for the purposes of ensuring the sustainable development of human capital in Azerbaijan through meeting the need for competent human resources by means of training them in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as providing the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan with access to quality education in line with the higher education standards of leading countries.

The key target of the program is to train a new generation of specialists and modernize the content and quality indicators of Azerbaijani higher education system with international double diploma program taking advantage of the cutting-edge scientific achievements and innovative teaching technologies.

One of the priorities is to study and to apply international practice in order to support the development of higher education institutions. Application of transnational education model in the Republic of Azerbaijan, which became relevant in countries such as the USA, Germany, Australia, Great Britain, France and Japan as of the end of last century, shall lay the groundwork for successful outcomes. Therefore, it is of special importance to apply international double diploma programs in our country. Hence, specialties relevant for the country's development priorities shall be taught in our higher education institutions in line with the study programs of world's leading higher education institutions.

Two-year joint "Business management" Master project of ADA University with Maastricht University of the Kingdom of Holland, three technical bachelor programs of Baku Higher Oil School with Heriot-Watt University of Great Britain, four technical bachelor programs within "French-Azerbaijani University (UFAZ)" project in the Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University are successful steps in this respect. Expansion of the existing practice shall enable the achievement of key objectives such as the development and internalization of Azerbaijani higher education system, and improving the quality of education.

Engagement of foreign teaching staff in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan through international double diploma programs will enable fast application of cutting-edge teaching technologies as well as open new windows of opportunities for our youths studying in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Subsequently, the establishment of mutual working relations between foreign specialists and our education providers will ensure contribution of foreign specialists to our education system even after leaving the country, speed up the process of transforming higher education institutions into modern research and innovation centres, and thus, they will progress in international ratings. Growing standing of higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the world will provide them more opportunities to attract foreign students and teaching staff independently, enable them to advance in international ratings, and make it possible to train specialists in line with the country's fast pace of development.

Besides, based on the experience gained as a result of state-funded education abroad program, it is necessary to set up a system for improving the selection of the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan for doctoral studies and for getting them in direct contact with employers, as well as a monitoring system of educational achievements for the purpose of building academic capacity of local higher education institutions. Professional specialists shall be trained for higher education and scientific institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan within short space of time through identification of the needs of employers, as well as of science and higher education, and supporting qualification raising of specialists with relevant work experience to this end.

Meanwhile, the Program shall serve to expand opportunities for those who would like to do a PhD in prominent foreign higher education institutions with engaging employers on the basis of joint funding principle. Taking account of the international rating of narrow specializations offered by foreign higher education institutions, where specialist training at doctoral level will take place, will improve the efficiency of training highly qualified specialists.

Integration of the education system of the Republic of Azerbaijan, implementation of the aforementioned key goals shall ensure progress in training highly qualified specialists and researchers.

1. **Key areas of the State Program**
   * 1. The following measures will be addressed within the state program: establishment of initial 5 (five) international double diploma programs for the purpose of modernizing the content and quality indicators of higher education system of Azerbaijan and continuation of the project in line with the monitoring  outcomes of implementation, selection of prominent foreign partner higher education institutions to this end, updating training program of administrative staff and training and teaching programs of scientific-teaching (professor-teaching staff,  scientific employees) staff in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan by engaging foreign specialists, as well as the following measures for funding the international double diploma programs:
     2. Establishment of double diploma programs in much-needed specialties in higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan together with the prominent foreign higher education institutions
     3. Development of study programs of relevant specialties, in higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan where international dual diploma programs will be implemented, in line with the practice of foreign higher education institutions;
     4. Engagement of foreign teaching staff for renewal of curricula in higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international dual diploma programs will be implemented;
     5. adjusting the development indicators of the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international dual diploma programs will be implemented, in line with the requirements of international ratings;
     6. Promotion of publication of researches conducted in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international double diploma programs will be implemented, as well as research articles of Azerbaijani scientists in international publications;
     7. Development of procedures and criteria for selecting foreign partner higher education institutions, where international dual diploma programs will be implemented;
     8. Development of criteria for selecting specialties and education level for international double diploma programs;
     9. Organization of activity of foreign teaching staff to be engaged in teaching in higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international dual diploma programs will be implemented, as well as organization of system for their subsistence allowance and fees in line with international standards;
     10. Identification of labor, health and social insurance, as well as social security conditions for foreign teaching staff to be engaged in teaching in higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international dual diploma programs will be implemented, in line with the existing legislation;
     11. evelopment of a list of subjects to be lectured by foreign teaching staff to be engaged in teaching in higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international dual diploma programs will be implemented, with due account for labor market needs;
     12. Implementation of grant-based research programs with the engagement of local and foreign teaching staff in higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international double diploma programs will be implemented;
     13. Employing Azerbaijani specialists working in foreign higher education institutions in higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international dual diploma programs will be implemented;
     14. Establishment of e-database together with the relevant higher education institutions for managing data pertaining to the foreign teaching staff to be engaged in teaching and students in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international dual diploma programs will be implemented;
     15. Establishment of research structures and preparation of research programs which involve conduction of joint researches by local and foreign teaching staff and talented students in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international dual diploma programs will be implemented;
     16. developing a mechanism for monitoring the activity and evaluating the outcomes of teaching process of foreign teaching staff to be engaged in teaching in higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international dual diploma programs will be implemented;
     17. promotion of international cooperation for the purpose of engaging foreign teaching staff in teaching the needed areas in higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international double diploma programs will be implemented, through alternative ways;
     18. Development of a mechanism both for forecasting the number of citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan who will study within international double diploma programs at state and personal expense over years and for future sustainability of double diploma programs;
     19. Development of a mechanism for organization of material resources and funding of current expenses of the higher education institutions where international double diploma programs will be implemented;
     20. The following measures will be implemented for the purpose of strengthening the academic potential of the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan within the State Program:
     21. Updating legal acts in the field of education, including development of legal acts on selection of persons for PhD studies abroad and funding of their studies in accordance with the State Program;
     22. Measures for employing the persons who did a PhD abroad in the Republic of Azerbaijan, development of proposals for updating the provisions of the related legal acts;
     23. Determination of a list of foreign higher education institutions for PhD studies of the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan, with due account for the international rating of their specialty programs;
     24. Determination of doctoral specialties for the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan in line with the development priorities of the republic;
     25. Development of joint funding mechanisms for to-be PhD students within the State Program with the engagement of employers;
     26. Organization of funding of doctoral studies in foreign higher education institutions and specialized scientific-education centres, which offer high-quality doctoral studies;
     27. Establishment of a system for direct coordination of doctoral students with employers, as well as for monitoring their research and education achievements;
     28. Establishment of a coordination mechanism for employment of persons who did a PhD within the “State Program on education of Azerbaijani Youth abroad in 2007-2015” in the higher education institutions where international double diploma programs will be implemented;
     29. Updating the existing e-database of persons who studied within the “State Program on education of Azerbaijani Youth abroad in 2007-2015” in line with the requirements of doctoral studies within the framework of this program.
2. **Funding sources of the State Program**
   1. The implementation of measures within the State Program will be funded from the following sources:
      1. The State Oil Fund of the Republic of Azerbaijan;
      2. Technical and financial assistance of international organizations (funds);
      3. credits and grants;
      4. donations of foreign and local legal and physical persons regardless of the property type;
      5. other sources not prohibited by law.
3. **Expected outcomes**
   1. The outcomes of the implementation of the State Program are as follows:
      1. Training of highly qualified specialists relevant for the country's development priorities in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international double diploma programs are implemented;
      2. speeding up reforms in higher education system, adjusting the higher education institutions to modern requirements, improving management and international cooperation skills, improving international rating of universities and transforming universities into research profiled education institutions by engaging foreign teaching staff in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international double diploma programs are implemented,
      3. International accreditation of international double diploma programs offered in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan;
      4. Improving the standing of the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and transforming them into regional education centres by implementing international double diploma programs;
      5. Application of international experience gained by PhD graduates of the State Program in science and pedagogy;
      6. Building highly qualified specialist capacity for professions and specialties determined on the basis of the labor market needs of the country;
      7. Expanding opportunities for the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan to acquire quality education within higher education standards of leading countries;

5.1.8. Employment of PhD graduates of the State Program by establishing relations with employers.

1. **Action Plan for implementation of the State Program**

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| **No** | **Title of action** | **Implementing bodies** | **Implementation**  **period** |
| **6.1. Establishment of international double diploma programs**  **in local higher education institutions** | | | |
| 6.1.1. | Establishment of double diploma programs in much-needed specialties in higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan together with the prominent foreign higher education institutions | Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Education, State Oil Fund, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population, Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies, other bodies which have a subordinated higher education institution | 2019–2023 |
| 6.1.2. | Development of study programs of relevant specialties in higher education institutions, where international double diploma programs will be implemented, in line with the practice of foreign higher education institutions | Ministry of Education, other bodies which have a subordinated higher education institutions | 2019–2023 |
| 6.1.3. | Organization of teaching process in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international double diploma programs will be implemented, with due account for international practice | Ministry of Education, other bodies which have a subordinated higher education institutions | 2019–2023 |
| 6.1.4. | Engagement of foreign teaching staff for renewal of curricula in higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan where international double diploma programs will be implemented | Ministry of Education, other bodies which have a subordinated higher education institutions | 2019–2023 |
| 6.1.5. | Aligning the development indicators of higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international double diploma programs will be implemented, with the requirements of international rating | Ministry of Education, other bodies which have a subordinated higher education institutions | 2019–2023 |
| 6.1.6. | Promotion of publication of researches of higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international double diploma programs will be implemented, as well as of scientific articles of Azerbaijani scientists in international publications; | Ministry of Education, Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, other bodies which have a subordinated higher education institutions | 2019–2023 |
| 6.1.7. | Development of procedures and criteria for selecting foreign partner higher education institutions where international dual diploma programs will be implemented | Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Education, State Oil Fund | 2019 |
| 6.1.8. | Development of criteria for selecting specialties and education level of international double diploma programs | Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Education, State Oil Fund, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population, Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies, other bodies which have a subordinated higher education institution | 2019–2023 |
| 6.1.9. | Organization of work of foreign teaching staff to be engaged in teaching in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international double diploma programs will be implemented, adjusting the system of funding their missions in line with international standards | Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Education, State Oil Fund, Ministry of Taxes, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population, Ministry of Finances, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State Migration Service, other state bodies which have a subordinated higher education institution | 2019–2023 |
| 6.1.10. | Development of a list of subjects to be lectured by foreign teaching staff to be engaged in teaching in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international double diploma programs will be implemented, with due account for the labor market needs | Ministry of Education, State Oil Fund, other state bodies which have a subordinated higher education institutions | regularly |
| 6.1.11. | Establishment of research groups and preparation of research programs which involve conduction of joint researches by local and foreign teaching staff and talented students in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international double diploma programs will be implemented, | Administration of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ministry of Education, Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, other state bodies which have a subordinated higher education institutions | regularly |
| 6.1.12. | Establishment of quality monitoring and teaching outcome assessment mechanism for foreign teaching staff to be engaged in teaching in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international double diploma programs will be implemented | Ministry of Education, other bodies which have a subordinated higher education institutions | regularly |
| 6.1.13. | Promotion of international cooperation for engaging foreign specialists through alternative ways in teaching in much-needed areas in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international dual diploma programs will be implemented | Ministry of Education, other bodies which have a subordinated higher education institutions | regularly |
| 6.1.14. | Development of a mechanism both for forecasting the number of citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan who will study at international double diploma programs at state and personal expense over years and for future sustainability of dual diploma programs | Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Education, State Oil Fund, other state bodies which have a subordinated higher education institutions | 2019–2023 |
| 6.1.15. | Development of a mechanism for improving material resources and funding of current expenses of the higher education institutions where international dual diploma programs will be implemented | Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Education, State Oil Fund, other state bodies which have a subordinated higher education institutions | 2019 |
| 6.1.16. | Establishment of e-database for managing data pertaining to the foreign teaching staff to be engaged in teaching in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, where international double diploma programs will be implemented | Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies, Ministry of Education, State Migration Service, Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, other state bodies which have a subordinated higher education institutions | 2019–2020 |
| **6.2. Strengthening academic capacity of**  **higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan** | | | |
| 6.2.1. | Updating education-related legal acts in line with the State Program | Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Education | 2019–2023 |
| 6.2.2. | Development of rules for funding doctoral studies of the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the prominent foreign higher education institutions with due account for forms of payment and sources | Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Education, State Oil Fund | 2019 |
| 6.2.3. | Development of joint funding mechanisms with the participation of employers for those who will do PhD within the State Program | Ministry of Education, Ministry of Economy, State Oil Fund, National Confederation of Entrepreneurs (Employers) Organization of Azerbaijan Republic | 2019 |
| 6.2.4. | Monitoring of funds allocated for financing the State Program | Ministry of Education, State Oil Fund, Council on State Support to Non-Governmental Organizations under the Auspices of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan | twice a year |
| 6.2.5. | Determination of priority specialties for PhD studies of the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan abroad with due account for the development strategy of Azerbaijan | Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Economy, Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, National Confederation of Entrepreneurs (Employers) Organization of Azerbaijan Republic and other appropriate bodies | 2019–2023 |
| 6.2.6. | Determination of priority specialties and relevant foreign higher education institutions for the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan to do PhD | Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State Oil Fund | regularly |
| 6.2.7. | Signing of cooperation agreements between the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan and foreign partner organization or between foreign higher education institution and local higher education institution | Ministry of Education, State Oil Fund,  Ministry of Foreign Affairs | regularly |
| 6.2.8. | Determination of criteria and procedures for selecting the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan who will do PhD | Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population, Ministry of Economy,  State Examination Centre of the Republic of Azerbaijan | 2019 |
| 6.2.9. | Updating mechanism for monitoring the academic indicators of PhD students during studies | Ministry of Education, Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies, relevant higher education institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan | regularly |
| 6.2.10. | Drafting legal acts for regulating competitive employment of PhD graduates of the State Program | Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population, Ministry of Economy, State Oil Fund,  State Examination Centre of the Republic of Azerbaijan | 2019 |
| 6.2.11. | Updating the existing e-databases related to persons studying within the State Program and expanding its capabilities (e-references, e-document circulation etc.) | Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population | regularly |
| 6.2.12. | Establishment of "State Program Management group" attached to the Ministry of Education and funded by the State Oil Fund for the implementation of the State Program | Cabinet of Ministers, State Oil Fund, Ministry of Education | 2019 |
| 6.2.13. | Raising public awareness concerning the implementation of the State Program | Ministry of Education, State Oil Fund | regularly |