



Establishing and development of Quality Assurance Centers at Azerbaijan Universities - EQAC 586351-EPP-1-2017-1-AZ-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP

ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS ANALYSIS PRESENTED BY AZERBAIJAN COOPERATION UNIVERSITY (ACU)

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This assessment provided by University of Applied Social Sciences is produced as part of the ERASMUS+ project “Establishment and Development of Quality Assurance Centers in Azerbaijani Universities” (EQAC) and has been undertaken in accordance with the guidelines for assessment provided by the Project Co-ordinator. Remarks and suggestions are presented with a view to providing a practical framework in which Azerbaijan Cooperation University (herein after ACU) could apply to improve its Internal Quality Assurance System.

The SER of the existing internal quality assurance system of ACU was developed using ISO 9001:2015 as a point of reference. Yet, the guidelines for assessment (as determined by the Project Co-ordinator) require that external experts focus on how well partners institutions have adapted, or could adapt to integrate the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area 2015 (ESG). Consequently, the observations presented below in the table relates to the use of ISO 9001:2015. Nevertheless, in order to integrate ISO 9001:2015 and ESG requirements, it is provided comments as to how the weaknesses highlighted in the existing internal quality assurance system of ACU could be improved in accordance of ESG 2015 standards.

At what extend internal quality assurance system of ACU is based on the provisions of ESG 2015, it is necessary to find out during the meeting in October with ACU community. Actions for the improvement presented in the table below can be supplemented afterwards.

Issue as identified by ISO 9001-2015	Conformity	Nonconformity	Actions for the improvement
1. Context of the organization			
<i>1.1 Understand the organization and its context</i>	The determination process of external and internal issues relevant to ACU goals done by the top management of the university and, particularly, by	However, monitoring and reviewing system of the internal and external issues at ACU is weak, there is not a system of monitoring and review of information about internal and	Develop a methodology to understand the key internal and external factors that influence ACU activities and performance by exploring the documents and tools like records of meetings where context is routinely discussed and monitored; PESTLE (Political, Economic, Social,



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	the orders of the rector is in place.	external issues related to the quality of education and research at ACU.	Technological, Legal, Environmental) analysis tools for external issues; SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis tools for internal issues; other documented information describing organizational context etc.
1.2 Understanding the needs and expectations of interested parties		Lack of experience and insufficient communication among academic staff, teachers and students hamper understanding the needs and expectations of interested parties of ACU.	Identify the requirements of the internal and external stakeholders of ACU and capture their relevant expectations and needs relevant to the QAS. Monitor and review information about stakeholders and their relevant requirements by permanent review of all relevant legal requirements; by establishing feedback system; by recording surveys, networking, meeting face-to-face, attending conferences, workshops, other public events; by participating in benchmarking etc.
1.3 Determining the scope of the quality management system	<u>No information provided about the scope of the QAS of ACU</u>	<u>No information provided about the scope of the QAS of ACU</u>	To verify that the scope of QAS of ACU exists as documented information (which may be contained in the quality manual). Consider context (internal and external issues and the requirements of stakeholders) and its links to ESG 2015. State the types of products (e.g. research outputs) and services (e.g. education, training) covered by the QAS of ACU.
1.4 Quality management systems and its processes	The Quality Assurance Centre of ACU is established.	However, quality management system of ACU is not developed yet. Evidence that ACU has maintained documented information to support the operation of QAS processes is not sufficient.	<p>Develop the internal QAS based on ESG 2015 by identification of the key and supporting processes; determinate the sequence and interaction of processes; controlling of outsourced processes.</p> <p>Ensure that the documentation is created and maintained by ACU to support the operation of QAS processes, such documentation might be in the form of quality assurance handbook, teaching staff handbook, student handbook, templates and forms for curriculum description of the courses, examination, other guidance material in physical samples (if relevant) as well as in IT systems (including intranet and internet).</p> <p>Ensure that the information identification and retain comply with ESG standard 1.7 Information management and shows that the processes of QAS is carried as it is planned.</p>



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2. Leadership			
2.1 <i>Leadership and Commitment</i>	<p><u>No information provided about the leadership and commitment of the top management of ACU with respect to QAS</u></p> <p>The need to be customer (stakeholder) focused and maintain satisfaction of customer (stakeholder) is perceived</p>	<p><u>No information provided about the leadership and commitment of the top management of ACU with respect to QAS</u></p> <p>However, there are no tools and procedures in place to determine and address the needs of customers (stakeholders) and enhance their satisfaction.</p>	<p>Top management of ACU must ensure that the human and financial resources needed for implementing the QAS are available. The actions required of top management of ACU must include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developing and supporting the QAS by defining and communicating policies; 2. Establishing organizational objectives related to QAS; 3. Ensuring appropriate resources for QAS are available. 4. Implementing and improving the QAS by encouraging employees to achieve requirements; 5. Reviewing QAS performance and ensuring resources are available to improve the QAS. <p>Top management of ACU must ensure that a process exists to achieve the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identifying customer (stakeholder) requirements (See <i>1.2 Understanding the needs and expectations of interested parties</i>); 2. Meeting customer (stakeholder) requirements; 3. Enhancing customer (stakeholder) satisfaction.
2.2 <i>Policy</i>		<p>Although the Quality Management System of ACU is in place, the Quality policy is not established and therefore is not available publicly.</p>	<p>Top management of ACU should establish the Quality Policy of ACU in compliance with ESG 2015 standard 1.1. Policy for Quality Assurance and demonstrate that the quality policy is compatible with the strategic direction and context of ACU, with stakeholders and their requirements. Quality Policy of ACU should ascertain that processes of continual improvement are implied and known throughout the ACU and it should be signed by the Rector of ACU. Quality Policy of ACU must be publicly available to any relevant stakeholder on the website of ACU, for instance.</p>
2.3 <i>Roles, Responsibility & Authority</i>	<p>The top management of ACU assigned responsibilities and authorities for relevant roles of heads of faculties and other departments. Each unit (faculty, department, Central Administration) of ACU has duty to perform management and support ACU leadership in management issues.</p>	<p>However, there is no evidence that the top management of ACU assigned the responsibility and authority for the management conformation with international standards (ISO 9001:2015 or / and ESG)</p>	<p>Ensure that ACU personnel have not only been advised of their responsibilities and authorities, but also that they understand these in the context of the overall purpose of the QAS.</p>
3.Planning			



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3.1 Actions to Address Risks and Opportunities	<u>No information provided about the actions to address risks and opportunities at ACU in respect of QAS.</u>	<u>No information provided about the actions to address risks and opportunities at ACU in respect of QAS.</u>	<p>Quality Assurance Centre should seek and record evidence that ACU has taken a planned approach to addressing risks and accomplishing opportunities to the benefit of the QAS, education, and research. Objective evidence could be in the following various forms:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meeting minutes; 2. SWOT analysis; 3. Reports on stakeholders' feedback; 4. Competitor analysis; 5. Planning, analysis and evaluation activities; 6. Strategic planning documents; 7. Design and development reviews of curricula of courses; 8. Management review minutes; 9. Risk determination or evaluation records.
3.2 Quality objectives and plans to achieve them	ACU determined its quality aims and ways to achieve them by developing an action plan.	However, there is no evidence on how quality objectives and targets are documented at each relevant function and level within the ACU. Does the scope and number of the objectives and targets are realistic and achievable? What kind of indicators will be used to track the progress?	<p>The quality objectives as the overall goals shall be reflected in the principles established in the Quality Policy. The appropriate level(s) of management personnel at ACU should define the targets. Targets must be quantified where practicable and comply with ESG standard 1.7 Information management. The action plan must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Address each objective and target; 2. Designate the personnel responsible for achieving targets at each relevant function / level of ACU; 3. Establish a time-frame or a schedule for achieving each target. <p>To ensure the progress of the action plan and a coordinated effort, a target leader should be selected for each target. Communicate the expectations and responsibilities laid out in the action plans to those who need to know. QAC should seek and record evidence that effective planning was undertaken in support of ACU quality objectives and their achievement.</p>



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3.3 Planning for change	Changes are intended to be beneficial but they need to be carried out when determined by ACU as relevant and achievable.	There is not expressed perception of understanding that changes shall be carried out in a planned manner. There is lack of mechanism in order to inform the staff of ACU about changes in education and research quality.	ACU should identify the risks and opportunities associated with changes. In order to realize the benefits associated with the identified risks and opportunities, subsequent changes to the management system may be needed. These changes could relate to any aspect of any process, such as inputs, resources, personnel, activities, measurements, and outputs. Top management of ACU should ensure that all personnel are made aware of any changes which affect their process, and that subsequent monitoring is undertaken to ensure that QAS and education as well as research changes are effectively implemented.
4.Support			



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4.1 Resources	<p><u>No information provided about the human resources necessary for the effective implementation of QAS as well as higher education and research processes</u></p> <p>ACU provides the infrastructure (buildings, library, ICT etc.) necessary for the operation of higher education and research processes</p> <p>ACU provides the positive social and psychological environment by involving specialists in the field of university education management, by paying special attention to human resources policy necessary for the operation of higher education and research processes</p> <p>ACU has Evolutionary Department, Department of Education, Internal Control, and Dispatcher Service as well as organizational knowledge needed for monitoring and measuring the conformity of teaching, learning and assessment outcomes to requirements.</p>	<p><u>No information provided about the human resources necessary for the effective implementation of QAS as well as higher education and research processes</u></p> <p>However, as it is stated in SER, ACU has no system for the feedback collection from alumni and information retention does not meet international standards</p>	<p>ACU should ensure that it has determined and provided the resources needed for the establishment, implementation, maintenance and continual improvement of the QAS. It is necessary to check that ACU has identified which resources (infrastructure, finance, personnel and IT etc) it needs to make available in order to ensure the effective operation of the QAS and higher education and research processes.</p> <p>It is necessary to describe how ACU allocates its staff in order to achieve the required outcome. The senior management need to determine the resource needed and maintain this. It should be recorded evidence to confirm that ACU has provided the staff necessary for the effective implementation of the QAS and higher education and research processes.</p> <p>It is necessary to observe and record evidence to confirm that ACU has provided the infrastructure and a work and study environment necessary for the achievement of effective implementation of the QAS and higher education and research processes in compliance with ESG 2015 standard 1.6 Learning resources and student support.</p> <p>ACU should verify that those monitoring and measuring resources used by ACU are suitable and comply with ESG 2015 standard 1.7 Information management and standard 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes.</p>



Issue as identified by ISO 9001-2015	Conformity	Nonconformity	Actions for the improvement
4.2 Competence	<p>No sufficient information provided how ACU ensure the competence of its human resources (staff and students) for effective implementation of the QAS as well as higher education and research processes, except some information that ACU organizes scientific-methodological conferences, publishes scientific works and data on students' satisfaction with teaching staff's professionalism.</p>	<p>No sufficient information provided how ACU ensure the competence of its human resources (staff and students) for effective implementation of the QAS as well as higher education and research processes, except some information that ACU organizes scientific-methodological conferences, publishes scientific works and data on students' satisfaction with teaching staff's professionalism.</p>	<p>ACU should establish a process of assessing and competency-based training of existing staff and students' competencies against changing education and research needs and prevailing trends. ACU should ensure that all staff and students of ACU are competent in accordance with ESG 2015 standard 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification and standard 1.5 Teaching staff.</p>
4.3 Awareness	<p>The Scientific Council of ACU informs about the policy of the university at the extended and different kinds of meetings.</p>	<p>However, it is not clear how the community of ACU is aware about quality objectives, their contribution to the effectiveness of QAS and higher education and research processes</p>	<p>ACU should ensure that the all community is made aware of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The quality policy; 2. Relevant quality objectives; 3. Their contribution to the effectiveness of the QAS; 4. Benefits of improved performance; 5. The implications of not conforming to QAS requirements. <p>The implementation of awareness should comply with ESG 2015 standard 1.1 Policy for quality assurance and standard 1.8 Public information.</p>
4.4 Communication	<p>Communication with interested parties is organized via electronic ways and Open Days</p>		<p>ACU should identify and expand the necessary internal and external communications (what, when, with whom and how) that are required for the operation of QAS and higher education and research processes. The communication should comply with ESG 2015 standard 1.7 Information management and standard 1.8 Public information. The current ways of communication could be supplemented by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Newsletters; 2. Suggestion box. 3. Annual reports or newsletters of performance sent to external stakeholders; 4. Availability of results of external evaluations / accreditations; 5. Policies published in the media and press releases.

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4.5 Documented Information		It is stated in SER that information retention does not meet international standards	ACU should determine the level of documented information, its creation and renewal necessary for the effective implementation of the QAS and higher education and research processes in accordance with national legislation (e.g. data protection) and ESG 2015 standard 1.7 Information management and standard 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes.
5. Operation			



Issue as identified by ISO 9001-2015	Conformity	Nonconformity	Actions for the improvement
5.1 Operational Planning and Control	<u>No information provided about the operational planning and control at ACU in respect of QAS and higher education and research processes</u>	<u>No information provided about the operational planning and control at ACU in respect of QAS and higher education and research processes</u>	ACU should ensure that the implemented processes are controlled as planned and that there is evidence that ACU has evaluated the effectiveness of actions taken when addressing risks and opportunities. Planning and control at ACU should comply with ESG 2015 standard 1.2 Design and approval of programmes.
5.2 Requirements for Products and Services	<u>No information provided about the communication with stakeholders, the determination as well as review and changes of requirements for higher education and research products and services to be offered for stakeholders by ACU.</u>	<u>No information provided about the communication with stakeholders, the determination as well as review and changes of requirements for higher education and research products and services to be offered for stakeholders by ACU.</u>	ACU should ensure that it has the ability and capacity to meet the requirements for higher education and research in accordance with national legislation and ESG 2015 standard 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification; standard 1.5 Teaching staff; and standard 1.6 Learning resources and student support.
5.3 Design and development of products and services	<u>No information provided about established, implemented and maintained design and development process of higher education and research products and services at ACU.</u>	<u>No information provided about established, implemented and maintained design and development process of higher education and research products and services at ACU.</u>	ACU should define its arrangements for establishing, implementing and maintaining a design and development process of higher education and research including planning, inputs, controls, outputs and changes in accordance with national legislation and ESG 2015 standard 1.2 Design and approval of programmes.
5.4 Control of externally provided products and services	<u>No information provided how ACU ensure that externally provided processes, products and services conform to requirements</u>	<u>No information provided how ACU ensure that externally provided processes, products and services conform to requirements</u>	ACU need to identify which materials and services it purchases affect the quality of higher education and research products and services the most. Based upon this information, establish criteria for selection and monitoring of the suppliers.
5.5 Product and Service Provision	<u>No information provided how ACU ensure quality of implemented higher education and research products and services.</u>	<u>No information provided how ACU ensure quality of implemented higher education and research products and services.</u>	ACU should ensure that the conditions by which higher education and research products and services are provided are under control and in compliance with ESG 2015 standard 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment.
5.6 Release of Products and Services	<u>No information provided how ACU implements planned arrangements, at appropriate stages, to verify that higher education and research products and services requirements have been met.</u>	<u>No information provided how ACU implements planned arrangements, at appropriate stages, to verify that higher education and research products and services requirements have been met.</u>	ACU must show evidence that a process (method, techniques, formats, etc.) is in place to monitor and measure the characteristics of higher education and research products and services to verify that requirements are being met. This must be accomplished at appropriate stages of the design and development process in accordance with national legislation and ESG 2015 standard 1.2 Design and approval of programmes.



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5.7 Non-conforming Outputs	<u>No information provided how ACU ensure that outputs of higher education and research products and services that do not conform to their requirements are identified, controlled and corrected.</u>	<u>No information provided how ACU ensure that outputs of higher education and research products and services that do not conform to their requirements are identified, controlled and corrected.</u>	ACU should ensure that outputs of higher education and research products and services that do not conform to their requirements are identified, controlled and corrected in accordance with ESG 2015 standard 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes.
6. Performance Evaluation			



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6.1 Monitoring, Measurement, Analysis and Evaluation	ACU has Evolutionary Department, Department of Education, Internal Control, and Dispatcher Service needed for monitoring and measuring the conformity of teaching, learning and assessment outcomes to requirements. There is provided possibility for parents, press media to participate at lessons and exams.	<u>However, there is no information how ACU monitor stakeholders (students, teaching staff, alumni, employers, etc.) perceptions of the degree to which their needs and expectations are fulfilled and how the data and information arisen from monitoring and measurement is analysed and evaluated.</u>	ACU should verify that those monitoring, measuring, analysis and evaluation procedures are suitable and comply with ESG 2015 standard 1.7 Information management, standard 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes, and standard 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance
6.2 Internal Audit	Internal audits at ACU are planned and implemented.	<u>However, there is no information what are the planned intervals to conduct internal audits, who will be responsible for performance of internal audits etc.</u>	ACU should establish an internal audit programme to cover all requirements of the standards. In addition, it should comply with ESG 2015 standard 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes.
6.3 Management Review	Management review is based on the comments, proposals or opinions of the customers. Opportunities for improvement and development of actions in certain areas (meet the needs of students, teachers, employees, etc.) are determined and implemented.	<u>However, there is no information how frequently management review is carried out, how continuing suitability, adequacy, effectiveness and alignment with strategic direction of ACU is ensured.</u>	Top management of ACU must periodically review the management system to ensure its continuing suitability, adequacy, and effectiveness. The frequency or intervals of the top management's formal review must be defined. The management review must address the possible need for changes to policy, objectives, targets, and other elements of the QAS and products and services of higher education and research. The management review process must ensure that the necessary information is collected ahead of time to allow management to effectively carry out this evaluation. Information that must be reviewed includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Minutes from previous management reviews; 2. The policies, objectives and targets; 3. Results of QAS and process audits; 4. The extent to which objectives and quantitative and qualitative targets were met.
7. Improvement			
7.1 Non-Conformity and Corrective Action	As it is stated in SER ACU administration, structural units of various levels are open to make changes in their actions, if necessary, in order to meet the	However, as it is stated in SER the sequence of implemented actions: to analyse the current situation, to adopt an appropriate decision and apply it is not satisfactory.	ACU is required to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Take whatever action is necessary to control and correct the nonconformity, and to deal with any resultant environmental impact; 2. Determine what caused the non-conformity and then



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	<p>needs of the interested parties. Certain actions are being implemented. When a nonconformity occurs, ACU takes several actions to control and get over it. Necessary measures are taken to prevent the growth of the scope of the problem.</p>	<p>Responsible persons are not appointed to cope with nonconformities and its consequences. <u>Also, there is no provided information how the nonconformity is detected and how it is reacted to eliminate the nonconformity</u></p>	<p>to consider whether the potential for a similar problem remains;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Consider whether any further action is required to prevent a similar nonconformity recurring at the same place or occurring somewhere else, at some point in the future; 4. Determine if similar non-conformity has occurred elsewhere and consequently whether it needs to take similar corrective action. <p>ACU should first contain the problem and then determine its root cause in order to take appropriate corrective action to prevent the problem's recurrence in accordance with ESG 2015 standard 1.2 Design and approval of programmes, standard 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes, and standard 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance.</p>
7.2 Continual Improvement	<p><u>There is no provided information how ACU ensure the continual improvement of QAS.</u></p>	<p><u>There is no provided information how ACU ensure the continual improvement of QAS.</u></p>	<p>ACU must be able to demonstrate continual improvement. ACU should selected the appropriate tools and techniques to investigate the causes and thereby establishing and implementing a process for continual improvement in accordance with ESG 2015 standard 1.2 Design and approval of programmes, standard 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes, and standard 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance.</p>

General observations on the interview (made in October, 2018) with representatives of Azerbaijan Cooperation University:

Representatives of Azerbaijan Cooperation University were open and honest. To be able to identify the state of the art and provide the best suitable solutions for Azerbaijan Cooperation University, EU experts need honest discussion about the strengths and weakness of current situation in terms of QAS.

The first observation is that in Azerbaijan Cooperation University responsibility for QAS is perceived as business of staff of recently established QA Centre. There is no understanding that all departments, faculties and other organisational units as well as individual staff members and students have to take their responsibilities in quality assurance procedures. The involvement of external stakeholders (like graduates, employers) in quality assurance does not exist.

Bearing in mind that Azerbaijan Universities have some autonomy to develop and provide elective subjects, also they have an autonomy what kind of teaching, learning and assessment methods apply while teaching obligatory subjects, there is no in place the monitoring and periodic review of programmes, in terms changing needs of society, in terms of students' workload, progression and completion. In some cases, there are few attempts, however the stakeholders (students, employers, etc.) are not involved in the process of monitoring and periodic review of the curriculum.



There is no system in place to collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of programmes and other activities of Azerbaijan Cooperation University, e.g. career paths of graduates.

Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment approach is not introduced, e.g. students are not aware what learning outcomes are expected from them and what are the criteria used in assessing their achievements.

However, in spite of above-mentioned shortages, there are some good bases, some good groundwork for developing an internal quality assurance system. First of all, the feedback system to gather the opinions of students on teaching is established. Of course, it needs to be improved, but anyway something substantial already exists.

Secondly, some support activities for the teaching staff exist, however, there are no internal systems for teaching staff support like Centre for Teaching and Learning development. Usually, upgrading of teaching staff competences is outsourced or in case there are some complaints about the teacher, he / she is just dismissed. Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their staff and for providing them with a supportive environment that allows them to carry out their work effectively.

Third positive feature to successfully implement quality assurance system, not quality control system (!), is some signs of student support activities, e.g. we discussed how do Azerbaijan Cooperation University ensure the compliance of study programmes with requirements of employers, it was stated that the gap between labour market needs and students' capabilities exists, e.g. graduates are not able to communicate in three languages (Azerbaijani, English, Russian) fluently. So, universities provide some extracurricular support for the language learning, also helps bachelor students to prepare for the studies at Master level, to pass the exams for admission. Attention for academic student support is provided.