

## Section 2. Management

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### **CURRENT SITUATION OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE OF STUDENT PREPARATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN LINE WITH THE LABOR MARKET DEMAND**

**Abstract.** All educational institutions operating in the Republic of Azerbaijan, regardless of their subordination, organizational form and ownership, they must undergo external quality assurance process, accreditation<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the accreditation of educational institutions forms a legal basis for them to provide students with the state recognized legal document and to operate in the next 5 years<sup>2</sup>. According to the international experience, the assessment criteria determined by the competent institutions for external quality assurance of higher education institutions, determine the internal quality assurance policy, action directions and action plan of higher educa-

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<sup>1</sup> Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan on amending Decision – No. 167 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated September 28, 2010. “Rules for the accreditation rules of educational institutions”.

<sup>2</sup> Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education.

tion institutions. Also, it is possible to see the approaches of most countries to quality assurance from their accreditation criteria.

**Keywords:** Higher education institution, labor market, quality assurance, accreditation.

### Introduction

According to “Education Law” of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the quality level of student preparation of educational institutions is determined by the competitiveness of their graduates in the national and international labor market, their role in the social and economic development of the country<sup>1</sup>. Also, the quality level of education arises from the requirements related to socio-political, socio-economic, scientific and cultural development at each historical stage and is evaluated accordingly by the body (institution) determined by the relevant executive body and as a legal entity in the Republic of Azerbaijan the activity of the state-registered, licensed and accredited educational institution is provided with legal guarantees<sup>2</sup>.

According to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated December 29, 2019, the competent institution in the direction of external quality assurance assessment of educational institutions operating in Azerbaijan is Education Quality Assurance Agency<sup>3</sup>. In order to implement the effective organization of the activity of higher education institutions, “Rules for Accreditation of Educational Institutions” approved by the decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated December 14, 2020 in a new edition and relevant rules

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<sup>1</sup> Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The Charter of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education approved by Decree – No. 907 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated December 29, 2019.

regulates the external quality assurance rules of educational institutions operating at all levels of the education in the Republic of Azerbaijan, regardless of their organizational form, subordination, ownership<sup>1</sup>.

In the aforementioned accreditation rules, it is mentioned that the quality assurance of student preparation of educational institutions consists of two parts, internal and external quality assurance. According to the relevant legislation, internal quality assurance is an internal management assessment system that serves to ensure the compliance of the activity of the educational institution with the state educational standards, the creation of an efficient and modern learning environment in the educational institution and the continuous development of its activity based on self-analysis, but external quality assurance is the process of evaluating the effectiveness of its internal quality assurance system<sup>2</sup>.

After the approval of the aforementioned rules, the accreditation, which is the external quality assurance of higher education institutions, consists of two parts, institutional and program accreditation and each part is evaluated by means of evaluation criteria<sup>3</sup>. Institutional accreditation assessment evaluates the strategic development, quality assurance, teaching and learning, internationalization, infrastructure, scientific research and management. However, during program accreditation, the efficiency of the institution's educational program implementation is evaluated according to predetermined evaluation criteria.

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<sup>1</sup> Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan on amending Decision – No. 167 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated September 28, 2010. “Rules for the accreditation rules of educational institutions”.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

According to the accreditation rules, the establishment of an internal quality assurance system of student preparation in line with the requirements of the labor market is noted as one of the obligations taken by the higher education institutions from the point of view of external quality assurance. Therefore, higher education institutions should establish internal quality assurance system and then external quality assurance should assess its compliance with the accreditation criteria.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of the analysis is to study the directions which the recommendations given to higher education institutions for the last 8 years during the accreditation process for the student preparation in line with labor market demand. During the scientific research, an analysis of the external quality assurance assessment results of higher education institutions was carried out within the framework of the accreditation rules and criteria and the qualitative research method was used as the basis for the analysis. So, on the basis of the Final Reports prepared as a result of the accreditation assessment, the accreditation assessment results of 34 higher education institutions that have been accredited in the last 8 years and the recommendations given to the institutions after the accreditation assessment were categorized and analyzed. Final reports were obtained from Education Quality Assurance Agency. Accreditation results of 34 HEIs out of 51 higher education institutions have been analyzed and sampling number is sufficient for the generalization.

### **External Quality Assurance According to Azerbaijan Legislation**

The process of external quality assurance, which is the main driving force of internal quality assurance, is a powerful tool for assessing student preparation process compliance with labor market

requirements<sup>1</sup>. External quality assurance is an important driving force for the enhancement of the quality of higher education institutions, as well as useful for internal quality control activities and in terms of accountability to the public<sup>2</sup>. Thus, external quality assurance of higher education emerges as a factor that increases the quality of education, because one of the main goals of accreditation is to create a competitive environment among higher education institutions and provide better educational services to students and their families. Another goal of accreditation in higher education is to raise the quality of the educational service provided in higher education institutions to a certain standard and to train skilled and qualified graduates in their fields<sup>3</sup>.

As it can be seen, accreditation of higher education institutions has many benefits, including trust, in addition to providing information about the accredited institution to the public and choosing between similar institutions during the decision-making process<sup>4</sup>. Even if we look at the history of the first appearance of the concept of the quality assurance, we will see that the emergence of quality assurance as a separate field in the management of higher education coincides with the emergence of the first accreditation organizations in the United States at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After 1990, quality assurance systems across Europe began to develop using different models and approaches. Thus, in Western European coun-

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<sup>1</sup> Quality Assurance and Labour Market Responsiveness in Higher Education: Final English National Report / D Lain A Maginn, – London, 2003. – P. 86.

<sup>2</sup> From Tools to an Internal Quality Assurance System University of Duisburg-Essen / Christian Ganseuer and Petra Pistor, – Germany, 2016. – P. 53.

<sup>3</sup> Mushtagov A. Quality Assurance System and Accreditation Factor in Quality Assurance in Higher Education Institutions, – Baku, 2021. – P. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. – P. 12.

tries, the trend was towards a more self-regulatory approach, while in most Central and Eastern European countries, a more centralized model of the quality assurance system was used<sup>1</sup>.

It is necessary to have an external quality assurance system based on systematic and measurable criteria to assess the efficiency of student preparation and internal quality assurance system in accordance with the requirements of the labor market. Thus, the external quality assurance of educational institutions operating at all levels of education, regardless of their subordination, organizational form, and ownership, operating in Azerbaijan is regulated by the “Rules for Accreditation of Educational Institutions” approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan’s decision. According to the relevant rules, internal quality assurance is defined as an internal management assessment system that serves to ensure the compliance of the educational institution’s activity with state educational standards, the creation of an efficient and modern learning environment in the educational institution, and the continuous development of its activity based on self-analysis. Also, in the relevant legislation, external quality assurance is defined as the process of evaluating the quality level of the educational institution’s activity and the effectiveness of its internal quality assurance system.

In order to ensure the implementation of the rules of accreditation of educational institutions in the Republic of Azerbaijan, accreditation criteria has been approved by the Collegium of the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Professional Higher Education in Europe: Characteristics, Practice Examples and National Differences / Camilleri Anthony F., Delplace Stefan Frankowicz, Marek Hudak Raimund, Tannhäuser, Anne-Christin, – Germany, 2014. – P. 62.

<sup>2</sup> “Evaluation Criteria for Institutional Accreditation of Higher Education Institution”. Approved by the Decision of the Board of the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Accreditation Criteria are measures for evaluating the activity of the educational institution that provides education at the relevant educational level and the compliance of the implementation of educational programs at the relevant educational level with the state educational standards. As in the international practice, educational institutions should adopt the accreditation criteria as the main measurement tool when establishing the internal quality assurance system, as well as when determining the internal quality assurance evaluation criteria of student preparation according to the requirements of the labor market.

### **Current Situation of External Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions in Azerbaijan**

According to previous accreditation criteria, during the accreditation assessment of higher education institutions within the framework of external quality assurance, normative-legal guarantee of the institution's activity, management, content and structure of training for educational programs, organization of the teaching process, quality of training for educational programs, staffing, scientific research activities, international cooperation, material and technical base, social conditions and financial provision directions were taken into account. At the same time, one of the main goals of the accreditation evaluation process in the framework of external quality assurance is to determine the conformity of the activity of the higher education institution with its status. For this purpose, higher education institutions are evaluated by experts on 25 relevant criteria in accordance with the minimum indicator determined according to their status.

As a result of the accreditation evaluation of higher education institutions within the framework of external quality assurance, the Accreditation Commission provides appropriate recommendations to the institution based on the deficiencies found, and the

implementation of the recommendations until the next accreditation period is mandatory for the institution. In accordance with the relevant legislation and the Education Quality Assurance Agency's own Charter, monitoring the implementation of the recommendations given to the higher education institutions after the accreditation assessment is part of the Agency's authority.

During the last 8 years, after the accreditation assessment, 34 (67% of all higher education institutions (including special purpose ATMs) accredited higher education institutions were analyzed based on the recommendations given by the respective Accreditation Commissions based on the prepared Final Reports. According to the given recommendations, 9 of the analyzed higher education institutions are private, 1 is specially formed higher education, 3 are branches, 8 are part of other Committees or Ministries. During the last 8 years, after the accreditation assessment, the recommendations given by the Accreditation Commission to the accredited institutions as a result of the assessment were divided into categories according to the following criteria:

Table 1. – Regarding accredited higher education institutions

<b>HEIs</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Ratio</b>
Private	9	26%
State	13	38%
Specially formed	1	3%
Branch	3	9%
Performing under other Committees and Ministries	8	24%

Based on the analysis of the above table, it can be said that among the recommendations given to the higher education institutions by the relevant Accreditation Commissions, the recommendations in the following areas prevail:



1. Preparing and approving the strategic development plan accordingly;

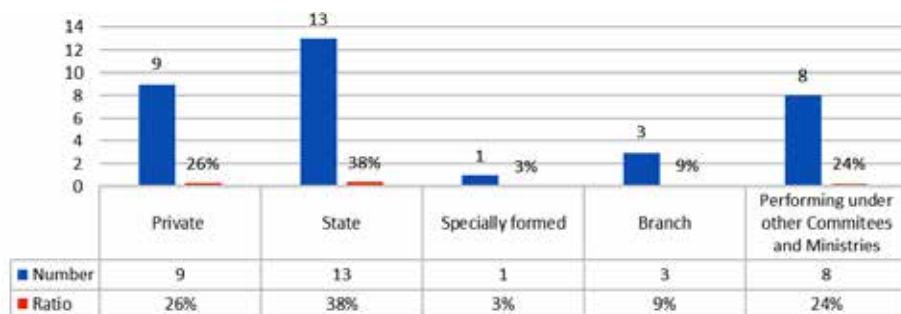


Figure 1. Regarding accredited higher education institutions

Table 2. – Regarding the recommendations given to HEIs after the accreditation assessment

Recommendations	HEIs (number)	Ratio
Preparation and approval of the strategic development plan	14	41.18
Improvement of strategic management	11	32.35
Establishment of Quality Assurance Center or respective Department	5	14.71
Improvement of the quality assurance system	9	26.47
Development of the student support system	5	14.71
Building a student-centered system	2	5.88
Consideration of labor market requirements	13	38.24
Improvement of alumni trace system or graduate career planning	13	38.24
Application of the differential evaluation system	11	32.35

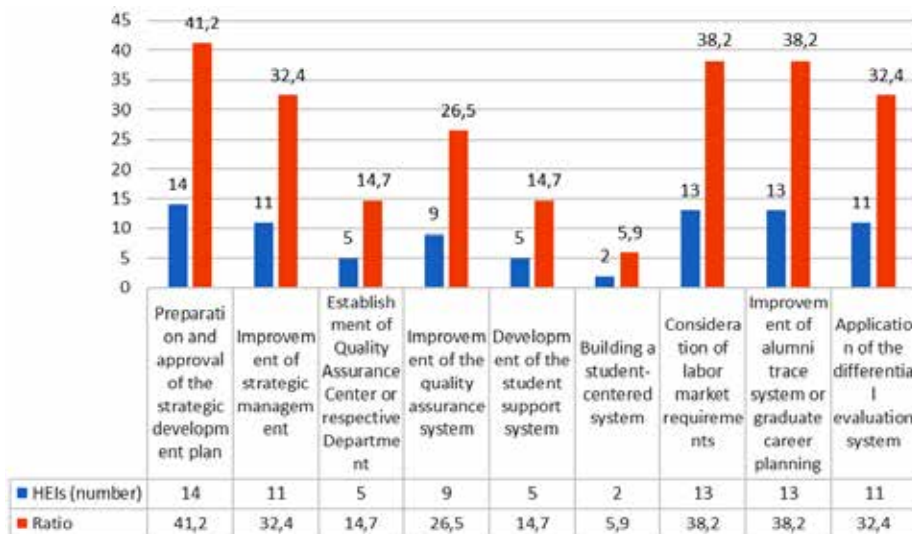


Figure 2. Regarding the recommendations given to HEIs after the accreditation assessment

2. Improvement of strategic management;
3. Establishing a quality assurance center or respective department;
4. Improving the quality assurance system;
5. Consideration of labor market requirements;
6. The presence or improvement of the career planning and tracking system of graduates;
7. Implementation of the differential evaluation system.

## Conclusion

Based on the results of the accreditation evaluations conducted in higher education institutions operating in the Republic of Azerbaijan during the last 8 years and the results of the analysis of the recommendations given by the Accreditation Commissions to the institution based on the shortcomings and deficiencies found after the assessment, we can say that it is needed to improve strategic management in institutions, establish effective internal quality assurance

system and there is a need to improve and create a student-oriented learning environment.

### References:

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